

COLUMBUS OF THE NEW DEAL:
REXFORD G. TUGWELL AND THE GOALS, CHALLENGES AND PHYSICAL
LEGACIES OF THE RESETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
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August 2009

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the agrarian economics beliefs of Rexford G. Tugwell prior to entering public service in order to understand the impetus for establishing the Resettlement Administration under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program.

The work begins with an examination of the historical themes and developments of the late 19th and early 20th-centuries that influenced Tugwell and the Roosevelt Administration, followed by Tugwell's pre-administration writings. Four influential themes from this professional period would later guide his policies as leader of the Resettlement Administration. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the agency's goals, obstacles, and policies between 1935 and 1936, and how they related to two of its flagship programs, Greenbelt, MD and the Chopawamsic Recreation Demonstration Project.

This work seeks to expose the history of an important, but relatively obscure, New Deal agency, and interpret Rexford Tugwell's role in its creation, and contribute to a broader discussion about the evolution of American land-use patterns in America.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Katelin Olson was born in Ogden, Utah on November 11, 1982. In 1994, she moved with her mother, Elizabeth Olson, to Riverside, California, where she lived until 2001, when she left to attend Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee.

While at Vanderbilt, Katelin studied modern Middle Eastern History and political science, with a focus on American foreign policy. In the fall of 2003, she interned in the Washington, DC office of Senator Barbara Boxer, and then returned to Vanderbilt to enter the Honors Program of the History Department. Under the guidance of Professor Thomas Schwartz, Katelin completed her undergraduate thesis, *Shifting Sands: U.S.-Saudi Arabian Relations During the 1973-1974 Oil Embargo*, and represented Vanderbilt as the 2004-2005 fellow to the Center for the Study of the Presidency. Katelin graduated magna cum laude from Vanderbilt in May 2005 with a Bachelor of the Arts in history and political, with High Honors in History.

After working for nearly two years as an events planner for People For the American Way, the progressive non-profit in Washington, DC, Katelin began her coursework in historic preservation planning at Cornell University in August 2007. In the summer of 2008, she worked as a preservation intern for the Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council in Rochester, NY. A 2008-2009 fellow of the Clarence S. Stein Institute for Urban and Landscape Studies, Katelin will graduate from Cornell University on May 17, 2009, with a Master of the Arts in Historic Preservation Planning.

This work is dedicated first and foremost to my mother, Elizabeth J. Olson, whose perpetual cheerleading, enthusiasm, and encouragement gives me the confidence to explore the world. To my classmates of HPP Classes of 2008, 2009, and 2009, thank you for your friendship and for admitting me into a truly amazing professional family. To my professors Michael Tomlan and Jeffrey Chusid, thank you for your insights, guidance and wisdom.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the participation of many people. My mother doggedly served as a sounding board for a variety of ideas, both farfetched and realistic, and sent me care packages to smooth out the valleys of life. To the Cornell HPP Class of 2009, I owe an enormous degree of gratitude. Nicole Moore, Natalie Franz, Ross Pristera, Sara Johnson, Matthew Kear, Erin O'Grady, and Yi-Hsin Lo, you made this experience magical. Thank you for friendship, dependability, and unflagging optimism.

I am grateful to Michael Tomlan and Jeffrey Chusid, whose dedication to their students forms the backbone of the HPP program, and who strove to insure that the university never got in the way of my education.

Finally, I am grateful for the generosity of the board of the Clarence S. Stein Institute for Urban and Landscape Studies for financially backing this endeavor, and for the patience of countless librarians and archivists at the National Archives II, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, and in Cornell Library system.

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INTRODUCTION

The most lasting visual documentation of the devastation of the Great Depression in rural communities throughout the United States was the work of the Information Division of the little-known Resettlement Administration. Photographers such as Dorothy Lange and Walker Evans became household names, owners of the eyes that saw and captured the destitution, despair, and even hope of impoverished Americans. Established by executive order in 1935, the Resettlement Administration and its successor, the Farm Security Administration (FSA) created approximately 77,000 black and white photos between 1935 and 1942, silent witnesses to the consequences of national economic collapse.¹

The degree of devastation in the early 1930s eclipsed all previous periods of hardship. The golden industrial era of the 1920s came to a grinding halt, and financial panic expanded in waves across the nation. In 1930, 1,352 banks and 26,355 businesses failed, and \$853 million in deposits vanished from the pockets of their clients. Closings in 1931 surpassed the preceding year. The value of farm properties continued to decline precipitously, from a record high of \$78.3 billion in 1920, to \$57.7 billion in 1929, to \$51.8 billion in 1931. By the time of the 1932 presidential election, approximately 12 million Americans were unemployed.² In comparison,

¹ Library of Congress, "America from the Great Depression to World War II: Black-and-White Photographs from the FSA-OWI, 1935-1945." <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fsainfo.html> (accessed 29 January 2009). In 1942, the project was transferred from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of War, where it lasted only until the following year.

² T. H. Watkins, *The Great Depression: America in the 1930s* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 55.

New York, the most populous state in the nation, had just over 12.5 million residents in the 1930 census.³

In November 1932, Americans overwhelmingly chose President Franklin Roosevelt to solve the escalating economic catastrophe. The massive scale of the calamity and the sheer force of the devastation gave his administration a mandate to take bold, creative leaps. While many of the New Deal programs of the early 1930s--- the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Work Progress Administration (WPA), and the Public Works Administration (PWA)-- -- became staples in American political history, the agency responsible for the photo documentation project has been largely forgotten.

As head of the Information Division, Roy Stryker made it the program's mission to "introduce America to Americans."⁴ Indeed, it might be more accurate to say that the project introduced transient rural Americans to their urban American brethren. The plight of the poor---primarily the rural poor---became visually accessible in a profound way. Photos of filthy mothers and children, broken men, desolated fields and substandard housing bespoke the need for a change. (See Illustration I.1 and Illustration I.2) Rexford Tugwell believed he could provide a solution.

³ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1933* no. 55 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1933), 9.

⁴ Roy Stryker, "The FSA Collection of Photographs," *Photography in Print*, edited by Vicky Goldberg (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 353.



Illustration I.1. Old farmhouse on property of woman who operated a chicken farm near Haymarket, VA, 1941. From the Farm Security Administration – Office of War Information Photograph Collection.



Illustration 1.2. Interior showing family of nine, 1930-1934. From the Farm Security Administration – Office of War Information Photograph Collection.

Born in 1891 in Sinclairville, an upstate New York village, to Charles Tugwell and Denise Rexford, Rexford Guy Tugwell experienced the first-hand benefits and disadvantages of rural life. When his family relocated to Wilson, NY to start a canning factory, Tugwell served as his father's field man. Coming of age during the era of Progressive politics and industrialization, he credited this work experience with providing him with an early distaste of laissez-faire economics, believing it to be an antiquated model for agriculture in the modern era.⁵

In 1911, Tugwell enrolled in the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, becoming a devotee of economic professors Scott Nearing, a liberal crusader, and Simon Nelson Patten, an advocate of institutional economics. Patten would influence Tugwell throughout his life, especially his experimental outlook and belief that economic theory should be directed towards institutional reform. Completing his Bachelor of Science in 1915 and his Master of Arts in 1916, both in economics, Tugwell served as an assistant professor of economics at the University of Washington, a manager at the American University Union in Paris, and at his father's canning factory before returning to the Wharton School to complete his doctorate. After graduating in 1922, he served as an assistant professor, and associate professor, and finally a full professor at Columbia University between 1922 and 1933.⁶

An agrarian economist, Tugwell was one of several Columbia University professors, collectively nicknamed the 'Brain Trust,' recruited to advise Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1932 presidential campaign. After Roosevelt's landslide victory, he asked Tugwell to serve as the Assistant Secretary of Agricultural, promoting him to Under Secretary in 1934. Widely considered to be one of the most

⁵ Michael V. Namorato, *Rexford G. Tugwell: A Biography* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 11-17.

⁶ *Ibid*, 21-54.

liberal members of the administration, Tugwell was frequently frustrated by bureaucratic red tape and his hard-line personality exasperated many of his colleagues within the Department of Agriculture (USDA). In 1935, he was appointed the Administrator of the newly formed Resettlement Administration, and although he retained his position as Under Secretary, he effectively ceased working in the department. Often considered one of the most influential forces in crafting the New Deal initiative, Tugwell resigned in November 1936, effectively ending the era of the Brain Trust.⁷

Statement of Purpose

This thesis is an historical study of Rexford Tugwell's ideological and economic beliefs prior to entering public service, followed by an examination of the formation and policies of the Resettlement Agency under his guidance. Two flagship programs are included in order to analyze the practical implications of the Resettlement Administration initiatives. Federal photographic documentation of the United States in the 1930s, towns such as Greenbelt, Maryland, and the Prince William National Forest, among many other public projects, all owe their existence to the efforts of the Resettlement Administration. The history of the agency, however, and the ideological underpinnings of its founder, Rexford Tugwell, remains largely absent from the historical record. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the origins, motivations, and goals of the short-lived Resettlement Administration, and the political, social, and economic implications of the policies for the creation of suburban communities and the destruction of pre-existing rural communities. The brief time period offers an opportunity to understand the tension between urban and rural needs in the period, and the goals, costs, and consequences of the social consolidation

⁷ Ibid, 115-117.

policies of the Roosevelt administration, and their impact on two American communities, one suburban and one rural.

An understanding of the Resettlement Administration—its leaders, its goals, its successes, its failures, and its critics—provides the necessary background to understanding future American land-use patterns, namely the rise of suburbanization and the intensified commercialization of farm land. The largely ignored story of the agency reveals the overwhelming complexity of redesigning, both administratively and ideologically, the way in which Americans engaged with the land in the mid-1930s. The long-term consequences of the policies and practices of this agency do not fall within the scope of this thesis. However, there is a noticeable gap in scholarship regarding the contributions of the Resettlement Administration, if only for the ideas and questions raised by Tugwell. Along the way, we will examine his ideological similarities to urban planner Clarence Stein, and the educational focus of two divisions within the agency.

Methodology

Several publicly accessible archives were utilized in the research component of this thesis. The records of the Resettlement Administration are stored at the U.S. National Archives II in College Park, MD. The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library in Hyde Park, NY is the repository of Rexford Tugwell's personal papers, including communications with President Roosevelt, administrative reports, and his private journal. Clarence S. Stein's papers are housed at Cornell University's Carl K. Krock Library, and provided insight into design and policy standards implemented at Greenbelt, Maryland.

Additional primary information was collected through academic databases made accessible through the Cornell University Library system. Tugwell was widely published in influential academic journals throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. The

Washington Post, *Washington Star*, and the *New York Times* newspaper, also accessed through the Cornell University Library, contributed to establishing a timeline of the Resettlement Administration's activities.

Secondary source research was also conducted through the Cornell University Library system. T.H. Watkin's *The Great Depression: America in the 1930s* (1993) was formative for my understanding the conditions of life in the United States in the years preceding and during the lifecycle of the Resettlement Administration. Michael V. Namorato's *Rexford G. Tugwell: A Biography* (1988) was invaluable for providing an overview of Tugwell's life and a bibliography of his writings. *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration* (1968), by Sidney Baldwin, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (1985) by David Shi, and *Rexford Tugwell and the New Deal* (1964) by Bernard Sternsher were influential in narrowing the scope of my project, and supplying background information on the political, social, and economic factors and influences that impacted Rexford Tugwell, President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, and the Resettlement Administration.

Chapter Overview

The following paper is organized into four distinct sections. Chapter One investigates the historical themes and developments of the post-Civil War era that influenced the Roosevelt administration's decision to establish the Resettlement Administration. It analyzes the impetus behind and implications in the 1930s of the Agrarian Crusade and the political mobilization of farmers, increased federal interest and participation in land-use and rural living standards, the establishment of rural sociology as an academic discipline, and rural nostalgia as a response to industrialization. The purpose of the chapter is to lay the economic, political, and sociological framework to accurately contextualize the Resettlement Administration.

The rationale for many of Tugwell's decisions as the head of the Resettlement Administration can be found in his academic writings prior to joining Roosevelt's political team, and speeches and journal entries from 1933 and 1934. Chapter Two traces the four themes that ultimately influenced many of his policies during 1935 and 1936. First, Tugwell asserted that the traditional American agricultural system had failed to independently develop a means by which to achieve price stability. His second theme emphasized the necessity for the agricultural community to accept the technological consequences of industrialization. Third, according to Tugwell, it was the duty of the federal government to intervene in the system and impose policies and standards directed at preventing significant price fluctuations. Finally, he argued that the acceptance of the second and third themes would result in the massive reduction of subsistence-level farmers in favor of the commercial farmer, and that such a transformation of American agriculture would be a natural, healthy development. During Tugwell's time in the Department of Agriculture and the Resettlement Administration, the volume of his publications decreased, likely the result of more pressing administrative demands. His journal entries between 1932 and 1935 are also extensively utilized in this chapter, but unfortunately his last entry before his November 1936 resignation was dated September 15, 1935. In the absence of his personal perspectives during the life of the Resettlement Administration, his earlier writings offer the clearest insight into the ideological underpinnings of his decisions.

Although the United States experienced periods of great prosperity throughout the 1920s, few farmers benefited economically because of crop price instability. Political mobilization initiated during the Agrarian Crusade built up sufficiently by the early 1930s to inflict significant political pressure on the new administration. Tugwell convinced Roosevelt that agricultural land-use policies and programs were too widely dispersed among multiple departments and agencies, and that the severity of the

economic situation demanded that the federal government consolidate all the programs under the umbrella of a single organization. Chapter Three traces the goals, policy objectives, administrative features, and political obstacles of the Resettlement Administration from the weeks prior to its official creation by executive order in May 1935 until its absorption into the Department of Agriculture in January 1937. Largely due to the political context of the 1936 presidential election, and a concurrent, sustained attempt by Congress to diminish the power of the executive branch, many New Deal opponents charged that the Resettlement Administration was a worthless, ineffective, expensive agency. It faced considerable challenges throughout its short lifetime, influenced by animosity personally directed at Tugwell.

The final chapter focuses on two examples of Resettlement Administration activities, Greenbelt, Maryland and the Chopawamsic Recreational Demonstration Project, which were created by the Suburban Division and Submarginal Land Division of the Resettlement Administration respectively. Although two other Greenbelt Towns were built in the Midwest, and over 200 demonstration programs were established in 43 states, both of the aforementioned projects were identified by the Resettlement Administration as their flagship endeavors. Analyzing their contributions and implications helps illuminate the difficulties faced by Tugwell and his aides in translating ideological stances into functional schemes.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM THE AGRARIAN REVOLT TO PROGRESSIVE SUBURBANISM –
PROVIDING A CONTEXT FOR THE RESETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION

Introduction

The clamor of the bone-chilling crash of the New York Stock Exchange on October 24, 1929 is often identified as the beginning of the Great Depression. Such an opinion, however, inadvertently implies that the instability of the American agricultural system in the same period was a consequence, and not a contributing factor, of the profound economic crisis. In contrast, the huge investment by the Roosevelt administration in emergency relief for farmers—in the form of the National Recovery Administration, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, and, finally, the Resettlement Administration—underscores the vital role that agricultural instability played in the breakdown of the national economic system.

In order to appreciate the values, goals, and challenges of the Resettlement Administration, it is first necessary to locate its development from within a thematic framework that extends back into the previous century, especially the decades immediately after the American Civil War. Four parallel movements, with overlapping interests and attributes, intersected in the early 1930s to inform and encourage the actions of Rexford Tugwell's Resettlement Administration. They were the Agrarian Crusade and the organizing efforts of farm labor, growing federal intervention in national land-use patterns and rural life conditions, the development of the academic study of rural sociology, and rural nostalgia. These movements and their aims would have been meaningless, however, without a corresponding economic crisis, and the willingness of the voting public to centralize power within the executive branch.

19th and Early 20th-Century Thematic Developments - The ‘Agrarian Crusade’ and its Successors

Between the conclusion of the Civil War and October 1929, intense economic fluctuations were common in the United States. Prior to that period, American agriculture and its influence on the domestic economy was clear and direct, and the nascent tensions between the rise of industrialization and traditional agriculture contributed to the Civil War.⁸ However, it was during the aftermath of the conflict that farmers organized as a special interest group in order to respond to significant domestic and international economics. This ‘Agrarian Crusade’ was a prolonged effort to shift agricultural production from the predominately self-sufficient/regional model, to a business-oriented approach that could meet the demands of developing population centers through the establishment of tariffs and formal production control mechanisms.⁹

It is dangerous to generalize about the condition of American agriculture in any era because of the incredible degree to which regional factors—from the types of crops being produced, to market demands, to the quality of the soil, to environmental hazards—influenced productivity. However, some broad agricultural trends developed in the aftermath of the Civil War. These, in turn, contributed to a nationwide farm experience that farmers encountered whether they grew tobacco in North Carolina, hops in New York, or wheat in Kansas. First, farming underwent widespread commercialization, involving the specialization of crops, increase in agricultural technology, and farms run as economic enterprises. Although all farmers

⁸ David E. Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 154.

⁹ Thomas H. Greer, *American Social Reform Movements: Their Pattern Since 1865* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1965), 61-63.

were traditionally subservient to limiting factors imposed by nature—such as storms, droughts, and insects—the commercialization process increased the importance of market forces. Concurrently, agricultural markets expanded; instead of simply selling his products in a local or regional market, the commercial farmer could take advantage of transportation innovations and place his crops in a national marketplace.¹⁰ World War I was responsible for creating an international consumer, as instability in Europe resulted in the fighting forces increasing their dependency on American crops. Enterprising American farmers, in turn, boosted their production levels by farming new lands and investing in new technology to raise productivity.¹¹

The direct consequences of a farmer participating in a widening agricultural market, however, included heightened economic risk combined with a near-total absence of individual control. By placing his crops in a national marketplace, the farmer became subservient to the whims of the marketplace itself. Agricultural discontent and unrest were a natural evolution from this unbalanced system. Farmers organized and turned to political forums to express their frustrations. The Agrarian Crusade became an initiative geared towards re-balancing the economic system.¹² The mobilization and vocalization of America's rural inhabitants in the latter decades of the 19th-century resulted in the gradual creation of a powerful voting block, but one that would not be on par with the industrial unions until the establishment of the Non-partisan League in North Dakota in 1916.¹³ By the 1920s, the Farm Bloc, a group

¹⁰ Robert A. McGuire, "Economic Causes of Late-Nineteenth Century Agrarian Unrest: New Evidence," *The Journal of Economic History* 41, no 4 (December 1981): 837. Shi, 154-155.

¹¹ Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 34.

¹² *Ibid*, 837-838.

¹³ Greer, 214.

largely comprised of Midwestern Republicans and Southern Democrats who represented the interests of the indebted post-war farmer, was a significant and powerful lobbyist. Designed to limit agricultural sales within the United States through the creation of a federal agency to oversee cooperation among farmers, the McNary-Haugen Farm Relief Bill was pushed through Congress by the Farm Bloc in both 1927 and 1928, but twice vetoed by President Calvin Coolidge.¹⁴ Rexford Tugwell was a staunch supporter of the bill, and his developing ideas about cooperation among farmers regarding production and the establishment of a federal agency to address such concerns were evident within it.¹⁵

It is important to note, however, that the political discussion of agriculture was centered on a specific type of farmer, namely one who was capable of producing a significant surplus. The Farm Bloc gave voice to the concerns of farmers who had overextended themselves during World War I, and who suffered the consequences of price instability in the 1920s. A subsistence farmer who was barely producing enough to feed his family was inherently excluded. His voice remained silent in the political mobilization effort because he did not fall within its constituency. During this period, therefore, it is possible to trace a distinct split in the definition of American farming, between the traditional subsistence model and a modern, commercial endeavor.

¹⁴ Gertrude Almy Slichter, "Franklin D. Roosevelt's Farm Policy as Governor of New York State, 1928-1932," *Agricultural History* 33, no. 4 (October 1959): 167. Incidentally, Coolidge's Secretary of Agriculture, Henry C. Wallace, was supportive of the bill. His son, Henry A. Wallace, would serve as both FDR's Secretary of Agriculture and Vice President, the latter during his second term in office.

¹⁵ Rexford G. Tugwell, "Farm Relief and a Permanent Agriculture," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 142, (Mar. 1929): 271-2.

19th and Early 20th-Century Thematic Developments - Federal Involvement

Evolving land-use trends in the federal government in the late 19th-century contributed was a thematic influence for Resettlement Administration policies. By signing the Act of Dedication on March 1, 1872, President Ulysses S. Grant established the first wilderness preserve around the Yellowstone River, today known as Yellowstone National Park. Although the principle motivation to protect the land was to two million acres out of private, industrial hands, it was an important incident because it established the precedent for the government to assert its right to decide how land should be used.¹⁶ This moment signaled an increased federal, particularly presidential, interest in considering land as a national resource, a concept that was subsequently embodied in both Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt's presidencies.

Many of the first national parks were actually designated as national monuments under the stipulations of the Antiquities Act of 1906.¹⁷ President Theodore Roosevelt, however, did not confine his interest in American land and the people who used it to federal land preserves. In 1908, his final full year in office, he appointed a commission "to gather information on the present condition of country life, to recommend means of supplying such deficiencies as are found, and, finally, to suggest methods of organized permanent effort in further investigation and actual work, which will result in making life on the farm more attractive and profitable."¹⁸ The commission, presided over by Professor Liberty Hyde Bailey, dean of the College

¹⁶ Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the Great American Mind* 4th ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 108.

¹⁷ Robert W. Righter, "National Monuments to National Parks: The Use of the Antiquities Act of 1906," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (August 1989): 281-282.

¹⁸ "Farm Board Soon to Act," *Washington Post* (14 September 1908), sec A.

of Agriculture at Cornell University,¹⁹ completed their report in less than six months, the product of thirty public hearings and 120,000 responses to printed questionnaires mailed by the Department of Agriculture to farmers and rural inhabitants around the country. The final report asserted that the American farmer must continue to evolve from an independent, self-sustaining individual into a fledgling businessman in order to raise rural standards of living and increase the vibrancy of rural life. In his message accompanying the deliverance of the commission's report to Congress, President Roosevelt declared, "Farmers as a class do not magnify their calling....Where farmers are organized co-operatively they not only avail themselves much more readily of business opportunities and improved methods, but it is found that the organizations which bring them together in the work of their lives are used also for social and intellectual advancement."²⁰

The Country Life Commission report was the product of national concern regarding the perceived emptying of the rural lands and the migration of rural populations to the cities. The bulk of the report focused on the ways in which to improve rural life and the business interests of farmers in order to insure that the nation maintained a rural population level capable of feeding the burgeoning cities.²¹ Additionally, the report identified the roles federal and local governments should play in sustaining agricultural production and advancing the efficiency of farms. As Roosevelt noted in his accompanying message to Congress, "the most important help that the Government, whether national or state, can give is to show the people how to

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Country Life the Subject of Roosevelt's Special Message," *Wall Street Journal* (10 February 1909), sec. A.

²¹ *Report of the Commission on Country Life*. Senate Document No. 705, 60th Congress, 2d Session, (New York: Sturgis and Walton, Co., 1911).

go about these tasks of organization, education, and communication with the best and quickest results.”²² The report’s emphasis on education was two-fold: the establishment of secondary and collegiate schools for rural youth was critical in order to circumvent a ‘brain drain,’ and it was imperative that farmers be educated in the latest and best production methods.²³ As with the Agrarian Crusade of the previous decades, the Country Life Commission engaged a specific type of rural inhabitant in their study: the independent, presumably white, male, family farm owner, capable of contributing to a national agricultural market. Most particularly, the tenant, subsistence farmers who rented farm land from others, were denied a role in this federal discussion.

19th and Early 20th-Century Thematic Developments - Sociology and Rural Life Conditions

Poverty was a well-established and accepted condition in 19th-century America, and further exacerbated in the urban context by post-Civil War industrialization.²⁴ In this era, poor relief typically came in the form of private, often religious, philanthropic activities, such as the establishment of Jane Addams’ Hull House in Chicago in 1889²⁵ and others who spearheaded reform in New York

²² “Country Life the Subject of Roosevelt’s Special Message,” Wall Street Journal (10 February 1909), page 2.

²³ *Report of the Commission on Country Life*. Nearly 25 years later, a Hoover Commission reflects on the disparity of education standards between white and negro school-age children. (T.J. Woofter, Jr. “The Status of Racial and Ethnic Groups,” *Recent Social Trends* 1, (York, PA: The Maple Press Company, 1933): 585-590.) Although this is not a focus of the paper, it is worth noting that the Country Life Commission focused on a specific type of rural inhabitants, and did not engage in a discussion of standards and conditions of the migrant workers and/or ethnic farmers.

²⁴ Shi, 154-174.

²⁵ Gioia DiLiberto, *A Useful Woman: The Early Life of Jane Adams*, (New York: Scribner, 1999), 157.

tenement districts.²⁶ These charitable activities developed largely within the American context as a response to the horrific conditions of the poor in inner-cities. Scott Nearing's *Poverty and Riches: A Study of the Industrial Regime*, is typical of a branch of early 20th-century texts. The book was a reaction to the elitist idea that poverty bred character, particularly the quintessentially American notion that man has the ability to pull himself out of squalor by the aid of his own bootstraps. Instead, Nearing characterizes the poor as victims of the modern age.²⁷

Poverty treatises prior to the Great Depression showed the difficulty by which non-academic authors grappled with defining poverty and addressing it in both urban centers and rural communities. Robert W. Kelso's *Poverty* shows of the general struggles of the private, philanthropic sector to broadly engage the idea of a standard of living as a means by which to define poverty itself. Kelso described poverty as, "that condition of living in which the individual...consistently fails to maintain himself...at a plane of living high enough to insure continuous bodily and mental fitness....and which allows him and them to live and function in their community with decency and self-respect."²⁸ The nebulous quality of this definition underscored the complexity of the situation. This was a primarily community-assessed approach to poverty. The rural individual may have considerably fewer resources than his urban counter-part, but if he was able to maintain a decent quality of life in comparison to his neighbors, he was considered to be outside of poverty.²⁹

²⁶ *Tenement House Reform in New York, 1834-1900*, (New York: Evening Post Job Printing House, 1900).

²⁷ Scott Nearing, *Poverty and Riches: A Study of the Industrial Regime*, (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1916), 165-167.

²⁸ Robert W. Kelso, *Poverty* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929), 21.

²⁹ Kelso, 13-20.

In the same period that Kelso and Nearing attempted classify poverty, formal academic interest in American rural life issued gradually developed. This trend became manifest with the establishment of rural sociology, a subcategory within the larger field of sociology, and a development that was fundamentally tied to the passage of the Agrarian Crusade, the Forest Reserve Act of 1891, and the Country Life Commission.³⁰ John M. Gillette, a professor of sociology at the University of North Dakota, was one of the first academics to engage in the creation of a rural sociology textbook, *Constructive Rural Sociology*.³¹ He credited his interest in the material to a course he took in 1900 at the University of Chicago with Professor Charles R. Henderson, titled, “Rural Communities.” The existence of such a course, but without specific designation as a subfield within the sociology department, showed slowly burgeoning academic interest in rural life and rural conditions at the turn of the century.³² Analyzing the root of the ‘rural problem,’ Gillette noted that it was a “in reality a product of the intellectual faculties. There was no rural problem recognized a few years ago. Conditions in the country have not grown worse since then. Country life was regarded as satisfactory and as well suited to the needs of the farming

³⁰ Nash, 133. Nash discusses the significance of the relatively unnoticed passage of the Forest Reserve Act because it fundamentally altered national land usage, and was precursor legislation to the establishment of the National Parks Service in 1916.

³¹ Both Gillette and Liberty Hyde Bailey are both popularly credited with being the “Father of Rural Sociology.” If their contemporaries viewed them in this manner or if a legitimate academic source cited either of them in such a manner remains unknown within the confines of this project. However, it is undisputable that they were both well-established academics and were among the first to produce numerous tracts on the ideas of the developing rural sociology movement, and, therefore, are worthy for inclusion in this discussion.

³² John M. Gillette, *Constructive Rural Sociology*, 3rd ed, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1921), vii.

classes.”³³ National political fluctuations in the early 20th-century, namely the rise of positivist, reformist theories such as Progressivism, attributed for the identification of the ‘rural problem.’³⁴

Constructive Rural Sociology was Gillette’s response to this trend, and his mission was three-fold. First, he used it as a response to an increased academic interest in the subject matter. Second, he frequently credited Theodore Roosevelt for sparking a national discussion of the conditions of rural life,³⁵ but contended that a significant portion of the problems and issues associated with it should be addressed through social avenues, and not simply political or economic ones. Finally, he argued that the social health of rural inhabitants was of vital importance to the overall well-being of both the nation broadly and the individual agricultural states.³⁶ Unlike the authors of the Country Life Commission report, Gillette challenged the hypothesis that rural depopulation was occurring with such rapidity as to threaten the national food supply. He did acknowledge, however, that the fear of this perceived phenomenon functioned as an important motivator for rising academic and popular interest in rural life issues.³⁷

Gillette’s text, although not in keeping with present-day methodological rigors, offers an opportunity to examine commonly held perceptions of the period regarding

³³ Gillette, 101.

³⁴ Shi, 175.

³⁵ Gillette, 102. This is the most specific example, but Roosevelt’s name crops up several times within the text.

³⁶ Ibid, 7.

³⁷ Ibid, 4-5. Gillette supports this conclusions with census figures on pp. 80-81.

the status of rural inhabitants.³⁸ *Constructive Rural Sociology* attempted to start a conversation, albeit brief, on the status of rural inhabitants outside model of the *Country Life Commission* and the Farm Bloc, namely of the Caucasian, business-minded, independent farm owner.³⁹ In the chapter titled “Types of Communities,” he engaged in a short discussion of “backward communities.” Common features of such societies include geographical isolation, one-crop economies, and low education and economic standards. Although he uses the “Mountain Whites” in Appalachia as his key example, he recognizes that these types of groups exist throughout the rural portions of the nation.⁴⁰ For the purposes of this study, it is worth noting the moral contempt with which Gillette characterizes these communities, a trend that will be evident in New Deal population displacement policies during the 1930s. While actions regarding rural conditions that were taken by President Franklin Roosevelt were implemented through political and economic means, they fundamentally reflected a desire to reshape social norms. Although the specific reasons for and means by which this is accomplished will be discussed in detail in a subsequent section, it is worth noting that an inkling of the trend is evident in the 1910s.

The American perception and tolerance of poverty shifted during the early 20th-century. Gillette provides an excellent lens through which to evaluate the evolution of the perception of the permanence rural life standards in the early 20th-century, and to recognize the significant role that academics played in directing this

³⁸ Although Gillette’s methodology---specifically his means of acquiring information through mail polling----is contentious, it does not adversely affect the purpose of this ideological investigation. Although his methods might be faulty, it does not change the fact that he engages in discussions of applicable material, and is reflective of broader themes as they relate to studies of farm life in the period.

³⁹ Gillette, 48-73.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 73-76.

discussion. As Gillette noted, “The origins of the [rural] problem lay in the discovery that conditions in the country might be improved, that they were not as good as the people living there deserve...and that there is no inherent reason why the farming classes may not and should not live as well as people of equal financial ability who dwell in the cities.”⁴¹ This observation, which developed concurrently with the rise in rural life studies, and the creation of the concept of the ‘rural problem,’ embodied the notion that rural deficiencies could be identified and assessed. Coupled with increased discussion about urban and rural living standards and fear over, this idea provoked Progressives to seek out measures to improve the quality of life through political and social reform. By the New Deal era, however, the idea that a relative standard of living should exist throughout the nation achieved maturity, which will help explain the impetus for political agencies such as the Resettlement Administration.

19th and Early 20th-Century Thematic Developments - Rural Life: An Industrial Salve

The idea of reinvigorating rural life was not exclusive to the early 20th-century America, nor was the nostalgia for ‘simpler times’ limited to advocacy for population shifts from the city to the countryside. Within the American context, the embrace of a “simple life,” either through the reduction of material consumption within an urban environment or a physical return to the land, had its roots among some of the first American settlers, and was a reoccurring theme in the post-Civil War period. It was a reactionary trend and a response to anxiety induced by industrialization, with accompanying regional and national consequences.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid, 102.

⁴² Shi does an excellent job of tracing the search for the “simple life” in America, starting with the Puritans and ending in the post-WWII era. This theme was by no means confined to the United States; indeed, responding in such a manner to industrial

After the declaration of peace between the Union and Confederate forces in 1865, scores of immigrants began disembarking at Ellis Island. They joined their fellow Americans in migrating westwards, facilitated by the spread of the railroads. Manufacturing was reinvigorated through new technology, and production ventures—from textile factories to commercial farms—became larger and more complex.⁴³ Such production efficiency generated great wealth, and, even more importantly, the ‘success myth’ and wide-scale material consumption. Many anti-industrialists responded to this trend by advocating for a simpler way of life in this Gilded Age, a philosophy that gradually regained momentum in the latter part of the 19th-century among the Brahmin intellectuals, the patrician inheritors of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s pre-Civil War Transcendentalist movement, and the romantic ideals of European thinkers such as Henry Thoreau and John Ruskin, among others. Initially reinvigorated among elite sectors of society by philanthropists, by the early 20th-century the themes of rejection of material excess and renewed human interaction with nature were adopted and popularized by positivists, such as the Progressives and their middle-class audience.⁴⁴

Under the direction of editor Edward Bok, who was captivated by the romantic myth of moral purity, the *Ladies’ Home Journal* became the highest-selling periodical in the world, reaching 1,950,000 readers by 1910, and the bully pulpit for a two-pronged approach to simple living. The first phase, the easiest for a housewife to implement, consisted of avoiding unnecessary purchases, reducing consumption, and

action first occurred in England, as the Industrial Revolution was well underway in the British Isles by the outbreak of the American Civil War.

⁴³ Shi, 154-155. Additionally, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, excellent examples in architecture include the Arts and Crafts movement and the Mission Style. Both emphasized remaining true to natural materials, prizing handcrafts over machine-produced detailing.

⁴⁴ Shi, 154-214.

valuing utility and simplicity. The second phase involved the rejection decorative excess associated with the Victorian era, and the embrace of clean lines and practical, natural materials. This was thematically connected with the developing Arts and Crafts architectural and interior design movement, and its “crusade on behalf of good taste.”⁴⁵

At the same time that Bok strove to revolutionize the American household, the rise of “romantic agrarianism.” As discussed by David B. Danborn, the term embodied the notion that individuals engaged in rural livelihoods are morally superior to their urban counterparts because of the benefits derived from working with and in nature. This, in turn, influenced the development of a ‘back to the land’ movement.⁴⁶ Proponents of ‘back to the land’ based their arguments on the horrors of city life.⁴⁷ Authors such as Bolton Hall published how-to manuals for homesteading, including *Three Acres and Liberty* (1907) and *A Little Land and A Living* (1908), emphasizing the benefits of rejecting modern life.⁴⁸

In 1911, Liberty Hyde Bailey published *The Country-Life Movement in the United States*, a variation on the ‘back to the land’ movement advocated by Bolton Hall. Bailey wrote, “The present revival of rural interest is immediately an effort to improve farming; but at the bottom it is a desire to stimulate new activity in a more or less stationary phase of civilization.”⁴⁹ Bailey was critical of the oversimplification of

⁴⁵ Ibid, 181-189.

⁴⁶ David B. Danborn, “Romantic Agrarianism in Twentieth-Century America,” *Agricultural History* 65, no. 4 (Autumn, 1991): 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 2-3.

⁴⁸ Shi, 203.

⁴⁹ Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Country-Life Movement in the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911), 4.

the romantic agrarians, suggesting that townspeople without the necessary skills to make a success of country life might be at a larger disadvantage in a rural situation than an urban one. Appropriately, he cautions his audience to distinguish between rural and suburban life.⁵⁰ Louis Mumford, who joined Clarence Stein and others in establishing the Regional Planning Association of America in 1923 to tackle urban reform, approached suburban living in a manner consistent with Bailey. He advocated combining the most superior attributes of both urban and rural life, and hybridizing them in a new form of living: the suburban planned community.⁵¹ In developing the goals and objectives of the Resettlement Administration, Tugwell engaged in ideas similar to those of Bailey and Mumford. Like them, he rejected the notion that the reinvigoration of a solely rural life was a reasonable or feasible solution to the unfortunate consequences of urban industrialization. Instead, he embraced the notion that the technological advantages of modern life could be harnessed to create synergy between urban and rural lifestyles, incorporating the best features of both worlds.

Conclusion

The Agrarian Crusade and the developing notion of a farmer as a businessman and lobbyist, increased federal interest in American land-use habits, the establishment of rural sociology and its investigation into the standards of living of country dwellers, the socialist rejection of laissez-faire economics, and rural nostalgia were formative for establishing a thematic foundation for the development of Tugwell's opinions. Each of these influential movements were reactions to the trauma induced by rapid modernization. The Agrarian Crusade resulted in the increased involvement of farmers in the political process, and emphasized the growing professional divide

⁵⁰ Ibid, 24.

⁵¹ Shi, 230-231.

between subsistence farmers and commercial farmers. With the establishment of the Yellowstone preserve, the federal government asserted its right to actively participate in land-use decisions. The development of rural sociology and the activities of the Country Life Commission began to expose the existence of poverty on the farms, which coincided with a rejection of modern life and the idealization for a simpler, agrarian lifestyle. The inheritor of these legacies, Tugwell used the platform of the Resettlement Administration to react, respond, and in some instances rebel, against them. Tugwell picked up Mumford's mantle, and advocated for society to embrace industrialization and overcome its negative attributes through the hybridization of rural and urban life in suburbia.

CHAPTER 2

THE WRITINGS OF REXFORD G. TUGWELL

“I refuse to vote for another crucifixion. I refuse to participate in compelling one of the President's most useful friends to drink a bowl of hemlock. I refuse to help bind a Columbus of the New Deal with chains. I shall vote against the crucifixion, against the hemlock and the chains. . . . My act in so doing will be to me in future years—A rainbow to the storms of life: The evening beam that smiles the clouds away, and tints tomorrow with prophetic ray.”

~ Senator Matthew Neely (WV), in defense of Rexford Tugwell's appointment to Under Secretary of Agriculture.⁵²

Introduction

Before he became the “Columbus of the New Deal” and one of the most controversial members of Franklin Roosevelt's first administration, Rexford Tugwell revealed his ideas and opinions regarding the state of American agriculture through numerous scholarly publications. These works delineate the development and evolution of his deep suspicion of laissez-faire economics, and the dangers he perceived in indulging in nostalgia for life in earlier, supposedly simpler times. Such an analysis is beneficial because much of Tugwell's personal opinions during his later years in the Administration are inaccessible. Although he maintained a diary throughout much of his professional life, his numerous responsibilities appeared to have made daily reflection impossible. His actions between 1933 and 1936 are largely visible through department letters, but those frequently reflect third-party interpretation. In examining the basis of his opinions regarding the state of American agriculture before he became the head of the Resettlement Administration, one is able to better understand his rationale for the organization and goals of the agency under his leadership.

⁵² “Tugwell Upped,” *Time Magazine*, 25 June 1934.

Four influential themes manifested themselves throughout his agricultural writings. These underpinned his actions even when he switched from academia to public service. First, Tugwell argued that prevailing American agriculture policies failed, for a variety of reasons, to secure either supply or price stability in the early 20th-century. Second, he asserted that agriculture was not exempt from the technological innovations produced through industrialization, and that failing to accept this as the future doomed the industry and the nation to a perpetual boom-bust production cycle. Third, Tugwell promoted the notion of establishing a permanent agricultural system, one that was organized and regulated by the federal government to ensure price stability and prevent over- and under-production. Finally, he acknowledged that the acceptance of such a system would result in a significant percentage of subsistence-level farmers being incapable of participating, effectively shutting themselves out of the system and eliminating their means of employment. Tugwell made suggestions for ways to mitigate these consequences, but believed that this employment evolution was a natural and acceptable byproduct of increased agricultural efficiency.

Tugwell's published writings, transmitted through scholarly journals, speeches, periodicals, and books, extended from 1917 to 1978. Between 1921 and 1933, Tugwell authored nearly fifty articles and reviews, primarily focused on agrarian economics and the decline of laissez-faire capitalism. For the purposes of this investigation, the seven articles examined were selected as a sampling of his most influential academic work, and they highlight the reoccurring themes that permeate his writing at the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Washington, and Columbia University. Although the chronologically last article, "Design for Government," was published in *Political Science Quarterly* several months after Tugwell began serving as Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, it was likely written just

before or soon after he entered the Administration, and is thematically connected to his earlier work.⁵³ As speeches and journal entries from 1933 and 1934 indicate, he never truly lost his ideological purity, but as Tugwell would soon learn in the months and years following the publication of “Design for Government,” implementing such ideas was not without its difficulties. Indeed, the bureaucratic quagmire of executive branch politics eventually contributed to his resignation in November 1936.⁵⁴

It is important to remember that Tugwell was strongly influenced by the economic context of the 1920s and early 1930s, as well as by the developing notions of standards of living that were discussed in the previous chapter. As an economist, he tackled contemporary problems, and accepted the idea of a linear model of social and commercial progress. In 1928, Tugwell describes his rather grandiose perspective on the nature of his profession in “Economics as the Science of Experience,” stating, “The economist’s heroic task is that of comprehending and, in so far as he can, of aiding in the subjection of nature to man’s will. His range is the whole range of the modern world.”⁵⁵ Tugwell perceived that as an economist, he was in a fortuitous professional position to contribute to the betterment of American life through the rational application of economic theory. By examining his academic writings prior to his immersion in the Roosevelt administration and public speeches and journal entries

⁵³ Rexford G. Tugwell, “Design for Government,” *Political Science Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (Sept. 1933): 321-332. Although no primary documentation indicates the date of the authorship of this article, it is reasonable to conclude that it was likely written in either the spring or early summer of 1933, as it was published in the journal’s September edition.

⁵⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Letter to Rexford G. Tugwell, 17 November 1936,” FDR Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY. Rexford G. Tugwell Papers, Container 23, Box Tugwell Papers, Ro-Sa, Folder Roosevelt, Franklin D. 1934-1946.

⁵⁵ Rexford G. Tugwell, “Economics as the Science of Experience,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (Jan. 1928): 37.

from 1933 and 1934, one is able to understand his goals and objectives, and the truly experimental nature of his implementation strategies.

Pre-Administration Writings - The Decline of American Agriculture

In examining the status of agricultural overproduction, and the subsequent shift in prices and profits in years following World War I, Tugwell gave his support to reform movements, challenging the notion that laissez-faire economics could be legitimately applied to such an industry. In his 1921 article “The Economic Basis for Business Regulation,” he articulated the differences between “supplying necessities” and non-necessities.⁵⁶ The latter, Tugwell asserted, had the potential to function in the marketplace under conditions of perfect competition and self-regulation because the consumer had the option to choose one version over another, or, alternatively, purchase neither. In comparison, necessities must be purchased, which subverted the notion of free competition, a core tenant of the laissez-faire model. Instead, such goods “with a tendency to increasing returns or decreasing costs coupled with an inelastic demand for the production, combination of competing units is in the long run inevitable...simply because of the economics to be gained by operations of a large scale and the loss of plant duplication.”⁵⁷ Conveniently, “combination,” essentially the process of amalgamating separate businesses with the same products into a single unit, also had the additional advantage of stabilizing production and enabling the establishment of price controls. This idea differed from that of a monopoly because the amalgamation occurred through the association of producers, and not by

⁵⁶ Rexford G. Tugwell, “The Economic Basis for Business Regulation,” *The American Economic Review* 11, no. 4 (Dec. 1921): 643-658. In classical economics, this is the differentiation between “needs” and “wants.”

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 646.

consolidating production under a single owner.⁵⁸ The article is a general discussion of the role of regulation and oversight, and only subtly addresses agricultural interests. However, the implication of such opinions was clear. In Tugwell's view, the production of necessity goods naturally progressed towards the notion of combination, because it lacked the elasticity of free market competition. In the absence of substitutions and consumer flexibility, Tugwell saw no reasonable means to maintain price and production stability without oversight, regulation, and cooperation.⁵⁹ Ultimately, he argued, the consumer bore the brunt of such a situation. "...Even the most orthodox laissez-faire believer...has come to accept the real logic of the saying that, when competition is not free and when supply is limited in the interest of total net profit, there is a harm to the consumers."⁶⁰

Tugwell's opinions on the consequences of the absence of such control mechanisms as cooperation and regulation within agriculture was prominent throughout several articles over the following decade. In "The Problem of Agriculture," he discussed the seemingly endless cycle of boom-bust periods within the industry, and the toll it took on both producers and consumers.⁶¹ As war raged in Europe between 1915 and 1919, American farmers had an overseas market for their goods, which, in turn, raised overall prices for the American consumer. However, with the conclusion of the conflict, production levels remained high while a price deflation began in 1920. This combination of events contributed to a considerable dip

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 644-658.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 644.

⁶¹ Rexford G. Tugwell, "The Problem of Agriculture," *Political Science Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (Dec. 1924): 549-591.

in the purchasing power of the farmer. Agriculturalists quickly went from being overpaid for their goods, to being significantly underpaid because of surplus conditions.⁶²

The triggers of such an unstable system were two-fold—one micro and one macro—with disastrous consequences for the American economy. First, in order to make ends meet, farmers frequently faced having to sell their goods below the production price. This was not a situation that occurred only in agriculture, but one that was exacerbated by the fact that it was far simpler to undervalue labor costs on a family farm than in a factory. For instance, non-agricultural commercial enterprises, such as Tugwell's father's canning business, traditionally paid their employees in wages. On a family farm, outside help would likely be paid in cash, but family labor might easily not, regardless of vibrancy the economic climate. Labor input, therefore, could easily become a hidden agricultural cost. In short, the farmer, by failing to adequately calculate the value of his production investments, had more flexibility in undercutting the price of his goods than an industrialist, because the real costs of labor production were not accurately tabulated. Additionally, this situation was adversely impacted by crops having a relatively short shelf-life. In surplus situation, rivalry among sellers meant that a small number of farmers in the same region undercutting their prices would have vast implications for their competitors. Thus, even when prices were higher, the buying power of the farmer could be considerably less than an industrialist.⁶³

According to Tugwell, agricultural price undercutting was also more feasible because of the vast disparities of standards of living between the agriculturalist and the

⁶² Ibid, 558.

⁶³ Ibid, 557.

industrialist. “In presenting figures showing that the purchasing power of the farmer has shrunk...it must be kept in mind that comparisons have been made really between two standards of living.”⁶⁴ The standard of living of the agriculturalist was a “human tragedy...beyond the economist’s estimate,” characterized by hunger, extreme weather complications, and inadequate tools.⁶⁵ The article’s implication was that the status quo operating mechanisms of agriculture created a two-tiered social system, with the average farmer constantly struggling and falling behind his industrial peers.⁶⁶

The second contributing force existed on the macro level of the agricultural profession, namely the natural difficulties that prevented agriculturalists from effectively self-regulating to avoid overproduction and under-reporting of production costs. Tugwell criticized the notion that farmers were inherently individualistic by noting the extensive number of farmers’ associations and technological advances that enhanced communication.⁶⁷ Instead, he attributed the disorganization to broad physical and market reasons. Tugwell noted that the distinctive nature of agriculture, in comparison to other industries, was that, “...Organization in industry has been most conspicuously built up on a basis of the joint and cooperative production and marketing of one commodity, not half a dozen. There is evidently a distinct handicap to agriculture here.”⁶⁸ It was not simply enough for one farmer to be able to communicate with another; instead, agriculture encompassed a multiplicity of products. Even with communication networks in place, the system still reflected the

⁶⁴ Ibid, 562.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 557.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 557, 562.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 571.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

long-standing tradition of each farmer selling their goods independently, and needing to do so in a timely fashion.⁶⁹ For instance, a wheat farmer would raise and sell his crops year after year, most likely without coordinating his production with other wheat farmers. The widespread use of the railroads meant that the wheat farmer was not simply competing within a regional cohort to achieve the best price, but on a national scale. Small variations in growth patterns, weather fluctuations, plant diseases, and other influencing factors meant price spikes when production levels failed to meet consumption demand, and price deflation in periods of surplus. In such a scenario, a farmer only knew the value of his crops after they were produced.

Although it was not specifically discussed in Tugwell's work, one might easily see the parallels between the two production models—agriculture and industry—and their relationship to transportation technology. The former pre-dated the development of the railroad, and the system, therefore, had to readjust to accommodate it. In comparison, the American Industrial Revolution occurred in conjunction with the building of the rail network. As such, new businesses were created to fill new niches, and those that survived filled gaps in the market. Manufacturing, in theory, was more naturally prone to communication among producers; the new businesses were forced to self-regulate production from the start. In comparison, the pre-existing, traditional agricultural system was turned upside down by the expansion of markets, and the boom-bust price cycle indicated its struggle to adjust to the new conditions.

In "The Problem of Agriculture," Tugwell never suggested that agriculturalists were entirely incapable of establishing a system of effective self-regulation. However, four years later he wrote in "Reflections on Farm Relief" that while self-regulated coordination was possible in other industries, "the nature of agriculture is such that so similar coordination is not possible for farmers. The use of governmental machinery

⁶⁹ Ibid, 572.

for such a purpose is not usual with us, but there would seem to be a quite reasonable excuse for it on these grounds.”⁷⁰ Therefore, an external regulating group was the only logical means of ensuring price stability for farmers and ensure the sufficient, but not excessive, production of crops.

Pre-Administration Writings - Rejecting Nostalgia

After reflecting on the ways in which agriculture failed in the 1920s to provide stable prices and reasonable production levels, Tugwell argued that this experience would only be further exacerbated by the failure of farmers and agricultural consumers to accept the industrialization process. Progress, in his opinion, was inevitable, and went hand-in-hand with technological endeavors.⁷¹ Increasing the efficiency of farming should not be simply a matter of concern to the farmers themselves, but, in Tugwell’s opinion, also considered a public issue. In 1928, he wrote, “The long-run problem is that of reorganizing the industry, raising its technical efficiency, reducing its cost, conserving the social interest in the land—generally enabling the industry to stand on its own feet among our other more typical ones.”⁷² Left to their own devices, farmers, in Tugwell’s opinion, would only consider improving their efficiency through broad investment in technology in period of high prices, such as occurred during World War I. In more lean periods, these same farmers were reluctant to increase

⁷⁰ Rexford G. Tugwell, “Reflections on Farm Relief,” *Political Science Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (Dec. 1928): 493.

⁷¹ Such opinions were widely disseminated early in the following decade by such events as the 1933 Century of Progress World’s Exposition, held in Chicago, Illinois, as discussed in Forest Fletcher Lisle’s M.A thesis, *The Century of Progress Exposition*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1970).

⁷² Tugwell, “Reflections on Farm Relief,” 481.

their financial output because of economic insecurity. It was at these times, however, that Tugwell believed it was most critical to make such alterations..⁷³

Combating the reluctance of agriculturalists to invest in new forms of technology was, in Tugwell's opinion, a reflection of a partial backlash in public opinion to American industrialization. In 1924 he wrote in "Our Philosophy of Despair," "It is no accident but the same old incorrigible despair, that causes our prophets, our artists, our thinkers either to turn their eyes backward to the medieval side of European life...to select the worst in American life as typical of the whole."⁷⁴

Tugwell called upon his readers to embrace a new world of technology and industry, and to reject pointless nostalgia because it is an impediment to success. His comments were based on contemporary conditions; they coincided with a general social anxiety about increase in farm abandonment and the development of the romantic agrarian movement of the 1920s, as was discussed in the previous chapter. He acknowledged that many lamented the industrialization process for contributing to the deterioration of rural communities,⁷⁵ but unlike romantic agrarians, Tugwell embraced that transition as the inevitable and positive.⁷⁶ In "The Theory of Occupational Obsolescence," he wrote that the "problem is not to stop and to restore an old stage of industrial technique; it is to bring up to date our social devices. Industrial progress is a cause we cannot attack in order to cure an incident of that

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Rexford G. Tugwell, "Our Philosophy of Despair," *The University Journal of Business* 2, no. 4 (Sept. 1924): 430.

⁷⁵ Tugwell, "The Problem of Agriculture," 552.

⁷⁶ Tugwell, "Our Philosophy of Despair," 430.

progress.”⁷⁷ Industrialization did not signal the end of agriculture because it did not eliminate man’s need for the products of the fields. However, it did imply the general demise of traditional rural life, at least as it historically existed in the United States. Tugwell argued that this transformation would result in the rise of a new type of farmer and a new type of agricultural life.⁷⁸

Pre-Administration Writings - A New, Permanent Agricultural System

In order to address price stability and over-production issues, as well as provide a means by which farmers could see the value of investing in technological improvements, Tugwell ultimately embraced the notion of a permanent agricultural system. Published in 1929, “Farm Relief and a Permanent Agricultural” advanced a linear notion of agricultural progress.⁷⁹ Agricultural regions and their practices, Tugwell asserted, can be categorized as either backwards, middle, or advanced. Backwards practices included planting haphazardly and frequently allowing the land to revert to nature. In the middle version, farming involved a single, consistent crop, and the raising of animals. Finally, the advanced consisted of specialized crop plantings and a strong emphasis on revenue-producing animals. All three variations, Tugwell argued, were evident in the United States at the end of the 1920s, although the backwards version was evident in much higher numbers than the advanced one.⁸⁰ This notion that backwards methods of agriculture were prevalent throughout the country, and that they could and should be eliminated because they do not reflect the

⁷⁷ Rexford G. Tugwell, “The Theory of Occupational Obsolescence,” *Political Science Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (June 1931): 181.

⁷⁸ Tugwell, “The Problem of Agriculture,” 552.

⁷⁹ Tugwell, “Farm Relief and a Permanent Agriculture,” 271-2.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

most efficient use of the land, would be critical during Tugwell's tenure in the Resettlement Administration.

One need not explore at length the details of Tugwell's agricultural management programs in order to understand his staunch belief that agriculturalists were incapable of self-regulation, and that it was in the best interest of the nation, and ultimately the farmer, to insure reasonable, stable prices for agricultural products through federal intervention. Tugwell argued in support of the McNary-Haugen Bills because he endorsed their mechanisms to "make certain specified kinds of farming profitable....by dumping these surpluses abroad while the domestic prices were held firm through the tariff mechanisms which might prevent the entry to our markets of similar commodities from other countries."⁸¹

The thematic notion of federal management of farm production and agricultural product prices was clearly evident in "Design for Government," which was written in support of the National Recovery Act and the Agricultural Adjustment Act.⁸² "Shall we continue to believe that panics, deflation and bankruptcy are our only remedies for overproductivity in industry? Or shall we, by similar ingenuity, control overcapacity and reconstruct the purchasing power of our people?"⁸³ Comparing the implications of these two acts to governmental intervention through such means as anti-trust policies and "free-competitive exploitation,"⁸⁴ Tugwell justified such actions as being the responsibility of the government because the status quo system had failed

⁸¹ Ibid, 279.

⁸² Tugwell, "Design for Government," 326.

⁸³ Ibid, 326.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 325.

to provide an effective or consistent solutions. He clearly articulated his rational for an active, assertive federal government to oversee the agricultural activities:

The jig is up. The cat is out of the bag. There is no invisible hand. There never was. If the depression has not taught us that, we are incapable of education. Time was when the anarchy of the competitive struggle was not too costly....We must now supply a real and visible guiding hand to do the task which that mythical, not-existent invisible agency was supposed to perform, but never did.⁸⁵

Essentially, in Tugwell's opinion, supervision of agriculture by the historically accepted laissez-faire system was, in fact, a figment of everyone's imagination. In the absence of a rational, cooperative system, therefore, chaos reigned.

Pre-Administration Writings - Necessary Obsolescence

Tugwell's criticism of the status quo in American agriculture at the end of 1920s instigated his own investigation into possible ways to alleviate the situation. As a critic of both laissez-faire economics and the marginal status of the federal government in agricultural decisions, he proposed a two-part solution. First, he called for the strengthening of the executive branch, a centralization of power and decision-making.⁸⁶ Second, he advocated for the elimination of the laissez-faire system of agricultural production, replacing it with a broad federal oversight intended to regulate cooperation among farmers and production levels.⁸⁷ Historical precedent contributed to the formation of these policies. During periods of American economic and social crisis, it is possible to trace the influx of power from the legislative branch to the executive branch.⁸⁸ Additionally, the intervention of government in industry was not

⁸⁵ Ibid, 330.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 331.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 321-324.

⁸⁸ Bert A. Rockman, "Legislative-Executive Relations and Legislation Oversight," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 9, no 3 (Aug., 1984): 377-440.

unprecedented; anti-trust initiatives to destroy monopolies, for example, were spearheaded by President Theodore Roosevelt.⁸⁹ While Tugwell approved of such actions, his conception of how agricultural production should be managed, and the necessary steps to achieve such a system of efficiency, required a significant extension of America's historical position regarding land-use and regulation.

Tugwell's believed that American agricultural salvation lay in federal acceptance of technological innovation, and the reworking of old social and economic systems to reflect the new world order.⁹⁰ "There is no prearranged field of government which is set apart from the circumstances of those who are governed. Relations here are always interdependent. As the circumstances of the people change, functions of government change."⁹¹ Ultimately, as his career in the first FDR administration proved, Tugwell was not a details-oriented policy wonk, but a big-picture ideologue. In his early academic writings, his vision for the future is bold, but the specific details on the implementation of such a system, and their possible consequences, are largely absent. The one area he did address was the notion that the reorganization of American agriculture would result in the decline of traditional rural life, and the unemployment of large numbers of farmers.⁹²

"The Theory of Occupational Obsolescence," published in 1931, broadly addressed the idea that one of the unfortunate, but nevertheless necessary, consequences of industrialization was the displacement and unemployment of significant portions of some sectors of workers. Tugwell was a product of his era, and

⁸⁹ Shi, 175.

⁹⁰ Tugwell, "Our Philosophy of Despair," 429-431.

⁹¹ Ibid, 321.

⁹² Tugwell, "The Theory of Occupational Obsolescence," 171-227.

the economic revelations of earlier generations. He recognized that many of his contemporaries responded to the same challenges in an opposite manner, stating, “There came....a romantic movement in literature; and there came one also in economics. The plea that poverty damned the economic system and that men had rights in their occupations was a dominant *motif* in their dissent.”⁹³ Instead of believe in the existence and character of poverty in the United States and the notion that the individual must be protected against the forces of industrialization, Tugwell argued that industrialization must be encouraged and assisted. “Our real complaint on this point is that we have not gone far enough, that the process has been too slow and indirect.”⁹⁴

Tugwell asserted that the critics of industrialization were, in fact, endangering the very people they sought to protect by failing to recognize and accept that change through technology was inevitable. “Occupational obsolescence” was simply a natural consequence of industrialization. As new, more efficient methods develop to produce goods and products, it was inevitable that machines would replace men. Lamenting this process was not a sufficient justification for preventing national progress.

It seems at first somewhat heartless to say that unemployment is an incident. But this does not imply that we lack sympathy for the unemployed; and it does not imply that no measures of relief ought to be undertaken to mitigate the personal disaster of loss of income. It simply recognizes that unemployment is a result of causes we can not lightly discard, and that it is not the only test we can make of these causes....Industrial progress is a cause we cannot attack in order to cure an incident of that progress.⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid, 178. Italics original to Tugwell.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 180-181.

Tugwell acknowledged both that workers trained in specific, outmoded fields would have difficulty finding new employment,⁹⁶ and that the government had a responsibility to find ways to alleviate the consequences, ideally through educational programs.⁹⁷ The intricacies of such efforts are not, however, the focus of his writings. Instead, “The Theory of Occupational Obsolescence” is ultimately an appeal to the learned and employed classes to accept the fact that industrialization required the elimination of certain working-class professions, and that it was necessary, for the betterment of the entire nation, to embrace this change and work to hasten its development.

On the Eve of Public Service

Prior to his appointment as Assistant Secretary of Agriculture in 1933, Tugwell’s views regarding the reasons for the instability of the American agricultural system and some of the steps he believed to be necessary to rectify the situation were widely disseminated. Trained as a theorist, Tugwell was challenged by the Roosevelt administration post to put his broad ideas into practice. Through his writings about the rights of the federal government to designate land as misused, acquire it, and repurpose it, one can easily garner a sense of the underpinnings of his opinions. It is not a far stretch to assume that someone who bluntly acknowledged that unemployment was the necessary cost of industrialization would feel similarly towards the acquisition of misused lands in association with the pursuit of greater agricultural efficiency. The themes that extend throughout his writings on agriculture and the industrialization process revealed his own acceptance that the willingness of society to embrace change was pivotal to the ability of the nation to progress towards increased economic security and stability. The practicality of these ideas and goals

⁹⁶ Ibid, 193.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 196.

were challenged during his tenure as a public administrator, and the tensions between such grandiose opinions and the feasibility of implementation were clearly evident in the organization and operation of the Resettlement Administration.

Department of Agriculture

Appointed as the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture after a position as the Under Secretary of Commerce failed to materialize,⁹⁸ Tugwell quickly became involved in the day-to-day oversight responsibilities of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA).⁹⁹ Tugwell believed this to be a reasonable position based on his positive relationship with Harry Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture, and the fact that he had written extensively on the allocation and reorganization of agricultural production during his academic career. Wallace, who served Roosevelt as his Secretary of Agriculture from 1933 to 1940 and his second Vice President, was initially an important ally of Tugwell.¹⁰⁰

Over the course of Tugwell's service in the Department of Agriculture prior to his appointment as the administrator of the Resettlement Administration in 1935, two speeches clearly delineated the evolution of his land-use policies. Additionally, they show how Tugwell was called upon to defend specific practices, which forced him to engage in political spin control. Backlash by some public and Congressional sectors against the efforts by the Department of Agriculture to curtail production and control surplus is indicated by Tugwell's slightly defensive tone, especially in the 1934 speech.

⁹⁸ Namorato, 72.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 78.

¹⁰⁰ Rexford G. Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, Michael Vincent Namorato, ed., (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 88-91.

The two speeches were given eleven months apart and disseminated over the radio. As the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, Tugwell presented “Our Lands in Order” over the National Broadcast Communications (NBC) Network on August 4, 1933. In his first national address, Tugwell announced that the government secured a “regulated harvest of cotton and cigar tobacco for this year, and is moving to procure a regulated harvest of wheat,” with similar plans for hogs and corn also underway.¹⁰¹ The speech emphasized the severity of the situation, and the desperate need for the administration to alleviate the agricultural price crisis through bold, decisive, and novel action. Lands ‘out of order’ received implicit blame for instigating the crisis, and the federal government was required to rectify the situation by establishing equilibrium between the buying power of industry and agriculture.¹⁰² The idea was that the individual farmer, and, by extension the individual property owner, was incapable of independently understanding how his land functioned as part of a larger national resource. Therefore, it fell to the federal government to coordinate activities in a manner that essentially produced the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Tugwell proclaimed this as an “educational effort,” claiming,

One thing seems certain: we must study and classify American soil, taking out of production not just one part of a field or farm, but whole farms, whole ridges, perhaps whole regions. We must determine which lands are best suited for the commercial production of the staple crops, which had best be put back into trees, and which should not be used for agriculture at all, but simply provide places of recreation and residence.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Rexford G. Tugwell, “Our Lands in Order,” (Aug. 1933), 1. FDR Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY. Rexford G. Tugwell Papers, Box 55, Folder “Our Lands in Order.”

¹⁰² Ibid, 5.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

He indirectly referenced the notion of backwards farming that he elaborated on in his 1929 article, "Farm Relief and a Permanent Agriculture,"¹⁰⁴ and stated the unacceptability of allowing "poverty-stricken families, wearing out their lives to no good purpose, trying to get blood out of a stone."¹⁰⁵ Given the public nature of this speech, it is clear that Tugwell had emerged by the late summer of 1933 as an agricultural spokesman for the Department of Agriculture specifically, and the FDR Administration.

In the summer of 1934 Tugwell expanded his spokesman role. His July 31st address over the Columbia Broadcasting System opened with, "We who are responsible for the execution of the great farm policies of the Roosevelt Administration find ourselves far out on the New Deal firing-line."¹⁰⁶ He continued on to explain that the decision to federally manipulate production schedules for key crops was geared towards reducing excess surplus and establishing stable, consistent prices. In a break from his academic work, Tugwell claimed that "it was only with the greatest reluctance that we temporarily called a halt to the unchecked, gigantic and uneconomic abundance which is the late product of science."¹⁰⁷ Most significantly, his characterization of these activities as "temporary" is quite noteworthy. In comparison to his earlier writings that emphasize the necessity of addressing the inelasticity of agriculture through permanent large-scale federal management, such as the previously discussed "Farm Relief and a Permanent Agriculture" and "Design for Government,"

¹⁰⁴ Tugwell, "Farm Relief and a Permanent Agriculture," 271-2.

¹⁰⁵ Tugwell, "Our Land in Order," 5.

¹⁰⁶ Rexford G. Tugwell, "Address of Rexford G. Tugwell, Under Secretary of Agriculture, Over the Columbia Broadcasting System, 10 PM, EST, July 31, 1934." FDR Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY. Rexford G. Tugwell Papers, Box 50.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 3.

Tugwell suggested here that such measures were merely short-term solutions. This fluctuation in his policy statements likely indicated a desire on the part of the Administration to mitigate criticism and to put a positive spin on the situation, and not a true change Tugwell's beliefs.

By mid-July 1934, Tugwell, the newly appointed Under Secretary of Agriculture, was under considerable pressure to reassure the listening public that the agricultural readjustment measures would not entirely disrupt the historical agricultural business model. He claimed to know "that the American people have given no mandate for the final abandonment of our traditional business system."¹⁰⁸ Yet despite such assurances to the contrary, buried within his conclusion was a reassertion of his personal beliefs in the wisdom of a centralization of agricultural decision-making. "From these drastic and emergency measures we are moving ahead towards a better use of our land, a better balance of agricultural production, and a storage system which will provide an ever-normal warehouse as a safeguard against future catastrophes."¹⁰⁹ As in his academic work, Tugwell was evasive about the specifics of implementing such a statement. Regardless of his claims to the contrary, his diaries indicate the degree to which he remained steadfast to the idea that massive reorganization and resettlement of the land was critical to the long-term success of the United States.

Tugwell's frustration with the political infighting and power struggles within the administration was evident soon after his first appointment. He quickly recognized that the ideological purity that he greatly prized as an academic was impossible to maintain while in a government job. In February 1933, a month before Franklin

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 7.

Roosevelt assumed the presidency, Tugwell ominously confessed, “The more I think of it the less I enjoy the prospect of an official job. Integrity is an elusive thing; but there is no greater satisfaction than the feeling that it is protected. I am afraid of the eternal compromises I may be asked to make.”¹¹⁰

Although Tugwell did not remain consistent in updating his journal throughout the period between 1932-1936, the reader is aware of the pressure on him to reorganize the Department of Agriculture, and to prove his capacity as an administrator.¹¹¹ He appeared to chafe within the confines of this position, and genuinely more interested in producing new ideas than implementing those of his superiors. In December 1932, while still an advisor to President-Elect Roosevelt and a professor with Columbia University, Tugwell reflected on his own strengths. “Any contributions to scholarship and literature [or public service] I am likely to make will consist in the development of alternative suggestions---something strange and new---which I shall probably leave as mere suggestions rather than as finished tasks.”¹¹² Unfortunately for Tugwell, this was not the role he is destined to have in the administration. Instead, he became caught up in internal power-struggles and absorbed in attempting to fix organizational issues within the USDA.¹¹³

Tugwell’s discussion of land-use throughout 1933 and 1934 was consistently geared towards a desire to progress towards a unified national approach. He eventually concluded that a single agency should be responsible for decisive policies. One of his strongest beliefs, and the means by which he justified land acquisition in

¹¹⁰ Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 79.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 91.

¹¹² Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 40.

¹¹³ Ibid, 81.

the name of national interest, was expressed in February 1933, approximately a month before Roosevelt took the oath of office.

“There is needed a new view of Commerce and Agriculture...as representatives, in special fields of the public, rather than representatives to the public of special fields. Given such a reversal of view, it would be possible to proceed toward entirely new policies in which a larger conception could be dominant. *The interest of the public is in an agriculture suited to national needs; agriculture exists for the country; the country does not exist to support farmers.*”¹¹⁴

As early as April 1933, Tugwell admitted his reluctance to work within the Department of Agriculture, disappointed that he would not be able to accompany Jesse Strause, FDR’s new Ambassador to France, as his economic advisor,¹¹⁵ a position for which he might have been infinitely more suited. Throughout the following year, notes cropped up throughout his entries that expressed his growing frustration in the USDA.¹¹⁶ Ultimately, he appeared to negotiate for the establishment of the Resettlement Agency as a means by which to placate his own irritations with bureaucratic inefficiency, believing that he could design a more harmonious system. First, however, he set about trying to work out a functional plan within the pre-existing departments.

A journal entry from November 1934 suggested that Tugwell had previously engaged in discussions with the President and his colleagues in Agriculture and Interior about land-use practices and policies, but these conversations did not warrant attention in earlier notes. Tugwell wrote that he “must talk with [FDR] about the coordination of land policy again. There are many – perhaps 20 agencies of government which have something to do with it. My scheme of trading between

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 324, 331.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 342-355.

Interior and Agriculture of last June was agreed to well enough by everyone but apparently F.D.R. got about equal pressures from all sides.” He continued on to mention the escalating difficulties of attempting to create any sense of cohesiveness between the different groups responsible for land-use policies, and his personal desire to set up a Department of Conservation to absorb all of these responsibilities. However, he still had “doubt[s] if anything drastic will be done,” and indicated that FDR was reluctant to act before the 1936 presidential election. His most pressing frustration with the status quo was that it left “the execution of policy in so many different hands that failure often results.” This journal entry was the first one to clearly indicate his specific administrative desires, and his deep belief that the only way to clearly oversee American land-use was to concentrate the policy process within a single agency.¹¹⁷

The following month, December 1934, Tugwell met with Wallace and Harold Ickles, Secretary of the Interior, and the issue arose about trading land-use bureaus between the two departments. Tugwell suggested the possibility of establishing an “individual conservation department,” and Ickes responds that the he had an “undersecretaryship provided in his budget,” and that he believed Tugwell well suited for the task. Tugwell’s response was, perhaps, the most revealing of his mindset, and his general lack of appreciation for the complexities of administration and bureaucratic politics. After Ickes asked him if he would be interested in such a position, Tugwell responded that “of course it would be attractive to be head of a conservation set-up but that there were many questions to be considered besides the simple one of creating a conservation set-up and that I might be available in any case.” For Tugwell, the difficulty was not in establishing the department itself, but finding the right person to run it. He appeared to underestimate the intricacies of establishing a new agency,

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 145.

even one that was already under the umbrella of another, pre-existing department. Although he acknowledged that he was not known to be an expert in conservation, he expressed his interest in the position, despite being in the presence of his current boss, Secretary of Agriculture Wallace. Unsurprisingly, Wallace approached Tugwell after the meeting, concerned about his interest in leading a new conservation program. Although he was not confronted directly on the issue of leaving Agriculture, Tugwell appeared to sense that this was also a source of concern.¹¹⁸

The larger issue that arose from the Ickles-Wallace-Tugwell December 1934 meeting was Tugwell's acknowledgment of his divisive position within the department, which stemmed from his role in participating in the drafting of the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA). The AAA was one of the first major initiatives of the New Deal, authorized by the President during his first hundred days in office, and tackled the pressing issue of agricultural surpluses. Many farmers were paid to not produce crops as part of a plan to lower production levels and raise the prices of agricultural products, thus initiating the era of farm subsidies.¹¹⁹

Tugwell's first administrative position was in assisting with the implementation the AAA within the Department of Agriculture. Personality conflicts with the AAA Administrator, George Peek, soon arose and an ideological tug-of-war quickly escalated within the USDA. Peeks resigned in late 1933, and for much of 1934 his replacement, Chester Davis, worked comparatively well with Tugwell.¹²⁰ Relations between the two men, however, disintegrated towards the end of the year. In a follow-up conversation with Wallace after their meeting with Ickes, Tugwell

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 168-169.

¹¹⁹ Baldwin, 50-58.

¹²⁰ Namorato, 75-86.

stated “that the present Administrator of Agricultural Adjustment and his assistants took very little trouble to conceal the fact that they would feel better if I were not Under Secretary; that I was not having the contact with and influence on A.A.A. policy that an under secretary ought to have and that naturally I felt sensitive about the situation...” Under such circumstances, it is reasonable to understand Tugwell’s desire to transfer to a different position, but the manner by which the issue was raised with his supervisor indicated the depth of his ongoing political immaturity.¹²¹

Before ever accepting a public position, Tugwell confessed in his journal that his deepest interest was in “the long-range planning of land utilization.”¹²² By the end of 1934, Tugwell, by his own accounts, appeared to be considered the go-to advisor on land-use regulation, a confidant to both Secretaries Wallace and Ickes. More importantly, he seemed to be privy to FDR’s own interest in a comprehensive departmental organization, but gave no indication of whether or not the President was still committed to his November policy of waiting until after the 1936 election. Tugwell was not completely naïve about the attention he is attracting from two powerful men: “The Secretaries are, of course, trying to maneuver so that they can get all the land agencies into their own departments.”¹²³ Although his eventual promotion to the head of the Resettlement Administration suggested that he legitimately held the endorsement of FDR, the events within the USDA in early 1935 suggested that, in fact, he was a relatively ostracized figure, and challenged the legitimacy of the self-aggrandizement recorded in his diary.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid, 51.

¹²³ Ibid, 175.

In January 1935, Tugwell's relationship with Davis deteriorated past the point of resuscitation when a human resource conflict that stemmed from liberals in the Legal Division deliberately misusing AAA stipulations to force Southern landlords to reemploy the same tenant farmers for a second year. Outraged, Davis received permission from Secretary Wallace to purge the liberal members of the program, which drew intense ire from Tugwell.¹ Such political infighting exacerbated Tugwell's own insecurities throughout the early months of 1935, culminating in a press conference, where Secretary Wallace announced that Tugwell was entirely unconnected with AAA policy, and that a separate council was being convened to oversee it. Tugwell's responded in his journal, "How could I stay as Under Secretary of the Department with the Secretary deliberately removing me from authority?"² Within three days, he met with the President to express his own frustrations, and his willingness to resign if, he implied, the situation did not improve significantly. Tugwell noted that the President called him a "distinct political asset" and that "he had no intention of letting me go at all."³ Although this statement cannot be corroborated, it is realistic to assume that Roosevelt did value Tugwell's service, given his subsequent promotion to head the Resettlement Administration, and later appointment as the Governor of Puerto Rico during FDR's final administration.⁴ If his journal is to be believed, it appeared that Tugwell refrained from resigning as a personal favor to the President. It is likely, however, that personal vanity and ambition also contributed to his decision, for in the same meeting Tugwell openly expressing his interest in

¹ Namorato, 86.

² Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 218.

³ Ibid, 220.

⁴ Namorato, 138-139.

acquiring a position overseeing “land and land-uses, conservation, forests and parks, etc.” The President responded that he was not yet prepared to address the reorganization of land responsibility. However, he asked Tugwell to “simply sit tight and wait until he could work the situation out,” to which Tugwell agreed.⁵

Although there was no clear indication in Tugwell’s paper about when he met with FDR to discuss going forward with the creation of the Resettlement Administration, by late February, mere weeks after FDR indicated that he was not ready to move forward with a land policy and conservation program, Tugwell was well underway in planning the “Resettlement set-up.”⁶ Sometime during the same period, Tugwell met with Wallace about his future in the USDA, and was informed that he was welcome to maintain his position as Under Secretary provided that he relinquished all ties to the AAA.⁷ Roosevelt’s willingness to proceed with the new agency decision may have been due to this further deterioration of relations between Tugwell and his USDA colleagues.

In early March, the President reentered the discussion with Tugwell about the formation of the Resettlement Administration, and generally endorsed Tugwell’s ideas. Indeed, he even indicated amusement over Tugwell’s unwillingness to accept responsibility for city housing.⁸ The very notion that such a program would fall under the scope of a land-use bureau is a reflection of the pending diversity of programs and issues Tugwell would become engaged in as the head of the Resettlement Administration. Nevertheless, the implication of such activity was clear: by early

⁵ Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 220.

⁶ Namorato, 87.

⁷ Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 226.

⁸ *Ibid*, 226-7.

March 1935, less than a month after Tugwell expressed a willingness to resign, the mechanisms for the creation of the Resettlement Administration were already in motion.⁹

Although Tugwell was unable to act formally on the creation of a separate land-use agency until March, journal entries in the proceeding months reflected his opinions and perspectives regarding appropriate land-use strategies. Two specific issues would greatly impact the Resettlement Administration agenda regarding a submarginal lands program and the establishment of the greenbelt cities: his views on farmers rights regarding their land, and his belief in the decline of cities.

Tugwell consistently favored the rights of the government over those of the people, trusting the former to be better able to make long-term decisions for the betterment of all citizens, instead of placing supremacy on individual rights to self-determination. In a January 1935 journal entry, Tugwell extended these views towards the rights of farmers to own and operate their land as they say fit, stating,

I personally have long been convinced that the outright ownership of farms ought greatly to be restricted. My observation has been that where a farm is held on long-term lease it belongs to the user of the land much more than if he actually owns it because if he owns it there is constant temptation to build up mortgage responsibilities and quite a likelihood that in the first depression of farm prices that comes along he will lose his land.¹⁰

His sympathy was not with the farmer who lost his land under such circumstances, but with the larger agricultural system, and the nation as a whole. As previous discussed, his academic writing indicated his strong belief that the individual farmer, affected by the inelasticity of the selling of agricultural products, was a significant contributor to the depression of the 1930s. As the farmer cannot be trusted to independently make decisions that benefit the entire nation, and self-regulation of the system seems

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, 186.

impossible, Tugwell concluded that the only acceptable method was to place the land under federal control and jurisdiction. A discussion of states rights in this process was consistently absent in his writings. The journal entry showed that Tugwell's opinions remained firm throughout his tenure in the Department of Agriculture, and it was these views that contributed to the establishment of goals of the Resettlement Administration.¹¹

Additionally, the January 1935 entry showed Tugwell's belief that only a small sector of the farming community was capable of self-government and ownership. Expanding upon his previous statements regarding the notion of backwards farming,¹² Tugwell went on to express his disapproval of the agricultural practices of poor Southern tenant farmers. "I also feel that for such of the farm population as is represented, for instance, in the South by the negro tenants or even by the poor whites, the bettering of farm practices and the raising of living standards requires some supervision of farm practice."¹³ Taken out of context, this statement might suggest that Tugwell favored education as the best means to correct inefficient farming practices. However, it followed a specific assertion that the average farmer was

¹¹ Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 189. The depth of Tugwell's mistrust of the individual making wise decisions is reflected in a passage that is unrelated to land-use. On January 29, 1935, he notes in his journal that he has recently returned from a visit to Union College in New York. He writes, "raised a great many doubts in my mind as to the future of what is sometimes called 'the country college.' It seems to me that these institutions, instead of trying to be national in scope, ought to be localized as junior colleges to include the last two years of high school and the first two years of college and that the big universities ought to be reserved for genuinely advanced students beyond this point." Although he has no role in establishing educational policy, the passage reflects his deep belief that the options of the individual---be it in choices of colleges or land regulations---should be limited, in order to insure the best possible outcome for the collective.

¹² Tugwell, "Farm Relief and a Permanent Agriculture," 271-2.

¹³ Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 186.

incapable of engaging in the best agricultural techniques. As such, the repercussions for the nation were significant enough to warrant removing the land from individual control, and placing it under the control of a governing agency. It is also worth noting that Tugwell specifically identified tenant farmers, specifically Southern ones, as guilty of mismanagement.

The second issue illuminated in the months preceding the establishment of the Resettlement Administration was Tugwell's reluctance to take over the responsibility for city housing. This was not an indication of his disinterest in the topic generally. Instead, it showed his staunchly held belief that the cities were in a permanent and irreversible state of decline, and that he believed he could be far more effective on their outskirts. His first private discussion of the methods by which to create a federally designed suburban community appeared as he justified to FDR his reluctance to accept city housing. Tugwell wrote, "I talked to him about satellite cities as an alternative ... My idea is to go just outside centers of population, pick up cheap land, build a whole community and entice people into it. Then go back into cities and tear down slums and make parks of them. I could do this with good heart and he now wants me to."¹⁴ Through the Resettlement Administration, Tugwell was empowered to put these ideas into concrete fruition with the design and construction of the Greenbelt communities outside Washington, DC; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

By mid-April, Joint Resolution 117 passed through Congress, which authorized the reorganization of submarginal land-use. Tugwell remained unsatisfied with the effort, and Congressional opposition was significant despite its passage.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid, 226.

¹⁵ Ibid, 231.

Although he did not address the specific modifications and amendments to the bill, the depth of Tugwell's defensiveness about them in future public statements suggests that there was considerable lingering mistrust on the part of both Congress and the general public about empowering the executive branch in such a bold fashion.¹⁶

Under the emergency provisions of AAA, submarginal land could be acquired without first establishing that it would be used for a specific purpose.¹⁷ Under the new bill, the administration was required to prove that each acquisition would be put to a specific use. However, Tugwell was satisfied with his acquisition of management over the Soil Erosion Service, and concurrently established a land policy committee within the Department of Agriculture "to coordinate land purchases and policies with respect to all our land treatment which promises to be useful."¹⁸

In late April, FDR publicly announced the creation of the Resettlement Administration, one of approximately sixty programs that constituted the work relief projects.¹⁹ The executive order officially establishing the Resettlement Administration was signed on May 1. Although Tugwell must have undoubtedly been pleased to see his strategizing come to fruition, he entered his new post as administrator of the

¹⁶ Tugwell, "Our Lands in Order" and Rexford G. Tugwell, "The Reason for Resettlement," Address on the National Radio Forum, and broadcast over the network of the National Broadcasting Company, 2 December 1935. FDR Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY. Rexford G. Tugwell Papers, Box 57, Folder "The Reason For Resettlement," NBC.

¹⁷ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "New Means to Rescue Agriculture – The Agricultural Adjustment Act, March 16, 1933," *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* 2, Samuel I. Rosenman, ed. (New York: Random House, 1938), 74-79.

¹⁸ Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 231.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 235.

Resettlement Administration with some trepidation about the nature and diversity of his new assortment of programmatic responsibilities.

Nothing was touched directly on the two problems which are bothering me most. The first of these problems has to do with whether or not the Rural Rehabilitation work is being carried forward as a project or whether it is to be given funds which are to be as flexible as they are in the Relief Administration. I do not see how this Rural Rehabilitation work, which apparently I am expected to take over, can be carried on by the project method altogether. The other problem which concerns me most is the extent to which the President expect us to develop our housing projects. I have never got clearly in mind just how much emphasis he expects to put on them...²⁰

In the early days of the Resettlement Administration, Tugwell harbored insecurities about which direction in which the President wished to proceed, and the agency appeared to have been established too hastily, as its relationship to its umbrella organization was under dispute. On the same day that he noted that FDR signed the executive order, Tugwell lamented that problems over jurisdiction and responsibility between the Department of Agriculture and the Resettlement Administration had already arisen, which could have only been exacerbated by unclear goals and policy agendas.²¹

Before discussing the specifics of the new organization in Chapter 3, it is worth briefly examining Tugwell's expectations of the public reaction to his programs prior to their broad introduction. As subsequent diary entries and speeches will indicate, the public outcry was significant, and the personal attacks on Tugwell were difficult to divorce from criticisms over the Resettlement Administration's actions. Although the opposition would ultimately focus its energies on the argument that the agency's land-use policies were economically infeasible, and Tugwell himself was

²⁰ Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 235.

²¹ *Ibid*, 240.

forced to confront charges of socialism, his prediction of the opposition's main arguments was quite striking.

As a matter of fact it seems to me that the work we are supposed to do is bound to be unpopular in the long run. What we shall have to do is to help out the poorest class of citizens and to do this we shall always be helping the shiftless and unfortunate in all local communities." He goes on to contend that, "I am afraid that what might be called a good citizen will always be against these efforts we are making. It must be one of our first considerations to try always to conciliate public opinion so that we may go ahead in the effort to lift the level of living of these people."²²

It is interesting to note that Tugwell believed that in the *long* term his agencies would be unpopular, which reflected his lack of understanding regarding the immediate implications and consequences of public distaste for political policy.

Conclusion

The frustrations that Tugwell expressed throughout his journal prior to the creation of the Resettlement Administration foreshadowed his struggle to implement concise and uniform land-use regulations, while his academic writings provide a basis for interpreting his subsequent policy decisions. His tenure as the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, the Under Secretary of Agriculture, and administrator of the Resettlement Administration was characterized by a tension between his own ideological beliefs, honed during an academic career at Columbia University and elaborated upon in numerous articles, and the practicalities of bureaucratic negotiating, infighting, and shifting responsibilities. Due to the unavailability of journal entries during the majority of Tugwell's time with the Resettlement Administration, his previous writings offer the best opportunity to explain the philosophical impetus for the establishment of the agency, and the motivations behind its mission, goals, and priorities. Woven through his agricultural works were four important themes: the failure of American policies to provide crop price stability; the

²² Ibid, 244-5.

need for farmers to increase their use of modern technologies; the establishment of a permanent agricultural system; and the elimination of subsistence level farming. These positions strongly informed and defined his policy agenda in the Resettlement Administration.

CHAPTER 3

THE RESETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION, 1935-1936

Introduction

In April 1935, Congress sent the Federal Emergency Appropriation Act, popularly called the “work relief bill,” to President Roosevelt, who signed it into law on April 8th. The bill was the largest single appropriation in American history to that time, totaling \$4,880,000,000 for work relief programs. The passage of the bill was a long, arduous process, due to political infighting among the Senators. By the time it was finally delivered to the President, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) had exhausted its own resources, and was forced to borrow from other programs. As of April 8th, an estimated 21,000,000 individuals were at risk of losing their FERA jobs.²³ Described in *The New York Times* as “the greatest effort to date to spur private industry through public spending,” the bill offered considerable latitude in the establishment of new programs and relief goals, as well as the amount of money to be spent during the first phase of intervention.²⁴

The ‘work relief bill’ greatly enhanced the power the executive branch. In addition to determining overall funding levels and the allocations to specific programs, President Roosevelt was charged with the responsibility of establishing interest rates on public-works projects and determining how much of the allocation to actually use.²⁵ By April 24, he announced the funding of a total of sixty government agencies, including the establishing of the Resettlement Administration.²⁶

²³ Charles W. Hurd, “Roosevelt Signs Work Relief Bill; Begins Allocating,” *New York Times*, 9 April 1935, sec. A.

²⁴ “Relief Set-Up Due with the President,” *New York Times*, 8 April 1935, sec. A.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Although President Roosevelt confirmed to reporters on April 24 that Rexford Tugwell would be overseeing the operations of the Resettlement Administration, the official creation of the agency occurred on May 1, 1935 with the signing of Executive Order No. 7027. Citing the authority of the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935 to establish such a bureau, President Roosevelt formally appointed Tugwell to head it, and designated \$25,000 for initial operating expenses.²⁷

The Resettlement Administration experiment was short-lived. By the end of 1936, Tugwell resigned from both his positions as the Under Secretary of Agriculture and administrator of the Resettlement Administration, and Secretary Wallace oversaw the absorption of the agency into the Department of Agriculture. The Resettlement Administration had operated quasi-independently for little more than 18 months, before disappearing and morphing into the Farm Securities Administration. Many factors can be cited for its temporary existence and questionable success, and few appeared to mourn its passage.

Ultimately, the Resettlement Administration contributed two important concepts on-going debates over American land-use strategies. First, it declared that that land was a finite commodity and should be treated as a national resource. Second, the agency asserted the argument that planning oversight was critical to preventing rural and urban communities from spiraling into poverty, and that it was the responsibility of the government agencies to create new ways of living that established a balance between rural and urban elements. In retrospect, such ideas might seem

²⁶ “President Sets Up Federal Network to Spend Billions,” *New York Times* 25 April 1935, sec. A.

²⁷ “The Resettlement Administration is Established Executive Order No. 7027. May 1, 1935,” *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*. Compiled by Samuel I. Rosenman and edited by Franklin D. Roosevelt. (New York: Random House, 1938), 143.

overly simplistic. These opinions, which were advanced by Tugwell throughout the 1920s and 1930s, were met with considerable public and private opposition. These themes were not simply the direct manifestations of the goals of the Resettlement Administration, but the consequences of the agency's actions, politics within Roosevelt's administration, and external pressures and obstacles. Although the short-lived agency was dismissed by Congress and New Deal critics as an inappropriate response to the crisis of the era, it is an excellent vehicle by which to examine developments in American land-use policies during the mid-1930s.

1935, The Year of Possibilities - Reason for its Creation: Official Goals and Objectives

In 1937, Roosevelt reflected on his personal justification for establishing the Resettlement Administration. He wrote that the decision was,
...founded on the realization that the lowest-income third of our farm population were themselves growing steadily poorer and were causing a great waste of the nation's land and economic resources by their unprofitable farming operations....This starting situation was made more clear by the presence of more than one million farm families on relief roles during the depression—families who lived on the land...[but] could make so little from the land that they had to be supported by outside sources.

The President partially attributed the national economic crisis with the widespread misuse of the land, and starting in 1934, the focus in the Land Policy Sections of both AAA and The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) shifted from reducing crop surplus to the retirement of submarginal lands.²⁸

Executive Order No. 7027 stated the broad goals and responsibilities of the Resettlement Administration, including:

²⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt, Notes on "The Resettlement Administration is Established. Executive Order No. 7027. May 1, 1935," *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* 4, compiled by Samuel I. Rosenman and edited by Franklin D. Roosevelt. (New York: Random House, 1938), 144-6.

- (1) To administer approved projects involving resettlement of destitute or low-income families from rural and urban areas, including the establishment, maintenance, and operation, in connection, of communities in rural and suburban areas.
- (2) To initiate and administer a program of approved projects with respect to soil erosion, stream pollution, seacoast erosion, reforestation, forestation, and flood control.
- (3) To make loans as authorized under the said Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935, to finance, in whole or in part, the purchase of farm lands and necessary equipment by farmers, farm tenants, croppers or farm laborers.²⁹

Immediately after establishing the Resettlement Administration, FDR signed Executive Order No. 7028, which transferred FERA's submarginal land acquisition and repurposing program to the RA.³⁰ The Chopawamsic Recreational Demonstration Project, which will be discussed in Chapter 4, was initiated under the FERA program.

In addition to personally delivering the executive orders to the President for his signature, Tugwell also likely played a significant role in the crafting their language. Although there is no specific documentation to prove that the numerical listing of the agency's responsibilities corresponds to Tugwell's own preferences policy priorities, the fact that the most far-reaching item—the legal justification for the creation of the Greenbelt communities—is listed first is highly suggestive of Tugwell's participation. Although unquestionably interested in conservation issues, his passion was community planning, namely finding new ways for Americans to live that balances rural and industrial needs and advantages.³¹

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Transfer of Land Program of F.E.R.A. to the Resettlement Administration. Executive Order No. 7028, May 1, 1935," *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* 4, compiled by Samuel I. Rosenman and edited by Franklin D. Roosevelt. (New York: Random House, 1938), 155.

³¹ Ibid.

1935, The Year of Possibilities - Obstacles and Challenges

Despite the clarity of the mission statements in Executive Order No. 7027, numerous conflicting and overlapping ideological goals and administrative assignments quickly emerged that impaired the Resettlement Administration's functional ability. By July 1935, Tugwell lamented the "hastiness" that drove the establishment of the agency and contributed to a frustrating summer.³² The young agency was plagued with ideological and programmatic conflicts within the executive branch. Three important examples highlighted differences of opinion between FDR and Tugwell, as well as mixed messages and contradictory statements issued by or in connection with the Resettlement Administration. Ultimately, the dearth of philosophical cohesiveness within the administration would be a factor in the inability of the to maintain its administrative independence.

In his initial public statements about the goals and intended activities of the Resettlement Administration, President Roosevelt made sweeping proclamations that urban residents "who want to try out something new and get away from city life" or who want to return to farming would find assistance through the new agency.³³ Eventually, this issue would intersect with a programmatic question that would haunt the Resettlement Administration throughout its short life, namely uncertainty over which populations were being targeted for assistance. At the time, however, Roosevelt's statement reflects a variation of a "back to the land" mentality of the late 19th and early 20th-century. FDR never waded into the specifics of such a process and, ultimately, the Resettlement Administration never recruited unemployed industrial workers for agricultural jobs, but given the context of the Great Depression, the President's motivations for making such a statement might easily have been to a

³² Ibid.

³³ "President Guides Rural Projects," *New York Times* 21 June 1935, sec. A.

simple way to sooth anxieties. Nevertheless, the incident should not be casually dismissed, because in addition to signaling a potential ideological rift between FDR and Tugwell, it additionally contributed to a sense of ambiguousness regarding the purpose of the Resettlement Administration.

Tugwell was highly critical of FDR's encouragement of urban residents to return to rural life because he believed that it advanced a gross oversimplification of agricultural practices, and the skills necessary to encourage success. His assertion that agricultural practices could be classified into different stages of progress showed his belief that the idea of the age of the independent farmer was largely past.³⁴ Tugwell recognized that process would result in the disruption of tradition, most importantly the "close-knit cooperative family,"³⁵ but did not believe sentimentality to be a sufficient justification for delaying, in his mind, an inevitable process. Nevertheless, relief for farmers and providing avenues for them to retain control of their land was an important component of the Roosevelt's Agricultural Adjustment Act, to which Tugwell greatly contributed.³⁶ Tugwell's writings subtly suggest that the abandonment of farms, a polite euphemism for farmers being forced out of their occupation, should be interpreted as a healthy, natural result of advancing agricultural progress. Instead of activity working to prevent the development, thereby delaying the advancement of agriculture, the role of the government such be to accept the situation as inevitable, and encourage the process by providing failed farmers with new economic opportunities.³⁷

³⁴ Tugwell, "Farm Relief and a Permanent Agriculture," 271-2.

³⁵ Tugwell, "The Problem of Agriculture," 552.

³⁶ Namorato, 75.

³⁷ Tugwell, "The Problem of Agriculture," 552. Tugwell's "Theory of Occupational Obsolescence" and "Design for Government" also advocate similar theses.

Tugwell was also dismissive of the romantic agrarianism mentality because he identified it as a significant factor in the development of the Great Depression. In December 1935, Tugwell took to the airwaves to defend the Resettlement Administration and explain to the public the rationale for national resettlement. His argument rested on the premise that speculative land deals, ignorant buyers, and irresponsible lenders resulted in a new segment of farmers stuck on submarginal land without the knowledge or skill set to be successful. The severity of the situation and the consequences for all Americans, Tugwell argued, demanded the resettlement of these populations through a federally managed program. He asserted, "Long before the Federal Government stepped in, many of those who stuck it out were being supported by charity. Many still are."³⁸ The efforts of the AAA and other land-use programs during the first years of Roosevelt's administration, however, were geared towards emergency relief efforts insufficient to provide long-term readjustment, and prevent such a situation from reoccurring. Tugwell stated that the only solution is for the land to be taken out of production, and that widespread rural suffering demanded such bold action. Most importantly, in Tugwell's opinion, "the land is being changed from a public liability into a public asset."³⁹ The idea of Americans leaving industry for a rural farm career, as suggested by Roosevelt, implied a sense of individuality that Tugwell never embraced. His priority was to produce a profound shift in the way Americans viewed their land: not as simply the possession of the holder of the deed, but as a national resource that should be regulated for the benefit of all citizens. In addition to undermining the ideological cohesiveness of the Resettlement

³⁸ Tugwell, "The Reason for Resettlement," 2.

³⁹ Ibid, 3.

Administration within the larger arena of New Deal programs, tension between the rights of the individual and the rights of the collective contributed to the ineffectiveness of Resettlement Administration programs, as it served as an easy target for criticism by New Deal opponents.

The second example reflects the mixed messages being issued about the Resettlement Administration soon after its creation, indicative of the fact that the Roosevelt Administration was unclear on the purpose of the agency and its function under the New Deal umbrella. On June 20, 1935, Roosevelt met with the State Resettlement Administrators, a group organized through the agency, and stated that the agency was distinct among all of the other work relief programs because it was geared towards planning for the future and “social reform,” instead of addressing immediate needs. The *New York Times* reported that FDR went on to delineate the “twin objectives” of the Resettlement Administration, namely the “creation of work on community projects and the provision of funds for rehabilitation and resettlement.”⁴⁰ There is a clear disparity between these two messages. Although Roosevelt asserted that planning for the future was the highest priority of the new agency, as opposed to the Works Progress Administration that was predominantly focused on employing large numbers of Americans, the ‘twin objectives’ indicate that job creation was also a key element. However, the implication of the statement was that the Resettlement Administration should equally prioritize putting the unemployed to work with planning for the future. Tugwell, as it became increasingly obvious by late 1935, did not share this employment priority.⁴¹

⁴⁰ “President Guides Rural Projects,” *New York Times* 21 June 1935, sec. A.

⁴¹ Tugwell Has Staff of 12,089 to Create 5,012 Relief Jobs,” *New York Times* 17 November 1935.

The discrepancy between FDR's stated goals of the Resettlement Administration cannot be solely attributed to ideological confusion within the administration. It exposed a profound schism between Roosevelt and Tugwell over the nature of the New Deal's work-relief philosophy, the third ideological consideration. In March 1935, Tugwell recorded a conversation with FDR about the use of man verses the machine. Tugwell objected to the government paying more workers than necessary to complete a specific task that could be done with fewer men appropriately applying technological innovations. He dismisses the President's assertion that "we ought to do a lot of this public work by hand methods," through the deliberate reduction of machinery. Tugwell prioritized the use of machinery over the employment of workers because he perceives it as necessary for the nation to accept that certain by-hand methods are obsolete and resistance to change would only further erode its ability to increase general standards of living and function efficiently. Roosevelt, in comparison, put supremacy on employing as many Americans as possible in order to rebuild the economy.⁴²

FDR's conversation with the State Resettlement Administrators underscored his political pragmatism. A significant increase in employment figures since 1932 would become his primary campaign assertion in the 1936 presidential election.⁴³ His effort to link the Resettlement Administration to work-relief initiatives indicated his understanding that continuing to raise employment levels was of great concern to Congress, as the holders of the federal purse strings, and the voting public. Additionally, he recognized that the funding of the Resettlement Administration came

⁴² Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 229.

⁴³ William E. Leuchtenburg, "Election of 1936," in *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-2001* 7, edited by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Fred L. Israel, and William P. Hansen (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 2838.

through the Work Relief Bill, and that despite a personal desire to make the agency a vehicle for significant social reform, its existence was dependent on appearing to belong under the work relief appropriations umbrella. Unfortunately, while Tugwell had strong convictions that the Resettlement Administration's efforts should be directed towards securing social transformation, he lacked his president's grasp of public relations. FDR embraced work relief as a means to an end for the agency, a way of ensuring that it has the resources to fund projects with far-reaching, long-term objectives. Tugwell was an opponent of emergency work-relief efforts in general, and specifically questioned their practicality for farmers. In 1936, this issue comes to a head when a reduction in overall work relief funding results in a total absence of new funds dedicated specifically to the Resettlement Administration.⁴⁴

The bureaucratic obstacles alone in establishing the Resettlement Administration during the summer of 1935 cannot be underestimated. Far from a gradual process of building an effective, streamlined agency, the Resettlement Administration was a cumbersome, hastily organized, discombobulated entity from its conception. Almost immediately after Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 7028, Tugwell was inundated with administrative problems. Addressing a huge surplus of employees, inherited as a result of acquiring the projects of numerous federal agencies, was a considerable obstacle. Staffing figures provide the easiest and clearest means to comprehend the enormous scope of the administrative challenges created as a result of a massive reorganization undertaking.

⁴⁴ Roosevelt Total for Relief is Cut," *New York Times* 7 May 1936, sec. A. This article reports upon the funding specifications to emerge from the House Appropriations Committee, which denied new money to the Resettlement Administration. Although the work relief appropriations go through modifications after the package progresses to the whole House, but new money is never allocated to the Resettlement Administration.

In addition to hiring 1,500 new employees by the end of July, the agency also inherited the staffs of all of the incomplete land-use projects it absorbed from the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior. A total of approximately 15,000 individuals transferred from AAA, the subsistence homestead division of the Interior Department, and the rural rehabilitation division of FERA combined, with nearly 12,500 from FERA alone. On July 31, the *New York Times* reported that Tugwell sought to eliminate between 7,000 and 8,000 positions by the early fall, the majority from the FERA projects. Thus, in addition to being focused on initiating new suburban resettlement programs and reworking policy objectives in the first few months of the agency's existence, Tugwell was forced to contend with reducing employee redundancies and consolidating pre-existing programs.⁴⁵

The efficiency of Tugwell's employee reduction and usage policies remained in question near the end of the 1935, when Harry L. Hopkins, administrator of the Works Progress Administration, announced that it was unlikely to meet its work-relief employment goals by approximately 1,000,000 jobs. Delays in Resettlement Administration work projects were deemed responsible for this shortfall, resulting in an examination of its employment figures. By the end of November, unspecified Resettlement Administration officials reported that the number of its administrative employees was almost twice as large as the number of workers engaged in direct relief positions. Tugwell was specifically cited as retaining 12,089 permanent, administrative employees—the people who oversee and implement projects and programs—and only 5,072 relief workers. In regards to salaries, these employees consumed \$1,750,000, while the relief workers received only \$300,000 total. In comparison, the WPA employed the greatest number of relief workers at the end of

⁴⁵ "Tugwell to Drop 8,000 from Staff," *New York Times* 31 July 1935, sec. A.

1935, with only 2,240 based out of Washington, DC. The most damning element of this assessment was the title of the article: “Tugwell Has Staff of 12,089 to Create 5,012 Jobs.”⁴⁶ The question of the efficiency of the Resettlement Administration and the use of funds was the predominant focus of the news report, and was reflective of growing public interest in political accountability within the New Deal projects generally, and the Resettlement Administration specifically.

In addition to adjusting employment figures, the Resettlement Administration struggled throughout 1935 with the relatively last-minute inclusion of a subsistence homesteads division, its degree of its administrative independence, and a massive internal reorganization. Originally, the Resettlement Administration was subdivided into the four divisions of rural resettlement, land utilization, suburban resettlement, and management/administration.⁴⁷ The agency was tasked with finishing incomplete land projects initiated by various departments, and creating new rural and suburban American communities⁴⁸ equipped to face the economic and social challenges of the 20th-century. Tugwell noted in his diary as early as April 29, 1935 that the President expected him to take over the Subsistence Homesteads division from the Department of the Interior,⁴⁹ but politics within the administration, especially related to Secretary Ickes, seemed to delay its inclusion.⁵⁰ The division was deliberately excluded from

⁴⁶ “Tugwell Has Staff of 12,089 to Create 5,012 Relief Jobs,” *New York Times* 17 November 1935.

⁴⁷ “Tugwell to Drop 8,000 from Staff,” *New York Times* 31 July 1935, sec. A.

⁴⁸ “Social Planners Advise Tugwell,” *New York Times* 1 July 1935, sec. A.

⁴⁹ Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 236.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 238.

the strategic plan that Tugwell designed with Hopkins.⁵¹ Its inclusion at Roosevelt's insistence and subsequent attention in the press undoubtedly contributed to a reduction in Resettlement Administration efficiency because it diverted attention and resources from the projects that Tugwell was actually interested in implementing. Although initially ambivalent on the matter,⁵² when it becomes clear in May that the Resettlement Administration would absorb the subsistence homestead projects initiated by the PWA, he made clear his intention to liquidate the entire program.⁵³ In September, the President allocated \$7 million to finish incomplete homestead projects.⁵⁴ Yet by January 1936, the majority of them were shifted to an inactive list.⁵⁵ Although the subsistence homestead component of the Resettlement Administration did not have a great deal of impact on the larger agency, it serves as an example of the types of programmatic issues that Tugwell faced that detracted from his organization mission, reinforced the argument that the Resettlement Administration served as a way station for incomplete and potentially unfeasible projects.

The status of the Resettlement Administration among the programs funded through the 'work relief bill' was a contentious subject throughout both 1935 and 1936, but it was the policies established prior to its official creation that ultimately placed it in a tenuous funding situation in 1936. One of Tugwell's conditions for leading the Resettlement Administration was that would be allowed to function independently of the established departments, namely the Department of Agriculture

⁵¹ Ibid, 236.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 250.

⁵⁴ "Tugwell to Help 425,000 Families," *New York Times* 28 September 1935, sec. A.

⁵⁵ "228 Projects Voted For Resettlement," *New York Times* 7 January 1936, sec. A.

and the Department of the Interior. Specifically, Tugwell wanted to report directly to the President, making himself, in effect, a pseudo-department head.⁵⁶ Even after it was clear that all of the funding allocations from the work relief bill would be funneled through an allotment committee chaired by Hopkins,⁵⁷ Tugwell expressed his resentment of being subjected to external review in order to receive administrative operating funds. “My contention is that my agency should be thought of as an independent agency just like any department of the government and that I should not have to go to an allotment board or anything of the sort for administrative funds.”⁵⁸ Tugwell went on to emphasize the significance of this issue for him personally, foreshadowing the circumstances that would eventually contribute to his resignation. He emphatically stated, “How this matter may be settled I do not know but unless I can operate independently so far as the control of my administration is concerned I am not interested in going on.”⁵⁹

As a result of a three-week tour of the field sites, Tugwell initiated a massive reorganization of the Resettlement Administration in November, an effort to meld his cumbersome agency into a functional group. The four original divisions were consolidated into two central departments, construction and resettlement, in order to eliminate redundant planning groups.⁶⁰ However, divided among the different departments and agencies, superfluous projects and personnel were not nearly as

⁵⁶ Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 238-239.

⁵⁷ “President Sets Up Federal Network to Spend Billions,” *New York Times* 25 April 1935, sec. A.

⁵⁸ Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 239.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ “Reorganization by Tugwell,” *New York Times*, 15 November 1935, sec. A.

visible as when they were packed into a single agency. With time, Tugwell might have been able to mold the Resettlement Administration into a highly functional and efficient organization. However, this remains only speculation, because his honeymoon period with Congress, the press, and Republican political strategists expired at the conclusion of 1935.

1935, The Year of Possibilities -Projects and Activities

Between May and December 1935, the Resettlement Administration was actively engaged in the acquisition and reuse of submarginal land through the Land Utilization Division, and the creation of the greenbelt communities under the guidance of the Suburban Division. The retirement of exhausted farm land and the development of suburban planned communities were the programs most resonant with Tugwell's personal values and goals, and formed the foundation of his efforts to initiate a revolution in the way that Americans viewed and engaged their land. Despite the obvious programmatic differences between reuse projects on submarginal land and the creation of suburban communities, both initiatives functioned as educational tools to demonstrate Tugwell's theories regarding "best practices."

Tugwell frequently cited the optioning and purchase nearly 10,000,000 acres of submarginal land as one of the main accomplishments of the Resettlement Administration in 1935.⁶¹ (See Illustration 3.1) According to Tugwell, by December,

⁶¹ Rexford Tugwell, "Problems—And Goal—of Rural Relief," *New York Times* 15 December 1935, sec. SM. Tugwell also cites these figures when he is called before the Senate in May 1936. "8 in Senate Demand Fund for Tugwell," *New York Times* 14 May 1936, sec. A.

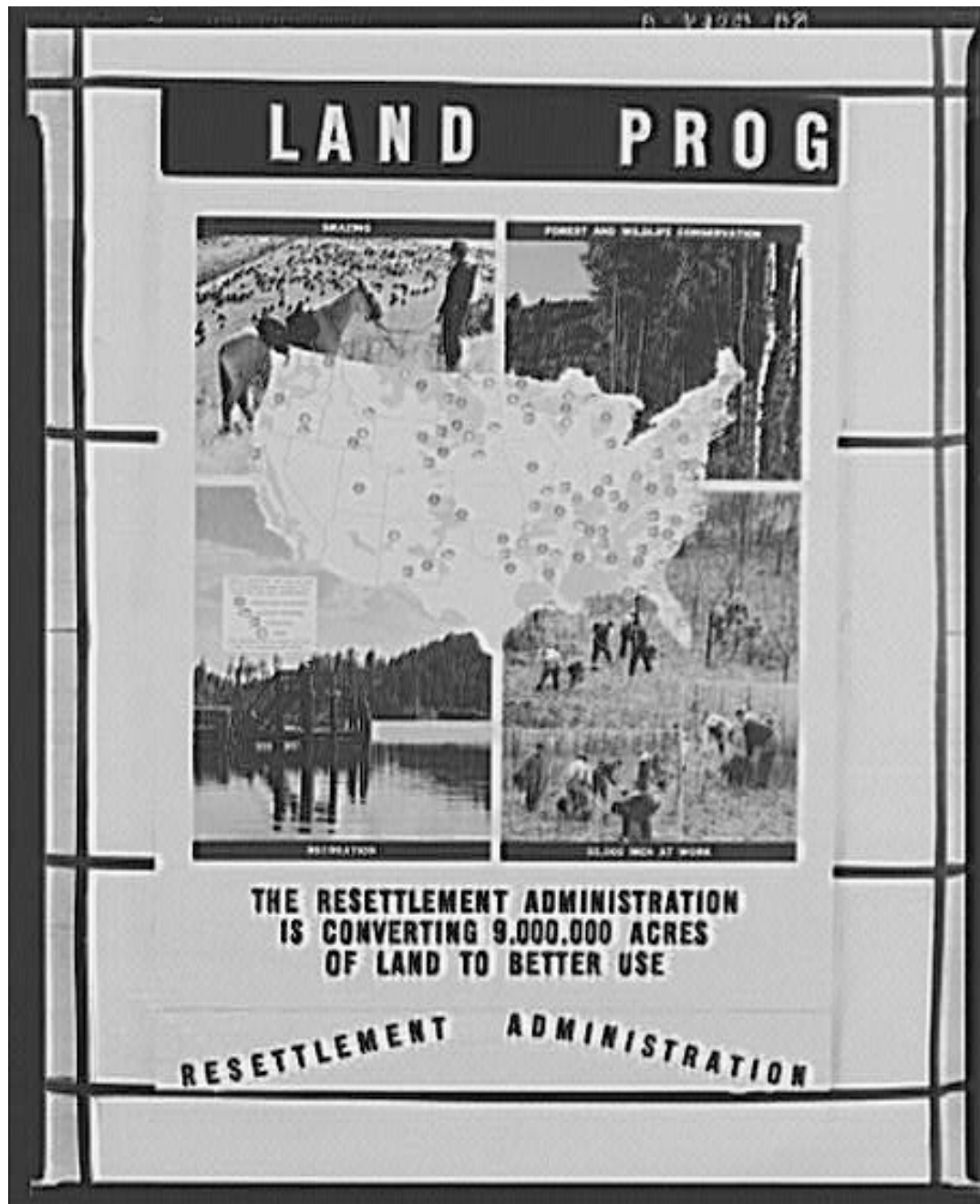


Illustration 3.1. Traveling Land Program exhibit promoting the Resettlement Administration, 1936. From the Farm Security Administration – Office of War Information Photograph Collection.

approximately 22,000 families received the chance to sell their land to the federal government and relocate, half with no additional need of relocation relief assistance.⁶² Following the transfer of titles, approximately 208 projects across 43 states were established to effectively utilize the land for public benefit.⁶³

The Land Program, the first version of what would eventually evolve into the submarginal land division in the Resettlement Administration, was formed under FERA. In February 1934, it received its first allocation, \$25,000,000, from the Surplus Relief Board of Public Works. An advisory committee was established to oversee its efforts. It included Secretary Ickes (Interior), Secretary Wallace (Agriculture), and Under Secretary Tugwell (Agriculture) among its members.⁶⁴ According to John S. Lansill, the first director of FERA's Land Program, the program had three objectives:

- (1) The purchase of poor land.
- (2) The conversion of that poor land to a use beneficial to the people of the U.S.

⁶² Rexford Tugwell, "Problems—And Goal—of Rural Relief," *New York Times* 15 December 1935, sec. SM.

⁶³ "8 in Senate Demand Fund for Tugwell," *New York Times* 14 May 1936, sec. A. In May 1936, Tugwell reported to the Senate that 208 projects had been established on land purchased by the submarginal land division of the Resettlement Administration. Although a percentage of these were likely started in 1936, the figure provides a reasonable estimate of Resettlement Administration activities in 1935, as budget deficiencies immediately began to plague the agency at the start of the new year, and many new projects were delayed. Therefore, it is appropriate to include that the vast majority of the 208 submarginal land reuse projects were initiated in 1935.

⁶⁴ A History of Recreational Demonstration Projects and Development of Policies," WPA Papers, National Archives II, College Park, Maryland, 9. The document is a draft of a report that appears to have been prepared for the Department of the Interior in 1936, as it includes a Memorandum of Agreement between the National Park Service and the Resettlement Administration that was signed on December 18, 1935.

- (3) The relocation and permanent rehabilitation of the people living on that poor land.⁶⁵

Immediately after establishing the Resettlement Administration, Roosevelt signed, “Transfer of Land Program of F.E.R.A. to the Resettlement Administration. Executive Order No. 7028, May 1, 1935.” The Chopawamsic Recreation Demonstration Project, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, was one of the projects transferred to the Resettlement Administration.⁶⁶ As a result of taking control of the Land Program, the Resettlement Administration changed the program’s name to the Land Utilization Division and identified three targets:

- (1) The wasteful loss and destruction of land and its resources;
- (2) Low living standards in areas where families are dependent upon the cultivation of poor land;
- (3) Excessive costs to [the] Government for roads, schools and relief in poor land regions where tax income furnishes only a minor portion of the necessary community expenditures.⁶⁷

The Resettlement Administration charged that the land was being misused by its owners, to the detriment of the individual, the regional community, and the nation as a whole. Through the Land Utilization Division, the Resettlement Administration directed its efforts to acquiring land that was both inappropriate for farming—either due to mismanagement or its natural attributes—and appropriate for a public purpose. It recognized, however, the infeasibility of being able to purchase all of the nation’s

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ “Transfer of Land Program of F.E.R.A. to the Resettlement Administration. Executive Order No. 7028, May 1, 1935,” *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* 4, compiled by Samuel I. Rosenman and edited by Franklin D. Roosevelt. (New York: Random House, 1938), 155.

⁶⁷ Resettlement Administration Publication #1, as quoted in “History of Recreational Demonstration Projects and Development of Policies,” 10. An effort was undertaken to locate the original document in October 2008, but was unsuccessful. The author determined that the source in which the original document is quoted is legitimate, and, therefore, acceptable to use in the place of the original.

submarginal land. Instead, the division directed its efforts towards the establishment of projects that would demonstrate appropriate land-use practices, in the hopes of inspiring local and state agencies to engage in similar activities.⁶⁸ The primary uses for reclaimed land included the establishment of forests, recreational areas, and environmental protection zones.⁶⁹

To oversee the day-to-day operations of the projects initiated on federally purchased submarginal land, the Resettlement Administration entered into an agreement with the National Parks Service (NPS), which operated under the oversight of the Department of the Interior. On December 18, 1935, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Tugwell, L.C. Gray, Assistant Administrator of the Resettlement Administration and Director of the Land Utilization Division, and Conrad Wirth, Assistant Director of the NPS. It established the NPS as the “technical agency” for the Resettlement Administration, and made it responsible for “the detailed planning and carrying to completion, in so far as funds will permit, the development of the conservation land development projects,” otherwise known as the Recreational Demonstration Projects.⁷⁰ The details of the designation of responsibilities between

⁶⁸ Interestingly, this is the only reference I’ve come across in the course of my investigation of the Resettlement Administration that specifically defines the audience that the demonstration projects were hoping to target. The absence of this information in the majority of primary literature suggests that the Resettlement Administration generally assumed its intended audience was obvious. An intriguing follow-up project would be to investigate if the practices and activities of the Resettlement Administration were, in fact, adopted by any of the states in any measure.

⁶⁹ “History of Recreational Demonstration Projects and Development of Policies,” 12.

⁷⁰ “Memorandum of Understanding Between the Resettlement Administration and the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, Concerning Cooperative Relationships on Conservation Land Development Projects,” in “History of Recreational Demonstration Projects and Development of Policies,” 13-16. A copy of the original, signed agreement is included within the report.

the two agencies is worth mentioning, albeit briefly, because it established a basis for understanding the involvement of the Resettlement Administration and NPS in the Chopawamsic Recreation Demonstration Project. It delineates the hierarchy of personnel between Tugwell, as administrator of the Resettlement Administration, and the people in Hickory Ridge and Batestown, VA who sold their land, either willingly or reluctantly, to the Resettlement Administration. This process, and the large degree of disconnect between Tugwell and the land purchased through the Land Utilization Division, and Tugwell's personal involvement in the establishment of the greenbelt communities, Greenbelt, MD in particular, serves as an excellent point of comparison.

An initiative to establish four, planned suburban communities for low-income residents became Tugwell's flagship effort in 1935, and the creation of the greenbelt communities was the most lasting visual reminder of the Resettlement Administration. After shelving the initial idea of relocating farmers from unproductive lands on to healthier, more viable ones due to administrative complications, the Resettlement Administration turned its attention to the creation of four "satellite" communities outside major metropolises. This stemmed from Tugwell's belief that people must relocate to areas with current and future employment opportunities,⁷¹ an idea that appeared to be widely held within the Department of Agriculture.

In a memorandum to Secretary Wallace, Mordecai Ezekiel, Wallace's economic advisor, described the results of a study of population movement that were presented by Dr. Goodrich to the Population Association on May 3, 1935. Dr. Goodrich examined American migration patterns from 1920-1929 and 1929-1933, and came to two important conclusions. First, during economic downturns, people were more likely to vacate the cities in favor of rural communities, which, on average, had lower standards of living during periods of both prosperity and depression. Second,

⁷¹ "Tugwell to Help 425,000 Families," *New York Times* 28 September 1935, sec. A.

industries were far more likely to remain in their original geographical location than to relocate. Third, when industrial movement did occur, it was generally to the areas on the periphery of its established city of origin. In making suggestions regarding the encouragement of industrial growth and development, Dr. Goodrich encouraged the establishment of new centers for industrial activities, and allowed established industries to remain in their original geographical region. People, as a result, should be encouraged to move these areas, instead of expecting the jobs to trickle down to rural regions. Ezekiel closes his letter with the acknowledgment that “these conclusions are certainly not a surprise...[and] they provide interesting detailed verification of general conditions which we would have expected.” The general theme of the missive was that Dr. Goodrich’s observations and conclusions reinforced the idea that the role of federal government in the mid-1930s was to encourage Americans to leave the farms and rural sectors of the nation and relocate to new suburban areas centered around industrial complexes.⁷²

In keeping with Dr. Goodrich’s suburban assertions, the Resettlement Administration announced on October 14 its intention to build a community for workers in Berwyn, MD. This immediately instigated scathing criticism in local papers. Although regional leaders, such as Lansdale G. Sasscer, president of the Maryland State Senate, lambasted the project for being unnecessary for the area, Tugwell believed that its proximity to the nation’s capitol would increase its visibility and make it an educational tourist spot.⁷³ Additionally, the Resettlement Administration believed in the supremacy of federal rights over states rights, and

⁷² Mordecai Ezekiel, “Memorandum for the Secretary,” 4 May 1935. FDR Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY. Rexford G. Tugwell Papers. Box “Tugwell Papers, D-E,” Container 7, Folder “Ezekiel, Mordecai, 1933-1939.”

⁷³ “Defenders Rearing of ‘Tugwell Town,’” *New York Times* 17 October 1935, sec. A.

asserted that the new towns would become “models for future planning, as the country needs to correct the present intolerable situation in which one-third of American families live in homes rated as substandard.”

The Berwyn project was slated to be the first of four, all situated outside of major metropolitan areas with industrial centers in order to “relieve the deplorable housing conditions of low-income workers in cities.” \$5,500,000 was allocated for land, construction, and labor costs for Berwyn alone, with \$31,000,000 for all four projects combined. The Resettlement Administration estimated that approximately 6,000 regional skilled and unskilled laborers from the Washington, DC area would be employed in the construction of 1,000 four and six-room apartments, and other community facilities. The idea was to construct an entirely self-contained town, a residential center to provide rental housing for low-income, working families. The press quickly coined the proposal “Tugwell Town.”⁷⁴

The second planned community was planned in Franklin, N.J., located outside New York City, but unlike the Berwyn project, opposition in New Jersey quickly manifested itself as a lawsuit and a legal injunction against construction in December 1935. The plaintiffs charged that the project would remove considerable tax dollars from the township’s coffers with the transfer of the land to federal ownership, and that the federal government seized ownership without first gaining Franklin’s consent. Additionally, the plaintiffs argued that the Resettlement Administration was in constitutional violation for seizing land without due process, and because “it affected an unlawful delegation of legislative powers by Congress [and] violated States rights.”⁷⁵ This case was resolved in 1936 in favor of the plaintiffs, and most likely

⁷⁴ “Workers’ Town to Rise,” *New York Times* 27 October 1935, sec. E. In other instances, the two words are conflated, creating “Tugwelltown.”

⁷⁵ “Confiscation Seen in Rural Aid Plan,” *New York Times* 11 December 1935.

played a significant role in the termination the program after the completion of Greenhills, Ohio outside of Cincinnati, and Greendale, Wisconsin on the outskirts of Milwaukee.

In addition to legal challenges, Tugwell and the Resettlement Administration faced a host of unresolved issues at the end of 1935, ones that would be carried into the following year and which would, in some cases, adversely affect the effectiveness and productivity of the agency. The first related to the relationship between rural poverty and urban poverty, and the question over who was being targeted for relief. For instance, the Resettlement Administration spent most of the year bogged down in completing projects previously started by other federal agencies. The greenbelt cities movement, however, reflected a large-scale program completely unique to the Resettlement Administration. Tugwell strongly resisted being saddled with the responsibility for creating new city housing,⁷⁶ but the Berwyn project specifically targeted the urban poor. By the end of October, proposed subsistence homestead projects had largely been scrapped,⁷⁷ so the only efforts by the Resettlement Administration to address establishing new ways for Americans to live on and with the land were centered in the greenbelt town projects. Yet despite maintaining vocal advocacy for improving agricultural standards and the fact that substandard land was purchased from poor farmers, Tugwell was unable to reconcile tensions between his impoverished urban and rural constituencies. The most striking reflection of this issue was the failure of the Resettlement Administration to propose and implement a lasting educational model for improved rural living.

⁷⁶ Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 226.

⁷⁷ “Workers’ Town to Rise,” *New York Times* 27 October 1935, sec. E.

The second issue is a subcategory of the first, namely the type of poor rural resident being targeted by Resettlement Administration relief activities. In his December defense of the Resettlement Administration, Tugwell justifies federal intervention into land ownership and the use of public funds by stating, “Resettlement attacks what might be classed the chronic rural-relief problem. The present situation, in which families are trying to live on land that will not support them is costing the taxpayers money.”⁷⁸ The bulk of his writing, however, focused on the newly poor, those individuals who were economically comfortable prior to the Great Depression. This variation exposed a tension within the Resettlement Administration, and perhaps Tugwell himself, over the appropriate course of action to achieve substantive reform.

At the end of 1935, the Resettlement Administration stood at a precipice, with the first inklings of a storm of opposition on the horizon. In many ways, it was the right organization, with the appropriate aims, at the wrong time. American agriculture was unquestionably in crisis; the consequences of rural poverty was captured by Roy Stryker’s photographers. Yet being able to identify the causes contributing to the development of such a horrifying situation was not sufficient. The activities of the Resettlement Administration in 1935 reflected insecurities and inconsistencies about the best way to proceed. It was generally unclear about what the relationship of the federal government in regulating land usage should be: Tugwell was in favor of massive federal control, while FDR took a more moderate, politically acceptable stance. This issue touched at the heart of the problem of the Resettlement Administration, namely administrative uncertainty over who exactly they were aiming to help and the nature of their mission. These insecurities made it difficult for the

⁷⁸ Rexford Tugwell, “Problems—And Goal—of Rural Relief,” *New York Times* 15 December 1935, sec. SM.

organization to function in a cohesive manner, and were eventually exacerbated by Tugwell's dogmatic opinions clashing with the political realities of 1936.

1936, A Year of Strife

Widespread and intense criticism of the Resettlement Administration did not gain momentum until 1936. Although the agency encountered legal challenges as early as December 1935, efforts by Republicans to torpedo Tugwell and the Resettlement Administration dramatically intensified the following year, and Tugwell resigned his post just after Roosevelt's reelection in November 1936. Four distinct elements contributed to the dismantling of the Resettlement Administration and its eventual absorption into the Department of Agriculture.

First, the agency suffered from Congressional backlash due to the massive empowerment of the executive branch through the Work Relief Bill of 1935. The bill contained allocations for \$4.8 billion dollars in programmatic and administrative funding, leaving the bulk of the designations to Roosevelt himself.⁷⁹ The administration faced a far different reception by Congress in 1936 when it submitted its work relief budget for the fiscal year 1937, which commenced on July 1, 1936. The Secondary Deficiency Appropriation Bill passed out of the House Appropriations Committee on May 6, 1936,⁸⁰ providing \$1,425,000,000 for relief efforts, a total of \$75,000,000 less than originally requested by the White House. Expenditure designations written into the bill required Hopkins, head of the WPA, to not exceed certain percentages on a per-program basis. Rural rehabilitation and relief was granted a combined total of \$85,500,000. Hopkins testimony before the Appropriations

⁷⁹ Charles W. Hurd, "Roosevelt Signs Work Relief Bill; Begins Allocating," *New York Times* 9 April 1935, sec. A.

⁸⁰ "Roosevelt Total for Relief is Cut," *New York Times* 7 May 1936, sec. A.

Subcommittee was released to the public on May 7, and the transcript indicated his preference to transfer some of those funds to the Resettlement Administration. It also documented the desire of the subcommittee members to keep the money almost entirely within the WPA.⁸¹

Unsuccessful in the House, Tugwell took his case directly to the Senate the following week, asking for \$167,500,000 to continue the Resettlement Administration's relief efforts. He acknowledged that without new allocations the agency would exhaust all of its resources by June 30, the last day of the 1936 fiscal year. The subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee, however, was disinclined to grant such a request, citing both the absence of a similar designation within the House version of the Deficiency Bill and the fact that President Roosevelt did not ask for a specific allocation for the Resettlement Administration within his budget request document. Therefore, the \$85,500,000 designated to "rural rehabilitation and relief for farmers" remained under WPA funding package, designations that Hopkins defended as appropriate, and the Resettlement Administration remained excluded from work relief appropriations.⁸²

The unwillingness of both the House and Senate Appropriation Committees to include the Resettlement Administration in the 1937 funding cycle reflected a growing legislative desire to assert a limited form of independence from the executive branch, and have a more significant role in defining the nature of federally funded relief efforts. Because the Resettlement Administration was established through an executive order and Roosevelt had a largely free hand with work relief appropriations to fund the new agency as he saw fit, Congress had little opportunity in 1935 to influence it. In 1936, however, it specifically controlled the purse strings, although it

⁸¹ "Relief Bill Starts a Battle in the House," *New York Times* 8 May 1936, sec. A.

⁸² "8 in Senate Demand Fund for Tugwell," *New York Times* 14 May 1936, sec. A.

is unclear why the President assisted their efforts by failing to grant the Resettlement Administration a specific line item in the budget proposal. The result, however, significantly reduced the ability of the Resettlement Administration to function independently from the WPA and the other established departments.

Frustration within Congress about the nature of the Resettlement Administration programs and administrative functions were not limited to House and Senate Appropriations Committees. On April 30, the *New York Times* exposed a secret bill crafted in the House Agricultural Committee to replace the Resettlement Administration, an executive branch creation, with a Congressionally designed version. The bill outlined the establishment of the Farmers' Home Corporation, which would be managed by three presidential appointments in the Department of Agriculture, and proposed that all activities of the Resettlement Administration would be transferred to the new agency. Most significantly, the Corporation could be dissolved by Congress at any time, a clear, but ultimately unsuccessful attempt, to wrest agricultural relief activities away from the White House.⁸³

The Senate provided Tugwell with the same reception as the House. Senator William Warren Barbour of New Jersey called for a senatorial inquiry into the activities and expenditures of the Resettlement Administration, inspired by the legal obstacles it encountered in trying to establish a greenbelt community outside New York. He charged that it was impossible to ascertain the amount of money that had been spent on the pending project.⁸⁴ On May 8th, the Senate approved Barbour's

⁸³ "Tugwell Substitute in Doubt," *New York Times* 1 May 1936, sec. A. Unfortunately, Tugwell's papers provide no indication of his knowledge or lack of knowledge of the secret bill.

⁸⁴ "Barbour Demands Inquiry on Tugwell," *New York Times* 29 April 1936, sec. A.

resolution, asking for a report from Tugwell on the “advisability of continuing.”⁸⁵ Four days later, Tugwell submitted a report to the Senate, and appeared before the Senate Appropriations Committee, asking for the aforementioned \$167,500,000 for the 1937 fiscal year to be added to the Deficiency Bill.⁸⁶ The results of this endeavor have already been discussed; the Committee refused Tugwell’s request. The nature of the summons, centered around the “advisability of continuing” with the Resettlement Administration, and the unwillingness of the Committee to even consider a partial funding amendment, indicated that it had determined that the Resettlement Administration should not be allowed to continue into 1937.

Internal politics within Roosevelt’s administration also played a notable role in the decline of the Resettlement Administration. It remained unclear as to why the President did not include a specific Resettlement Administration reference and allocation request in his 1937 budget. Based on reductions in Congressional funding, it is suggestive that there was increased tension between the executive and legislative branches over relief spending in early 1936. It is merely speculation to suggest that the House used the secret bill that would have replaced with the Farmers’ Home Corporation as leverage in budgetary negotiations with the President,⁸⁷ or that economic resources dictated that the President had to accept reducing or eliminating specific programs. Either way, the President provided Congress with a clear justification to exclude the Resettlement Administration from the allocation process.

Additionally, the situation was complicated by the emergence of Hopkins as the favorite son of the New Deal. In addition to actively defending rural relief

⁸⁵ “Tugwell Figures Asked by Senate,” *New York Times* 9 May 1936, sec. A.

⁸⁶ “8 in Senate Demand Fund for Tugwell,” *New York Times* 14 May 1936, sec. A.

⁸⁷ “Tugwell Substitute in Doubt,” *New York Times* 1 May 1936, sec. A.

appropriations to the WPA,⁸⁸ he asserted that if Congress wanted to make job creation a priority in fiscal year 1937, the total of the work relief funds would need to be appropriated for the WPA. Of the three programs—the WPA, PWA, and the Resettlement Administration—the WPA had the administrative and programmatic mechanisms established to provide the highest number of jobs at the most efficient rates. Essentially, by reducing expenditures and valuing employment figures over efficiency, the WPA model directed a higher percentage of its allocations to new jobs than either the PWA or the RA.⁸⁹

Nevertheless, Roosevelt did not entirely abandon the Resettlement Administration in May. The reorganization of the federal relief efforts began that month, making Harry Hopkins responsible for managing relief efforts between the WPA, the PWA, and the Resettlement Administration. The new hierarchy reflected the distribution of relief funds under the Deficiency Bill to the WPA. Roosevelt indicated that he would continue to fund PWA and Resettlement Administration activities, albeit on a reduced basis, through grants and specific allocations from the WPA. During the press conference, the President defended accusations that the Resettlement Administration had squandered its resources in 1936, asserting that it had made considerable strides and additional WPA funding would further its efforts. He emphasized that between 100,000 and 200,000 families had been assisted off of public support permanently, and announced that very little additional money would be spent on purchasing submarginal land.⁹⁰ The reorganization of the relief programs, however, reflected the executive branch's awareness that the WPA possessed the most

⁸⁸ “8 in Senate Demand Fund for Tugwell,” New York Times 14 May 1936, sec. A.

⁸⁹ Resettlement Facing Cut,” New York Times 24 May 1936, sec. E.

⁹⁰ “President to Keep PWA,” New York Times 16 May 1936, sec. A.

efficient, cheapest model for creating employment. Again, the issue of job creation, which always existed on the periphery of Tugwell's focus on building sustained social change in America, asserted its importance. Quite simply, the Deficiency Bill contained a clear message: jobs creation equaled cash from Congress. Although the President established a funding mechanism for the Resettlement Administration, it significantly reduced Tugwell's much-valued independence, and placed him at the mercy of Harry Hopkins for all funding requests, both administrative and programmatic. Additionally, as only 20% of the WPA relief funds could be allocated by the President to the PWA and RA,⁹¹ a significant portion of rural relief and rehabilitation funds would remain within the WPA. One of the original intentions of the Resettlement Administration was to consolidate land-use and rural rehabilitation efforts within a single federal entity to avoid unnecessary overlap and redundancy. Clearly, changes to both the funding and cooperation mechanisms between the WPA and the Resettlement Administration contributed to an increase in power and prestige for the former, and a reduction in both for the latter.

May 1936 was a trying month for the Resettlement Administration. First Tugwell confronted hostile Congressional appropriations committees, followed by the reorganization of the federal relief efforts that left him begging for assistance from the WPA. Next, the legal challenges regarding the proposed greenbelt community in the Township of Franklin, NJ erupted, dealing the Resettlement Administration a highly damaging blow. First, the Chief Justice of the District Supreme Court dismissed the suit, a decision that the plaintiffs appealed to the United States Court of Appeals in the District of Columbia in January.⁹² On May 18, the Court of Appeals issued a divided

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² "Tugwell Strikes Legal Obstacle in Housing Suit," *Washington Post* 11 January 1936, sec. A.

opinion, ruling that the funding of the Resettlement Administration through the Federal Emergency Appropriations Act of 1935 was unconstitutional. Therefore, federal town planning activities associated with the Bound Brook greenbelt project in NJ had to be immediately and permanently halted. The only recourse for the government in such an situation would be to challenge the decision in the Supreme Court. If the Supreme Court upheld the lower court's decision, the Resettlement Administration would have to be dismantled until Congress saw fit to reestablish it. The lower court decision, however, only established a precedent for legally challenging Resettlement Administration activities and halted activities in NJ; it had no similar effect on the rest of the agency's projects.⁹³ Plaintiffs would have to file similar suits through their own geographically determined legal channels in order to possibly achieve the same results. It appears that Roosevelt's administration opted to avoid appealing the case to the Supreme Court,⁹⁴ and the reasoning behind such a decision is quite obvious. By maintaining the status quo, the Resettlement Administration had to abandon its NJ greenbelt project, but could proceed with the rest of its activities in various locales, provided that new plaintiffs did not achieve injunctions under the NJ model. Taking its case to the Supreme Court would be risky, and given the concurrent funding refusal by Congress, altogether unwise.

The best way to describe the 1936 presidential election, and to understand the differences between contemporary and historical interpretations, is to borrow the

⁹³ "Jersey Housing Halted," *New York Times* 19 May 1936, sec. A.

⁹⁴ The announcement of the US Court of Appeals decision in May 1936 is the last reported legal challenge. The Resettlement Administration garnered significant attention by the press throughout 1936, and it is altogether unlikely that similar legal challenges would not have not caught their attention. Similarly, had the government appealed the verdict to the Supreme Court, it would have warranted front-page attention. As no such stories were reported, it is safe to conclude that the government decided to forego an appeal.

words of a preeminent American History scholar, William E. Leuchtenburg: “The historian who writes about the campaign of 1936 has one big advantage over the people who lived at the time—he knows how it all turned out.”⁹⁵ A simple observation, perhaps, but also keenly astute. Although Roosevelt would ultimately trounce the opposition and win all but eight electoral votes,⁹⁶ such an outcome was not guaranteed in the spring and early summer of 1936.⁹⁷

The 1936 campaign match-up pitted the incumbent, President Franklin Roosevelt (D), against a Washington, DC outsider, Kansas Governor Alf Landon (R). However, the full machinery of the Republican Party did not back Landon until his election at the June GOP convention, where he was nominated and elected as the Republican presidential candidate.⁹⁸ This process, however, should by no means suggest the absence of strife between the two major parties prior to June. On the contrary, Republican hopefuls waged war against Roosevelt and the New Deal early in the year, and both the Resettlement Administration and Tugwell became easy targets for their political outrage.

Several candidate possibilities emerged in the spring of 1936, and Col. Frank Knox was one of the first to publicly describe the aim of the New Deal programs as a the establishment of a ‘dictatorship.’ A Chicago publisher and the Chairman of the Credentials Committee at the Bull Moose Convention,⁹⁹ Knox, who would eventually

⁹⁵ Leuchtenburg, 2809.

⁹⁶ “The Votes in the 1936 Election,” in *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-2001* 7, edited by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Fred L. Israel, and William P. Hansen (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 2914.

⁹⁷ Leuchtenburg, 2809.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 2814.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 2812.

be selected as Landon's running mate, took his criticisms of Roosevelt and his New Deal programs direct to American business leaders. Speaking before the Manufacturing and Bankers Club on February 10, Knox compared the administration to the dictatorships of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin. "New Dealers are determined to gain possession for themselves of the system of free enterprise that has been built up in the country."¹⁰⁰ Nor were such sentiments limited to Republicans. New Deal policies had an incredibly divisive effect within the Democratic Party itself.¹⁰¹ On the same that Knox spoke in Philadelphia, the chairman of Georgia's State Democratic executive committee, Hugh Howell, responded to a request by Marion Allen, Roosevelt's Georgia campaign manager, to hold a state primary in a manner that underscored the socialist undertones of Knox's remarks. Hugh replied, "You and those you represent today should come back to the Democratic Party...come back to good, old-fashioned honesty in government and repudiate, as will be done in November, the New Deal theorists, crack-pots, Socialists and Communists, as represented by Wallace, Tugwell...and others of their kind."¹⁰²

In the build-up to the May appropriations conflicts, accusations of socialism and communism for his economic policies were directed at Tugwell specifically. Back in June 1934, Tugwell defended his opinions before the Senate Agricultural Committee, clarifying that while he believed in a national planning movement, he had no wish to defy the Constitution or impose a model in the manner of the Soviet

¹⁰⁰ "'Dictatorship' New Deal Aim, Knox Declared," *New York Times* 11 February 1936, sec. A.

¹⁰¹ Leuchtenburg, 2810.

¹⁰² "'Dictatorship' New Deal Aim, Knox Declared," *New York Times* 11 February 1936, sec. A.

Union.¹⁰³ Accepting the leadership of the Resettlement Administration, however, thrust Tugwell into a new, more visible role, making him a whipping boy for critics of the New Deal agenda. Representative Hamilton Fish, Jr. emerged as a vocal opponent of both the Roosevelt Administration broadly and Tugwell in particular. In a rebuttal to a broadcast by the secretary of the Communist Party in the United States, Earl Browder, Fish declared, "...I am inclined to the belief that open attacks of Communists against our industrial, social and political institutions are far less dangerous than the subtle and insidious attacks of New Deal spokesmen, such as Under Secretary of Agriculture Rexford Guy Tugwell."¹⁰⁴ Although Senator Barbour did not employ such pointed language, and generally limited himself to attacking the projects and expenditures of the Resettlement Administration,¹⁰⁵ the message in early 1936 was clear: the Resettlement Administration was under assault from Republicans and Democrats alike.

Projects and Activities - May 1936

The conclusion of the House and Senate appropriations process and the verdict in the U.S. Court of Appeals case bookmarked the approximate end of the first year of the Resettlement Administration. The accomplishments of the agency throughout that period were divided into four basic categories: rural rehabilitation, rural resettlement, submarginal land acquisition, and suburban construction resettlement. The first, rural rehabilitation, absorbed the largest portion of the RA's resources. Approximately \$140,000,000 was spent on loans and grants to 600,000 farmers to keep them on their

¹⁰³ "Tugwell A Center of Endless Strife," *New York Times* 18 November 1936, sec. A.

¹⁰⁴ "Fish Sees Tugwell 'Worse than Reds,'" *New York Times* 7 March 1936, sec. A. For a more comprehensive examination of Hamilton Fish, Jr.'s opinions on FDR, see *FDR: The Other Side of the Coin* (New York: Vantage Press, 1976).

¹⁰⁵ "Barbour Demands Inquiry on Tugwell," *New York Times* 29 April 1936, sec. A.

land and help avoid foreclosure by May 1. Rural resettlement, in comparison, only assisted 3,000 families in relocating to more productive farmland, at an average cost of \$4,800 per family.¹⁰⁶

For the purposes of this investigation, the two final categories, submarginal land acquisition and suburban resettlement, are the most significant. By the beginning of May, the Resettlement Administration had optioned or purchased outright almost 10,000,000 acres of land, involving 207 projects in 43 states. These numbers were virtually identical to those previously mentioned in the end-of-year discussion of 1935. In total, Tugwell estimated that approximately 600,000,000 acres of American land in production at the start of the depression, was entirely unsuitable for farming, but home to approximately 650,000 families.¹⁰⁷

Roosevelt initially earmarked approximately \$31,000,000 for the creation of four suburban communities, but the aforementioned legal battle resulted in the elimination of the New Jersey project. As of May 1936, construction had only begun on the project in Berwyn, MD, although the administration indicated that it was prepared to proceed with the creation of ones outside both Cincinnati and Milwaukee. In total, approximately 2,700 families would be housed in the three communities, with land available for the construction of more than 5,000 more residences.¹⁰⁸

Projects and Activities - June through December 1936

After the dual blows by both the legislative and judicial branches, the Resettlement Administration quietly began a dissolution process, while it faced increasingly outlandish accusations by the Republicans, part of a last-ditch effort to

¹⁰⁶ “Resettlement Facing Cut,” *New York Times* 24 May 1936, sec. E.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

swing the election in their favor. In August, the Republican National Committee (RNC) issued a statement, followed by a report, asserting that the Resettlement Administration irresponsibly stored the notes that covered the loans under the rural rehabilitation program in buildings prone to fire damage and theft.¹⁰⁹ In late October, just days before the election, the RNC questioned the treatment of taxpayer dollars in the Resettlement Administration, alleging that \$661 was spent on a spotted cow, \$821.30 on two black mares and three pigs.¹¹⁰ Records from the period indicate that the White House generally ignored such baseless attacks.¹¹¹

By September, the consequences of having the Resettlement Administration report directly to Harry Hopkins for funding requests was reflected in a total cessation of new projects. Tugwell was again forced to reduce his staff, this time by 1,888, bringing the total number of positions down to 13,815. Throughout the summer, he gradually eliminated employees, which had peaked at 19,444 on June 1.¹¹²

The inaccessibility, and perhaps nonexistence, of journal entries throughout 1936 limits one's ability to understand the situation behind-the-scenes and Tugwell's own evolving perspectives and opinions during his last days serving as the Resettlement Administration administrator. The depth of his frustrations over losing

¹⁰⁹ "Calls 'Fire Traps' Peril to Resettlement Administration Loans," *New York Times* 30 August 1936, sec. A. "Farm Loan Laxity Again is Charged," *New York Times* 31 August 1936, sec. A.

¹¹⁰ "Says Tugwell Aids Lent \$661 on One Cow," *New York Times* 26 October 1936, sec. A.

¹¹¹ Leuchtenburg discusses in detail Roosevelt's avoidance of even acknowledging the existence of a Republican candidate during the 1936 campaign, on the grounds, essentially, that doing so would give more credibility to the opponent than was desirable. The minimal response by the White House on the charge of laxity regarding Resettlement Administration loan records indicate that the President and his advisors believed to be insignificant enough to warrant attention.

¹¹² "Tugwell Force Cut 1,888 More," *New York Times* 12 September 1936, sec. A.

his independence to Hopkins and the WPA through Congressional funding can only be imagined. It is clear, however, that in the final months of the year, Tugwell worked to tie up loose ends and find a permanent home for his agency.

Immediately after Roosevelt was reelected by a staggering margin, a proposal by Tugwell to the President to move the Resettlement Administration into the Department of Agriculture was leaked to the press. Chester C. Davis, a member of the Federal Reserve Board and Tugwell's former adversary at the AAA, staunchly opposed such an action. Davis's objection was not to the Resettlement Administration as a program, but to Tugwell personally. He blamed the Under Secretary for contributing to the tensions between right and left-wing New Deal Democrats within the Department of Agriculture. Although Tugwell maintained his title as Under Secretary of Agriculture after the establishment of the Resettlement Administration, he was essentially absent from department issues. By bringing the Resettlement Administration into Agriculture, however, Davis feared that Tugwell would ignite new hostilities. Sources within the administration indicated that while Secretary Wallace has resisted making a decision, he expressed a general reluctance to include the Resettlement Administration, despite Roosevelt's belief that at least some of the programs and departments should be transferred.¹¹³

In addition to advocating the transfer of the Resettlement Administration to Agriculture, Tugwell also issued a massive 40-year farm-relief proposal geared towards eradicating the farm ownership issues that exacerbated conditions during the Great Depression. In his characteristic fashion of arguing for the expansion of the government, the plan generally provided a way to advance federal take-over of much of American farmland, which would in turn be leased to farm families on the provision

¹¹³ "New Storm Rises Around Tugwell," *New York Times* 14 November 1936, sec. A.

that they would be eventually able to own them outright.¹¹⁴ This proposal was Tugwell's last major policy suggestion and revealed that he remained true to his belief that large-scale land reform was the responsibility of the federal government, and that America needed to regulate land usage based on an acceptance that the management decisions did not simply fall under the purview of the holder of the deed, but should be treated as a resource of the nation.

The President's apparent willingness to accept even part of Tugwell's push to transfer the Resettlement Administration reflect his pleasure over the almost completed community of Greenbelt, MD. On November 13, Tugwell gave Roosevelt a personal tour of the town, and the President remarked to accompanying reporters that "The actual sight far exceeds anything I ever dreamed of. I wish every one in the country could see it. It is good to get people out into the country. It is an experiment that ought to be copied in every community in the United States."¹¹⁵ (See Illustration 3.2 and Illustration 3.3) Immediately after showing off Greenbelt to Roosevelt, Tugwell embarked on a tour of the RA's rural resettlement projects with Secretary Wallace. The purpose of the trip was described in the papers as an "open secret," namely to convince Wallace of the value of the Resettlement Administration projects, in order to get him to accept a transfer of the agency into his department. Tugwell was on a leg of this trip when news of his resignation became public knowledge.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ "Tugwell is Seeking 500 Million to Help Tenants Buy Farms," *New York Times* 14 November 1936, sec. A.

¹¹⁵ "President Views Resettlement Administration Model Town," *New York Times* 14 November 1936, sec. A.

¹¹⁶ "Tugwell Resigns His Post; Acceptance Today Likely; Plans Return to Columbia," *New York Times* 18 November 1936, sec. A.



Illustration 3.2. President Roosevelt and Rexford Tugwell greet the press at Greenbelt, MD, November 1936. From the Farm Security Administration – Office of War Information Photograph Collection.



Illustration 3.3. President Roosevelt and Rexford Tugwell tour Greenbelt, MD, November 1936. From the Farm Security Administration – Office of War Information Photograph Collection.

Conclusion

I full understand the reasons that make you feel you should, for a while at least, return to private life within the next few months. You have given generously and efficiently of your services to the Government for these past four years, and I want you to know that later on I fully expect to ask you to come back to render additional service.¹¹⁷

The warmth of Roosevelt's letter accepting Tugwell's resignation, followed in 1940 by Tugwell's appointment as the Governor of Puerto Rico in 1940, reflected that the parting was amicable. Both men accepted that the time for New Deal visionaries was largely past, and with Tugwell's resignation the era of the Brain Trust came to a close. Although he initially intended to resume his post to Columbia University, the institution declined to welcome him back in light of his tumultuous career in government and the storm of negative press that swirled around him throughout 1936 in particular. His resignation from Roosevelt's Administration was interpreted as a sign of Professionally homeless, Tugwell left the Department of Agriculture to become an executive of the American Molasses Company.¹¹⁸

A practical analysis of the functions of the Resettlement Administration ends with Tugwell's resignation and the transfer of the agency in a reduced form to the Department of Agriculture on January 1, 1937.¹¹⁹ In later years, Tugwell would maintain his core beliefs, but describe the Resettlement Administration as a "failure," largely due to the unwillingness of Congress and the capitalist activists, and by

¹¹⁷ Roosevelt, "Letter to Rexford G. Tugwell, 17 November 1936."

¹¹⁸ Nomorato, 117-128.

¹¹⁹ "To Absorb Forces of Resettlement," *New York Times* 22 December 1936, sec. A.

extension the American public, to accept the need for substantial land-use reform measures.¹²⁰ Numerous other reasons have been raised in this chapter in an attempt to explain the conclusion, and Tugwell himself deserves much of the blame. Throughout his short tenure with the Resettlement Administration, Tugwell never embraced the need to link his agency to the work relief efforts of the WPA, which is most clearly evident in his employment statistics. His efficiency as an administrator, and, by extension, the success of the entire Resettlement Administration, began to be questioned as early as November 1935. Ultimately, the Resettlement Administration slipped into obscurity within the Department of Agriculture because it could not garner sufficient legislative support and the necessary fiscal appropriations to independently sustain its objectives, and because Tugwell did not direct his efforts to achieving his all-important work relief quotas. However, this situation was also precipitated by numerous ideological and administrative conflicts, unresolved programmatic goals, and the political context itself.

Although the agency failed to perform as Tugwell expected, it nevertheless provides an intriguing opportunity to examine a federal effort to address an incredibly acute crisis in American agricultural and rural living conditions. The results of this initiative, examined through two programmatic examples in Chapter Four, would be the displacement of individuals from submarginal land, and the establishment of the first federally sponsored suburban community. The idea behind such projects was Tugwell's belief that the economic circumstances and nature of American society required new solutions, and that the role of the government was to experiment and create examples that could be emulated by local and state governments, other federal agencies, and, in some cases, the business community. As the following chapter

¹²⁰ Rexford G. Tugwell, "The Resettlement Idea," *Agricultural History* 33, no. 4 (Oct., 1959): 159.

reveals, these ideas fell squarely within Roosevelt's New Deal tradition. By evaluating the activities, successes, and failures of the Resettlement Administration, one is able to grasp a more complex and nuanced understanding of how the federal government sought innovative, fresh solutions, and how this environment eventually contributed to the belief that suburbanization was the bridge between the poverty of the cities and the poverty of the farms.

CHAPTER 4

GREENBELT, MD AND THE CHOPAWAMSIK RECREATIONAL DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Introduction

The prior examination of Roosevelt administration's rationale for establishing the Resettlement Administration and the agency's subsequent goals and initiatives revealed three important themes. First, the idea that land is finite, and, therefore, must be considered a national resource. Second, solely rural or urban populations without oversight and supervision by regulatory agency could disintegrate into poverty. Finally, the role of government should be to demonstrate appropriate coping mechanism for integrating urban and rural life, as it is incapable of independently solving all of society's ills. Tugwell believed that the hybridization of urban and rural was the ideal form for living for the working class, but recognized the implausibility of the relocating all downtrodden Americans to such neighborhoods or communities. Recreational Demonstration Projects such as Chopawamsic were meant to provide a rural component to an otherwise city-bound lifestyle.

The creation of the greenbelt towns and the establishment of the Recreational Demonstration Projects were the clearest physical manifestations of Tugwell's philosophy. Greenbelt, Maryland and the Chopawamsic Recreational Demonstration Project were two of the flagship programs for these Resettlement Administration, although neither was fully operational before Tugwell resigned in November 1936. The following chapter emphasizes the philosophical and political motivations, the historical influences, and intentions of the participants in establishing, constructing, and implementing the projects.

Greenbelt, Maryland - Historical Precedents

In *Towards New Towns for America*, Clarence S. Stein credited the ‘Greenbelt Towns,’ of which Greenbelt, MD was the first, as the site of where the “seed of future city development was planted.”¹ The depth and degree of Greenbelt’s influence upon future city planners will be left to another author. Instead, Greenbelt, in Stein’s perspective, provided an innovative, fresh answer to the question of community development in the 1930s. While the government had previously engaged in public housing programs, the Greenbelt Towns were the first federal initiative of such magnitude.² However, despite the novel quality that Stein attributed to the project, suggesting that it provided a launching pad for subsequent city planning efforts, the initiative owes much to 19th-century social and technological developments, and early 20th-century federal activities in the housing sector.

The notion that architecture can affect society in such a way as to produce, enhance, or exacerbate certain wholesome or vile characteristics was not the brainchild of 19th-century writers, but such concepts were first succinctly proposed and implemented during that period. Although Pugin was by no means the only writer to embrace this notion, his *Contrasts*, which staunchly articulated that the Gothic style was the most appropriate style for England in the 1830s, compares nicely to Nikolaus Pevsner’s *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* of 1936. Pevsner embraced the idea that the adoption of an architectural style should be based on its ability to respond to society’s needs. Instead of emphasizing style for its own artistic sake, it became a

¹ Clarence S. Stein, *Towards New Towns for America* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1978), 119.

² Roosevelt’s relief programs under the New Deal became the largest mobilization in American history that was not associated with a wartime effort. Greenbelt, as will be discussed, became one of the largest New Deal projects, employing more than 13,000 total men over 37 months.

cogent vehicle by which to reply to the challenges of the age, and influence social responses to a new set of obstacles.³ The former looked to previous traditions for inspiration and the latter embraced a new stylistic expression, but each perceived of their respective styles as “a rational way of building evolved inevitable in response to the needs of what society really is or ought to be.”⁴ Although Pevsner wrote in the early 20th-century, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* serves as a bookend to a century-long tradition of applying architecture as a bandage to the wounds of society. From John Haviland’s The Tombs, a prison-court complex in New York City that was begun in 1838 and emphasized solitary reflection through a single-cell arrangement, to the amphitheater design of mid-19th-century Methodist churches to enhance the audio and visual experience of the audience, even the lower-income members relegated to the balcony, the practical application of architecture influencing social behavior was evident throughout the century.⁵

Three months after resigning from office, Tugwell penned “The Meaning of the Greenbelt Towns” for *The New Republic*. The article downplayed the degree to which Ebenezer Howard’s Garden Cities influenced the creation of the Greenbelt Towns, instead emphasizing population studies as the motivating rationale for the

³ David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture: The Development of a Theme in Architectural History and Theory from the Gothic Revival to the Modern Movement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 1-2.

⁴ Ibid, 1.

⁵ Readers interested in these specific developments should consult Norman B. Johnston’s *Forms of Constraint: A History of Prison Architecture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000) and Jeanne Halgren Kilde’s *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

project.⁶ Nevertheless, it is impossible to assess Greenbelt, MD's contributions to town planning without a brief mention of Howard's ideas because of the conceptual overlap between the two initiatives.⁷

Industrialization first drew rural Americans into the cities, and then technological developments in the late 19th-century—in the form of streetcars, omnibuses, and subways—enabled urban residents to relocate to neighborhoods and communities far-removed from the city center. By the early 20th-century, the automobile entered the market and dramatically affected the development of suburbia, as people could choose to move farther and farther away from the congested cities.⁸ This phenomenon was not limited to the United States. In England, Ebenezer Howard, part of the nascent movement interested in quality of life standards, proposed the idea of the Garden City in his 1898 *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, which was republished in 1902 as *Garden Cities for To-Morrow*.⁹ Howard identified the best and worst attributes of city and rural life, and perceived that the best recourse

⁶ Rexford Tugwell, "The Meaning of the Greenbelt Towns," *The New Republic* 90, no. 1159 (February 17, 1937): 43. (42-43). Although this article was published after Tugwell's resignation, it is acceptable to include it because of its timeliness. Although Tugwell is no longer an official member of the administration, he obviously continues to be invested in the project, and feels the need to defend it against his critics. Additionally, Tugwell's opinions on the Greenbelt Towns is largely absent in other forms, and, therefore, this the best opportunity to understand his vision of suburban resettlement in general, and his rationale for Greenbelt in particular.

⁷ Incidentally, Stein also credited the Garden City movement as a significant factor in the design of the Greenbelt Towns.

⁸ Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), 97.

⁹ C.B. Purdom, *The Garden City: A Study in the Development of a Modern Town* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd, 1913), 17.

to reconcile the needs of industrialization with those of civilization was through community planning that incorporating the best of both forms of living.¹⁰

There are in reality not only, as is so constantly assumed, two alternatives---town life and country life---but a third alternative, in which all the advantages of the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty and delight of the country, may be secured in perfect combination; and the certainty of being able to live this life will be the magnet which will produce the effect for which we are all striving---the spontaneous movement of the people from our crowded cities to the bosom of our kindly mother earth, at once the source of life, of happiness, of wealth, and of power.¹¹

Howard went on to found the Garden Cities Association, and organize two conferences that provided credibility and advertisement for his city planning proposals, and the First Garden City, Ltd was incorporated in 1903. Letchworth became the first product of this initiative.¹²

American federal involvement in the housing industry did not develop out of the Franklin Roosevelt administration. Nearly two decades earlier, President Woodrow Wilson first established new, federally constructed housing projects in response to a shortage of housing stock in industrial areas, and pressing wartime demands.¹³ President Hoover, a Republican, transformed the efforts started by Wilson, a Democrat, into a way to boost the private sector by establishing the Division of Building and Housing in the Department of Commerce in 1921. The purpose of the new department was to intervene in the private housing industry by creating standards for construction materials, as well as codes for development issues such as sanitation and setbacks. The overarching purpose of this initiative was to stimulate public

¹⁰ Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities for To-Morrow* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1965), 46.

¹¹ Ibid, 45-46.

¹² Purdom, v-vi, 17-36.

¹³ Louis Mumford, "Introduction," in *Towards New Towns for America*, 12.

consumption and bolster the private housing industry.¹⁴ Like his successor, Hoover believed in the power of education to advance American society. The same year that he established the Division of Building and Housing, Hoover helped found Better Homes in America, Inc.¹⁵ The new organization, which became a national campaign overseen by the federal government in 1924, erected the National Better Home in Washington, DC in order to educate, through demonstration, the appropriate way to live in the modern age.¹⁶

The developing themes of the 19th and early 20th centuries were not distinct, separate movements, but, instead, overlapping responses to the question of the appropriate way for the working classes to live in the industrialized world. Tugwell's impulse to create the Greenbelt Towns should be viewed in a similar vein, as well as a reaction and reinterpretation of preceding responses.

Suburban Division Organization

The Suburban Division was the only department in the Resettlement Administration to be tasked with an entirely new project, without the burden of inheriting previous initiatives by other land-use agencies. Its official purposes included:

- (1) To give useful work to men on unemployment relief.
- (2) To demonstrate in practice the soundness of planning and operating towns according to certain garden city principles.
- (3) To provide low-rent housing in healthful surrounding, both physical and social, for families that are in the low-income bracket.¹⁷

¹⁴ Hayden, 121.

¹⁵ Ibid, 122.

¹⁶ Janet Hutchison, "The Cure for Domestic Neglect: Better Homes in America, 1922-1935," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 2 (1986): 168-169. (168-178).

¹⁷ Stein, 119.

Tugwell was impressed by John Lansill's success with submarginal land purchases in 1934.¹⁸ Tugwell and Lansill's relationship dated back to their days as students at the University of Pennsylvania.¹⁹ He formally tapped him to serve as the Director of the Suburban Division after the agency was created in May 1935, but Tugwell's diary notes that Lansill was already engaged in developing plans for the Maryland site the previous March.²⁰

The initial planning efforts by the Suburban Division engineers were cumbersome and implausible. Lansill played an important role in helping Tugwell conceptualize the new communities. He initially envisioned a town along the lines of Le Corbusier's *Ville Contemporaine*, a model planned community that involved high-density residential skyscrapers surrounded by greenbelts that was showcased at the 1922 Paris Exhibition. Lansill helped Tugwell reevaluate the practicalities of such a scenario in the United States and advocated single and multi-family units.²¹

Although Tugwell originally rejected the notion of including professional town planners in the design process, he acquiesced after reviewing the dismal products of a summer's worth of activity. First, the Resettlement Administration sought the expert opinion of Tracy Augur, the chief town planner for the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), and then reached out to the private sector. Clarence Stein, an early American urban planner, became an influential consultant on the Greenbelt project at the bequest of Lansill. Henry Wright and Sir Raymond Unwin also gave their opinions upon

¹⁸ Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 115.

¹⁹ Donald A. Krueckeberg. *American Planners: Biographies and Recollections*, (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1983), 239.

²⁰ Ibid, 115, 228.

²¹ Krueckeberg, 238-239.

solicitation. The first concrete results of these meetings included a reorganization of the staff, a rejection of the first community design, a largely grid-style proposal, and the separation of the suburban planning division from the subsistence homestead division.²²

Stein's writings offer the clearest perspective on the internal organization and operations of the Suburban Division after the staff reorganization. The planning portion was divided into separate teams, consisting of architects, planners, engineers, and technicians, each group working independently on their respective sites under the guidelines of the project. Frederick Bigger, the Chief of the Planning Staff, oversaw the efforts of each team, and the rationale for separating them stemmed from a desire to maximize the experimental value of the initiative, and encourage the members to think creatively and take risks.²³ The absence of Tugwell from Stein's discussion, as well as the general nature of the head of the Resettlement Administration that can be gleaned from previous chapters, suggests that he was uninvolved with the design component of the Greenbelt Towns, beyond defining the broad perimeters of the project.

Greenbelt, Maryland - Satellite City Philosophy

The Suburban Division was tasked with an enormous responsibility—namely, to conceive of a new, healthy, economical way for working-class Americans to live in the industrial world—on a relatively tight timeframe. Although they would eventually become known as the Greenbelt Towns, Tugwell initially conceived of them as “satellite cities.”²⁴ As previously discussed, the administration strongly believed that

²² Joseph L. Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs: A History of the Greenbelt Town Program, 1935-1954* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1971), 47.

²³ Stein, 120.

²⁴ This is the term that Tugwell employs throughout his example. His diary entry of March 14, 1935, is but one example. Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, XXX.

industry would never relocate from the general area in which they were established to new population centers, and, therefore, that it was imperative for people to move to accommodate industry.²⁵ However, relocation to the urban centers in the previous century had proven to be unhealthy, and these satellite towns, located on the outskirts of industrial cities, were meant to provide an affordable alternative to the slums. On the issue of site selection, Tugwell wrote, “These peripheral areas offer the best chance we have ever had in this country for affecting our living and working environment favorably.”²⁶

While Tugwell and Stein appeared to have little personal interaction between 1935 and 1936, the two shared an important city planning philosophy. There was an ongoing debate within the Suburban Division about how much could reasonably be spent on each individual dwelling, how much could be recouped through rent, and how much should be totally absorbed by the agency itself. In a letter to Lansill in November 1935, Stein weighted in on the matter, writing about the importance of working within the budget limitations. “Even if capital cost is not charged to tenant, it must be kept to a minimum so as to...set standards of planning and building that will be sufficiently economical to serve as a guide to others for building in the near future.”²⁷ In this manner, he strongly shared Tugwell’s crusading impulse.

²⁵ Mordecai Ezekiel, “Memorandum for the Secretary,” 4 May 1935. *Rexford G. Tugwell Papers* FDR Library, Box “Tugwell Papers, D-E,” Container 7, Folder “Ezekiel, Mordecai, 1933-1939.” Accessed November 12, 2008.

²⁶ Tugwell, “The Meaning of the Greenbelt Towns,” 44.

²⁷ “Appraisal of Plans” from Clarence Stein to John S. Lansill, 19 November 1935. Clarence S. Stein Papers, Collection 3600, Box 7, Folder 10, Cornell University.

Greenbelt, Maryland - Site Selection

Prior to his appointment to Administrator of the Resettlement Administration, Tugwell expressed an interest in the land around the Beltsville National Agricultural Research Center. In March 1934, he and a few assistants examined the property for the possibility of creating a wildlife refuge.²⁸ A year later, he broached the issue of creating satellite towns with FDR, and gives him a tour of the area as the site for the first potential project.²⁹ An on-going problem for the Roosevelt administration in solving the urban slum crisis was the difficulty of obtaining large, congruent tracks of city land for reasonable prices. Resettlement Administration officials believed that relocating these efforts to the perimeters of these communities would offer the best opportunity to make significant reform.³⁰ Approximately 13 miles north of Washington, DC, Berwyn, the area around the Beltsville National Agricultural Research Center, became the future site.

Greenbelt received considerable attention in regional newspapers, much of it unfavorable. As noted earlier, the press soon bequeathed the suburban Maryland project the dubious title of “Tugwelltown.”³¹ That appellation’s similarity to the “Hooverilles,” a popular name for Depression-induced shantytowns, cannot be overstated. Politicians such as Lansdale G. Sasscer, President of the Maryland State Senate, weighed in, charging that the project should be halted based on the objection that the new residents would not be from the area and would have to be added to local

²⁸ Tugwell, *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, 105.

²⁹ Ibid, 226.

³⁰ Arnold, 37-38.

³¹ “Tugwelltown in Berwyn,” *Washington Star* 12 October 1935, sec. A.

and possibly state relief rolls.³² Other critics argued that private suburban projects and PWA initiatives already in development were sufficient to address the regional shortage of low-cost housing, and that the Resettlement Administration project was an expensive misuse of funds.³³

“The Claim Jumper,” an editorial cartoon that ran in the October 13, 1935 edition of the *Washington Post* clearly surmised the opposition’s sentiments regarding the proposal (See Illustration 4.1). A dapper, aristocratic Tugwell leans against a sign, a play on the notion of staking a claim, which contrasts the idea of a “low cost housing project” with a \$5.5 million price tag. Representatives from the PWA, the private sector, the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) are all depicted as workers returning to the site and being shocked by Tugwell’s claim to the land. In comparison to Tugwell, the representatives of pre-established building organizations are dressed for work, and accompanied by the tools and supplies fit for construction.³⁴ The message conveyed is that Tugwell is out-of-touch with the situation, and asserting himself in an environment in which he clearly does not belong, to the detriment of taxpayers, private enterprise, and government agencies alike.

³² “Defends Rearing of Tugwell Town,” *New York Times* 17 October 1935, sec. A. Also reported regionally in “State Officials Join in Protesting Berwyn Project,” *Washington Star* 15 October 1935, sec. A.

³³ “Tugwell’s Folly,” *Washington Post* 13 October 1935, sec. B.

³⁴ “Editorial Cartoon 1 – No Title,” *Washington Post* 13 October 1935, sec. B.



The Claim Jumper.

Illustration 4.1 "Editorial Cartoon 1 – No Title." Published in the *Washington Post*, 13 October 1935, section B.

Greenbelt, Maryland - 'Best Practices' Research

In addition to reviewing plans and proposals, Clarence Stein was also involved in aiding the Research Section of the Suburban Division, which was led by Warren Jay Vinton. Communications throughout the fall of 1935 indicate that one of the major hurdles to community creation was determining the 'best practices' that should be employed by the agency.³⁵ As this was the first undertaking federal undertaking of such magnitude, the planners had to consider issues that were here-to-date excluded from government housing projects for low-income residents, such as shopping centers, schools, and other community amenities. Stein's previous planning experience made him especially capable of advising on the policies that influenced the type of design that was feasible in the space itself.³⁶

Stein wrote that the research phase of the project was abruptly curtailed as a result of political pressure to respond to the "Hooverilles" established along the National Mall by the 'Bonus Army.'³⁷ The documents reviewed for this paper neither directly support nor refute such a claim, but the pressure to act was unquestionably influential in Resettlement Administration decisions in the last months of the 1935.

³⁵ Letter from Clarence Radley (Executive Director of the International City Managers' Association) to Warren Jay Vinton (Chief of Research, Division of Suburban Resettlement, RA), 10 October 1935. Clarence S. Stein Papers. Collection 3600, Box 7, Folder 11. Cornell University. Although a contemporary term and not found in specifically in the papers of either Tugwell or Stein, "best practices" is a succinct term for describing their goals.

³⁶ Several letters between Stein and the Resettlement Administration in the fall indicate this trend, including: "Letter from Stein to Warren Jay Vinton, Resettlement Administration," 30 September 1935. Clarence S. Stein Papers. Collection 3600, Box 7, Folder 11. Cornell University; and, "Letter from William H. Ludlow (Research Section, Division of Suburban Resettlement, RA) to Stein," 12 October 1935. Clarence S. Stein Papers. Collection 3600, Box 7, Folder 11. Cornell University.

³⁷ Stein, 121.

Additionally, the WPA's failure to meet its employment goals in late 1935 because weather conditions adversely affected its construction efforts.³⁸ The flow of public dialogue of the period suggests that the impetus to rush the Greenbelt project was a reflection of work relief considerations more than anything else.

Greenbelt, Maryland - General Plan

Although Tugwell gave a personal tour of the Greenbelt project to President Roosevelt in November 1936,³⁹ just days before submitting his resignation, the new community was not officially completed until 1938. However, he visited the site numerous times, and the final project was ultimately a physical manifestation of Tugwell's main priorities, with one important exception. (See Illustration 4.2) Although he initially desired to incorporate a small amount of agricultural production into the Greenbelt design, this element was ultimately eliminated from the final design, and no rationale was ever provided in Tugwell's papers.⁴⁰ Greenbelt was designed in a modified crescent pattern with a highly "organic quality" around the natural features of the landscape (See Illustration 4.3). The interior land provided sites for a community center and recreation fields, as well as the public and commercial

³⁸ "Tugwell Has Staff of 12,089 to Create 5,012 Relief Jobs," *New York Times* 17 November 1935, sec. A.

³⁹ "President Views Resettlement Administration Model Town," *New York Times* 14 November 1936, sec. A.

⁴⁰ H. N. "Factual Summary on Greenbelt Towns," 20 May 1948. Clarence S. Stein Papers, Collection 3600, Box 7, Folder 14, Cornell University. The full name for H.N. is not listed in the papers. S/he was likely one of Stein's employees. Unlike Greenbelt, Greendale, Ohio and Greenhills, Wisconsin both had agricultural space incorporated into their community design.



Illustration 4.2. Rexford Tugwell and his aides touring Greenbelt, MD, July 1936. From the Farm Security Administration – Office of War Information Photograph Collection.

buildings. The five superblocks south of Northway were completed by the Resettlement Administration and its post-1936 successor, the Farm Security Administration.⁴¹ The five southern superblocks included 885 total units and 3,444 rooms for residential, commercial, and community purposes, on a total of 3,200 acres. Within the buildings themselves, there were 1,885 dwelling units, including 306 apartments, 574 duplexes and row houses, five freestanding houses, and 5 ‘farmhouses’ without any designated farmland.⁴²

Greenbelt, Maryland - Propaganda, Objections and Missed Opportunities

Although Tugwell was under nearly constant criticism throughout the spring of 1936, after the initial public outcry over the Greenbelt project, the program largely slipped out of sight in the press until the US Court of Appeals decision in the New Jersey housing case. This created the opportunity for other municipalities to challenge the constitutional rights of the Resettlement Administration to create the Greenbelt Towns.⁴³ Simultaneously, progress slowly continued in Maryland under the direction of the Construction Division, educational materials were prepared to advertise the general objectives of the Resettlement Administration and the purpose of the Greenbelt Towns. A pamphlet entitled, “The Work of Resettlement,” announced that the towns would have all the amenities necessary for vibrant community life, including municipal services, small businesses, and playgrounds, all circled by a “greenbelt” to provide a rural atmosphere.

⁴¹ Stein, 119, 127-129.

⁴² “Factual Summary on Greenbelt Towns.” Although listed as “farmhouses,” these buildings were not associated with any agricultural pursuits, and simply functioned as five additional dwellings.

⁴³ “Berwyn Heights Favors Resettlement Administration Project,” *Washington Post* 19 May 1936, sec. X.

Located near industrial centers, these towns will provide good housing and a healthy environment, at a minimum cost, to families who now can afford only sub-standard homes and will make available convenient markets for the farmers living outside the town proper. By encircling these towns with areas of farm and wood land, the best values of both city and country living will be combined.⁴⁴

Despite the assertions of “minimum cost,” the main criticism of the Suburban Division was its consumption of money. Not content with providing simply adequate accommodations for lower-income workers, Tugwell wanted to demonstrate what America was capable of achieving through comprehensive planning. The new community abounded with recreational opportunities: meadows and wooded areas, a lake stocked with fish, playgrounds and sports fields. Underpasses were constructed to increase public safety, designated parking areas were designed to be functional and aesthetically pleasing, while Stein later compared the pedestrian paths that meandered throughout the superblocks to a “human nerve system.” Shopping centers, educational facilities, and municipal buildings would be constructed to serve the needs of the new resident families.⁴⁵ All of these amenities, however, came at a steep price: between \$9,000 and \$10,000 per residential unit.⁴⁶

A memo buried in the Stein papers written by Carl H. Chatters, presumably a bureaucrat, concisely reveals the nature of the hostility towards Tugwell’s project.⁴⁷ In it, Chatters proclaims,

⁴⁴ Resettlement Administration, “The Work of Resettlement,” (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1936), FDR Library, Henry Morgenthau Papers, Correspondence: 1933-45, Resettlement Administration Rh-RN (1937), Box 238, Folder Resettlement Administration 35-37.

⁴⁵ Stein, 140-148.

⁴⁶ Tugwell, “The Meaning of the Greenbelt Towns,” 42.

⁴⁷ Research here-to-date has not revealed Chatter’s position, or that of his correspondent. However, the authenticity of the memo is not in question, and regardless of his position, the sentiments expressed as well worth considering in this project.

It seems to me ridiculous to plan such facilities for places under jurisdiction of the Resettlement Administration. The type and scope of services discussed in this memorandum are far more ambitious than the services now received by cities generally. I doubt if 1% of our population enjoys the facilities in the aggregate comparable to those comprehended here. My opinion

- If we are planning Utopia, this is fine.
- If we are planning something practical for the type of persons concerned, it is fantastic.⁴⁸

As related in Chapter 3, Congress failed to designate funds to the Resettlement Administration in the 1937 fiscal budget, suggesting that it, too, shared Chatters' concern over the role of the agency in the housing process, its goals, and its consumption of resources. Although, ultimately, a great deal of money was spent on the construction of Greenbelt and it was publicly perceived as affecting an exceptionally small portion of the region's inhabitants, Tugwell failed to emphasize how the project benefited Washington, DC. As previously discussed, providing employment opportunities was not Tugwell's main concern. He seems to have failed to understand, however, that this was the primary focus of the Congress, the President, and the public at large throughout 1936. For instance, in each of the last few months of the 1936 campaign, FDR ratcheted up the number of work relief positions. Landon himself believed his own campaign to be dead in the water as of June, in large measure due to the President's strategy.⁴⁹

Since providing work relief jobs was not his personal mission, Tugwell missed an opportunity to advertise the Resettlement Administration's contributions through the Greenbelt project. In October 1935, when construction began, roughly 1,500 transient men were housed at public expense in six sites around Washington, DC. Conditions were deplorable, and the Suburban Division offered to help alleviate the

⁴⁸ "Memorandum" from CHC (Carl H. Chatters) to Ascher, 8 November 1935, Clarence S. Stein Papers, Collection 3600, Box 7, Folder 14, Cornell University.

⁴⁹ Leuchtenburg, 2838.

situation by taking responsibility for them. Approximately 900 of the men were employed in the construction of Greenbelt for 136 hours per month, instead of the typical 88 hours per month of other WPA projects, as well as housed and fed at considerable expense to the Resettlement Administration. These workers proved to be highly efficient, however, and the production rates of these former transients likely contributed to the Resettlement Administration's rejection of a CCC proposal to take over the construction activities.⁵⁰

From October 1935 through February 1936, the workers were kept busy doing a variety of activities until the blue prints were completed. Between March 1936 and November 1938, no fewer than 3,000 men were employed at any one time, and sometimes personnel figures reached over 8,000. In fact, the construction of Greenbelt was one of the largest single New Deal projects, with over 13,000 individuals hired over the course three years.⁵¹

Unfortunately for Tugwell, he resigned before the full economic and social benefits of the project for the DC metro region could be fully realized. He failed to personalize the project, to tell the story of the unemployed transient who escaped the bone-crushing depression of poverty through work opportunities at Greenbelt. Instead, he conversed in lofty tones more befitting an academic than a public administrator.

Chopawamsic Recreation Demonstration Project - Setting

Situated approximately 35 miles southwest of Washington, DC,⁵² the Prince William National Forest is a natural oasis nestled among the detritus of suburban

⁵⁰ Arnold, 111.

⁵¹ Ibid, 112.

⁵² "Recreational Demonstration Projects as Illustrated by Chopawamsic," VA, 4.

sprawl, poorly planned commercial areas dominated by strip malls, and the Quantico Marine Corps Base. (See Illustration 4.4 and Illustration 4.5) The forest's approximately 15,000 acres are bounded by the Quantico Creek, a tributary of the Potomac River, and bisected by the North and South Forks of Quantico Creek, as well as the Chopawamsic Creek. Although a relatively small parcel of land, elevation changes range between about 50ft and 400ft, and rugged terrain is mixed with floodplains.⁵³ The forest is the direct federal descendant of the Chopawamsic Recreational Demonstration Project, designated by Congress as the Prince William National Forest in 1946.

When National Park Service representatives first encountered the area between Dumfries and Joplin, VA that now comprises the Prince William National Forest, they discovered a region rich with natural resources. A 1936 project report cited excellent specimens of white oak, red oak, black oak, chestnut oak, beech, walnut, sycamore, tulip, ironwood, birch, maple, white and black ash, pine, cedar, hemlocks, and dogwood, among others. "Forest cover throughout the area is nearly ideal" for the needs of the project, the report indicated, despite the fact that logging activities produced clear-cut spaces in some sectors. Noteworthy fauna in the mid-1930s included a respectable low levels of fish in the mid-1930s was due to high levels of pollution by the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine.⁵⁴

⁵³ "We Know that Such a Place Exists," 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 88.

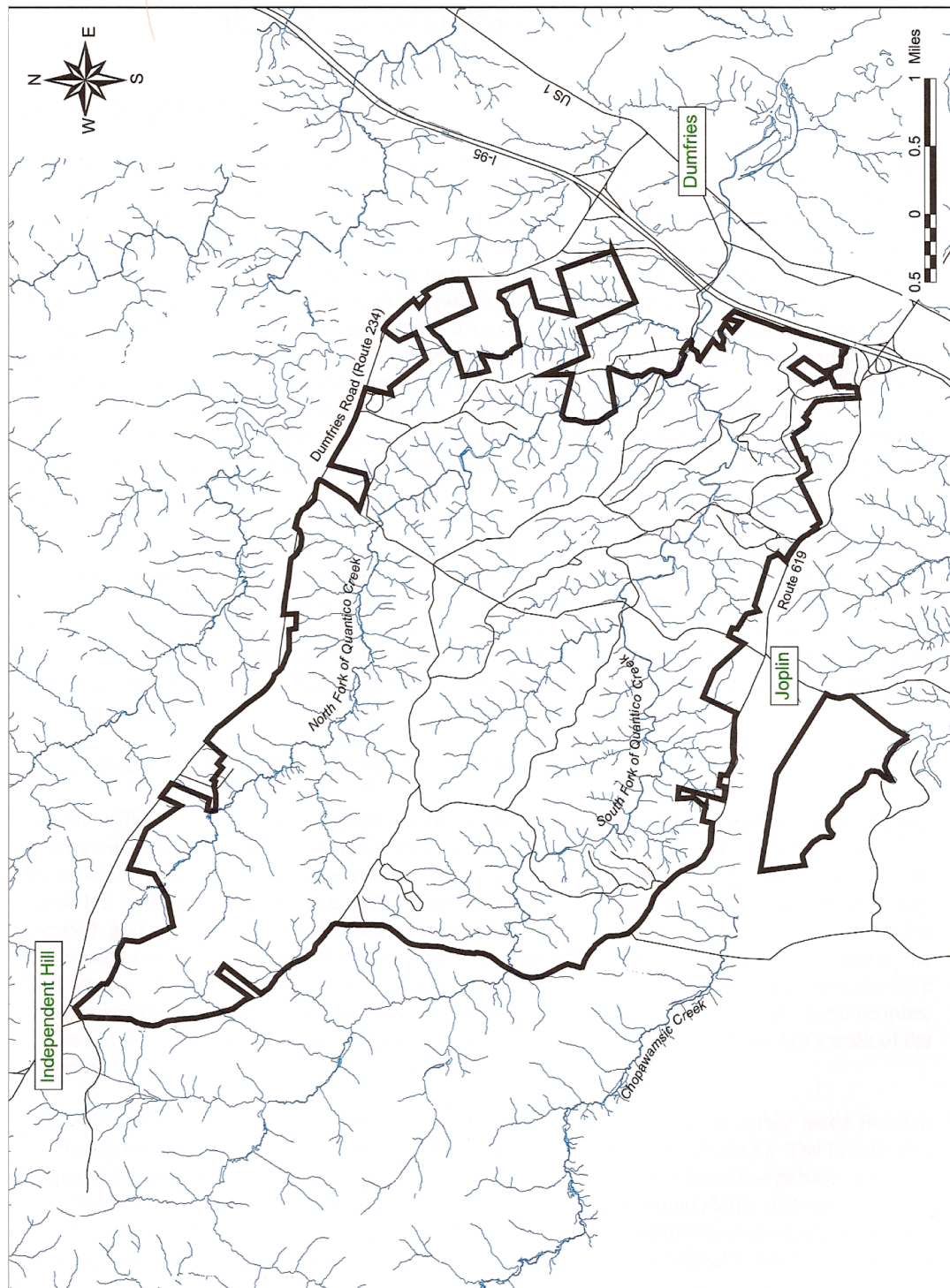


Illustration 4.4. Prince William Forest National Park boundaries. From “We Know that Such a Place Exists,” pg. 5.

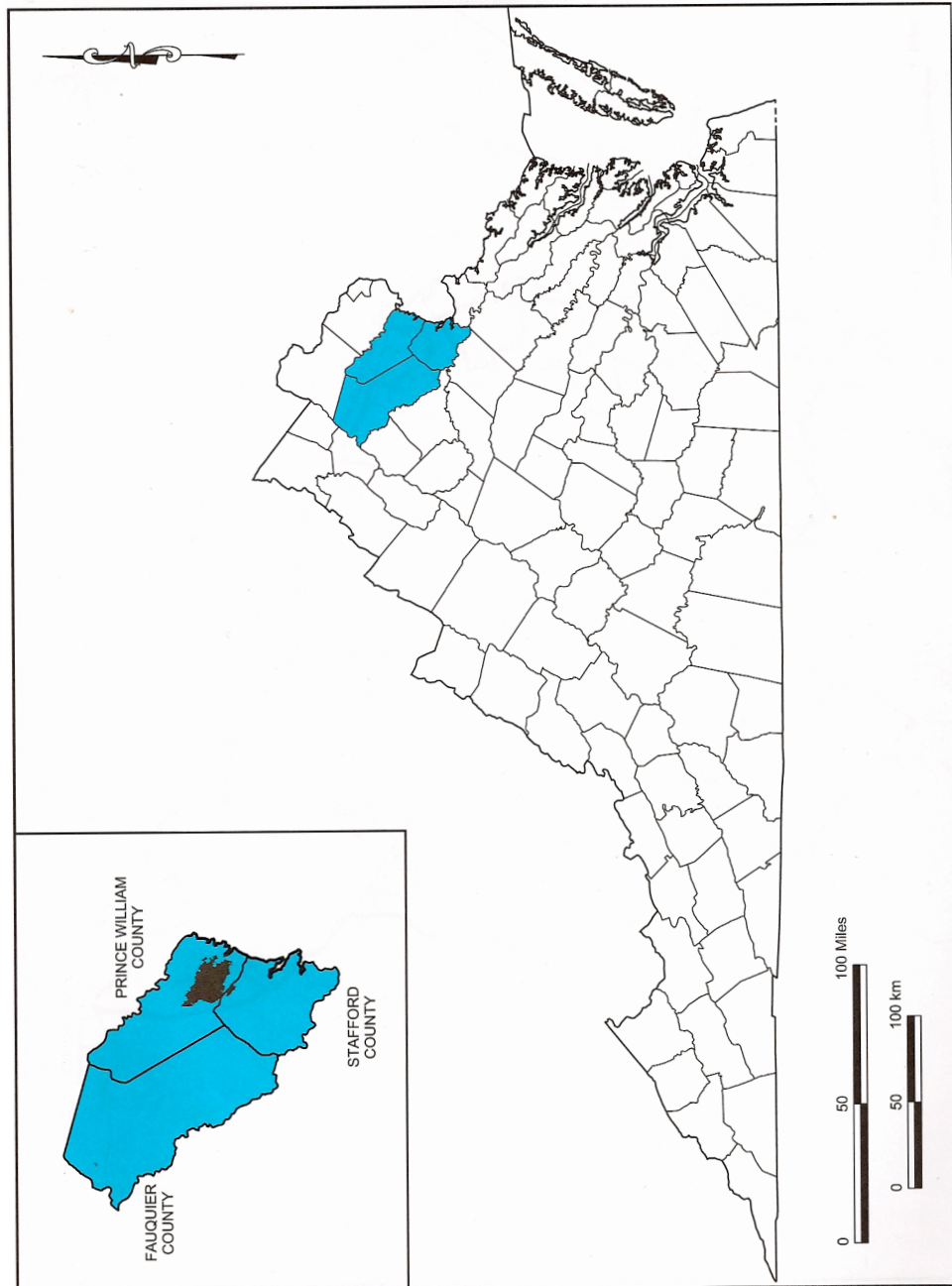


Figure 4.5. Prince William Forest National Park in relationship to the surrounding counties in Virginia. From “We Know that Such a Place Exists,” pg. 4.

Chopawamsic Recreation Demonstration Project - Scope of the Project

By the 1920s and 1930s, Americans firmly believed that healthful benefits could be derived from interaction with the natural world. Advertisements for vacation retreats in places such as the Adirondacks were commonly found in popular publications like *Life Magazine*. Some philanthropists strove to insure that these opportunities were not limited to the middle and upper classes, and established camps for less fortunate children.⁵⁵ (See Illustration 4.6) Such opinions and activities were not exclusive to the United States. The idea for establishing the Recreational Demonstration Project program was the brainchild of Matthew Huppuch of the National Park Service (NPS), who witnessed the positive benefits Swiss children derived from nature camps experiences.

The Chopawamsic Recreational Demonstration Area was initially established by FERA's Land Program, one of 46 programs that were created between 1933 and 1942. Initially, the park was going to be contained within 8,081 acres that straddled Prince William and Stafford Counties, for an estimated cost of \$86,000.⁵⁶ Officials perceived the area to be ideally suited to serve the need for inner-city youth camping and outdoor recreation programs, such as the Twelfth Street YMCA and the Boys' Clubs of Washington. Sites for these programs were to be within 35 miles of a major metropolitan area, cost no more than ten dollars an acre, and contain natural features suitable for adaptation to camp facilities.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ "Fresh Air Fund," *Life Magazine* 99, no. 2568 (July 1932): 32. The Fresh Air Fund, established as a philanthropic venture by *Life Magazine* was an excellent example of this phenomenon. The project, which sent poor, urban youth to nature camps, ran for several decades.

⁵⁶ "Recreational Project to Total 8,081 Acres," *Washington Post* 2 March 1935, sec. A.

⁵⁷ National Park Service. "Chapter One: The Construction of Prince William Forest Park," *Prince William Forest Park; Administrative History*



Illustration 4.6. Fresh Air Fund Advertisement. From *Life Magazine* 99, no. 2568, July 1932, page 32.

<<http://www.nps.gov/archive/prwi/Admin_hstry/adhi1.htm >, accessed 16 January 2009.

Roosevelt administration officials justified the establishment of the Chopawamsic on the basis that the capital city lacked “an adequate place where low-income families might go to rest and play...[there are] no provisions for the simple pleasures and improved health of those who need them most and can afford them least.” Although Washington, DC was notable for its many parks and open green spaces, the implication was that lower-income families were not welcome in such venues. Therefore, it became the responsibility of the federal government, as the ‘landlord’ of the city, to provide such facilities.⁵⁸

As the land negotiation records show, the acquisition of land by the federal government in the vicinity of Joplin, Dumfries, Batestown, and Hickory Ridge was a gradual process that predated the creation of the Resettlement Administration, and continued on after it was absorbed into the Department of Agriculture. Land acquisition commenced in early 1935, and was transferred to the RA’s Submarginal Land Division the following May. While there is little indication that Tugwell took an active role in the activities on the site, it was one of the more successful programs that the Resettlement Administration administered, and one that was accomplished with limited resources. It is unclear why Tugwell failed to cite the cooperation established between the Resettlement Administration, NPS, and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) as an important accomplishment of his agency when petitioning Congress for additional resources.⁵⁹ Additionally, since it was initially believed that the programs would be turned over to state management, Chopawamsic was established in

⁵⁸ Recreational Demonstration Projects as Illustrated by Chopawamsic, VA., 4.

⁵⁹ The retirement of submarginal land appeared to be pushed to the background of the Resettlement Administration activities, and the positive results it achieved received scant attention during negotiations for the 1937 fiscal year budget. Instead, it became a target for the opposition of financial and administrative mismanagement.

cooperation with Virginia authorities.⁶⁰ Tugwell's focus appeared to be on the acquisition and retirement of exhausted land instead of on its adaptive reuse, and the absence of public dialogue about the situation suggests that he again missed an opportunity to claim the achievements of the Recreational Demonstration Project as a direct result of Resettlement Administration initiatives. Nevertheless, the Recreational Demonstration Projects were in keeping with his philosophy that the federal government should function as a role model for state and local governments. As the name implies, it was meant to "demonstrate" how the land could be effectively used to achieve the highest social benefits.

CCC Camp Sp-25 was a vital force in the creation of the camp facilities at Chopawamsic beginning in 1934.⁶¹ By the time the joint report on the nature of Recreational Demonstration Project activities was issued in 1936, three separate camps were completed, designated for girls, boys, and mothers with small children. The facilities were constructed from wood available on-site or in the vicinity, and stone quarried from the nearby pyrite mines was used in roadbeds.⁶² After the Resettlement Administration was absorbed into the Department of Agriculture, ongoing development of the camp facilities continued to be overseen by the NPS and constructed by CCC employees. In total, five group cabin camps were finished, which

⁶⁰ National Park Service. "Chapter One: The Construction of Prince William Forest Park," *Prince William Forest Park; Administrative History* <http://www.nps.gov/archive/prwi/Admin_hstry/adhi1.htm>, accessed 16 January 2009. This conclusion is also supported by "Virginia Parks Fast Improve, Director Says," *Washington Post*, 17 April 1935, sec. A.

⁶¹ National Park Service. "Chapter One: The Construction of Prince William Forest Park," *Prince William Forest Park Administrative History* <http://www.nps.gov/archive/prwi/Admin_hstry/adhi1.htm>, accessed 16 January 2009.

⁶² Recreational Demonstration Projects as Illustrated by Chopawamsic, VA., 9.

included facilities for sleeping, eating, recreation, and administrative and medical support. Swimming spaces were built near each of the camps, and included the construction of dams on both the North and South Forks of Quantico Creek. The CCC was also responsible for building manager's quarters, as well as miles of trails, roads, and bridges.⁶³

The Chopawamsic initiative was a public-private collaboration. Although the aforementioned land and facilities were paid for and constructed by the federal government, the responsibility for providing recreational activities for inner-city residents was relegated to the private sector. In early 1936, the first groups, such as the Boys Club of Washington, DC, applied to lease the facilities for the following summer.⁶⁴ In June, the Jewish Community Center inaugurated their first year of operation at Chopawamsic,⁶⁵ and in August, the Family Service Association applied for a 1937 lease for facilities for Camp Good Will, geared towards lower-income mothers and children.⁶⁶ Visitors to these camps might have encountered the remains of the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine, small graveyards with hand-carved stones, or exposed foundations of demolished homes, providing them with some indication that the area had been previously occupied. It would not be until the end of the 20th-

⁶³ National Park Service, "Prince William Forest Park: Civilian Conservation Corps," *Prince William Forest Park* <<http://www.nps.gov/prwi/historyculture/ccs.htm>> accessed 15 January 2009.

⁶⁴ "Chest Agencies Apply for Use of New Camp," *Washington Post* 29 March 1936, sec. X.

⁶⁵ "150 Youngsters are Examined Preparatory to Camp Opening," *Washington Post* 8 June 1936, sec. A.

⁶⁶ "Welfare Unit Asks to Use New Park," *Washington Post* 20 August 1936, sec. X.

century, however, that the history of the land and its residents prior to the establishment of Chopawamsic would be fully exposed or appreciated.

Chopawamsic Recreation Demonstration Project - History

Prior to the submission of the joint Interior/RA/NPS/CCC report, the preparation of the history of the site was assigned to Dr. Charles W. Porter, Assistant Regional Historian of the Third Region. His draft was submitted on December 28, 1935.⁶⁷ H.E. Weatherwax, Regional Officer for the Region, wrote a letter accompanying its submission to the head of the Recreational Demonstration Projects. “You will note that several gentleman of quite a great deal of prominence have owned land on this area, and we believe that Dr. Porter has given us a very good historical sketch concerning former owners of this particular land.”⁶⁸ Although Dr. Porter was indeed able to track the ownership lineage of the land, his research ceased in the days prior to the American Revolutionary War. He failed to include a single owner or fact about the land after the late 1700s, making only passing remarks about Native American settlement in the region prior to European incursion.⁶⁹

The report produced on behalf of the Department of the Interior, the National Parks Service, the Resettlement Administration, and the Civilian Conservation Corps incorporated the historical documentation provided by Dr. Porter, with minimal indication of human habitation and activities on the land between 1789 and 1936. While neighboring communities such as Occoquan, Quantico, and Cochlester were

⁶⁷ Charles W. Porter, “Preliminary Historical Report on Chopawamsic, SP-22, Virginia,” 28 December 1935.

⁶⁸ Letter from H.E. Weatherfax to M.C. Huppuch accompanying the “Preliminary Historical Report on Chopawamsic, SP-22, Virginia,” by Charles W. Porter, 3 January 1936.

⁶⁹ Charles W. Porter, “Preliminary Historical Report on Chopawamsic, SP-22, Virginia,” 28 December 1935.

important in the years before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, agricultural production appeared to decline severely in the same period, although no explanation is provided for this phenomenon. “Stone piles and head-stones in many small burial plots attest to population and use of the land for the period running from Colonial to Confederate War days.” The only activities attributed to the post-‘Confederate War’ days were “sporadic recurring attempts of individuals” to engage in farming, and mining attempts that were abandoned in 1919.⁷⁰

In 1999, the Louis Berger Group was commissioned to conduct a four-year archeological study on the Prince William National Forest, and their detailed findings dramatically contradict the narrowly focused history produced by Dr. Porter, which emphasized only the contributions of European settlers. In contrast, the report produced by the Louis Berger Group, “*We Know That Such a Place Exists: Land and People in the Prince William Forest Park*,” reflects the fact that the region was alive with activity throughout the post-Civil War period, and home to both African Americans and Caucasian Americans. (See Illustration 4.7)

Farmland was gradually abandoned in the Dumfries district in the decades both before and after the conclusion of the Civil War, although in the area that would become part of Chopawamsic, the family farms that were formed between 1770 and 1830 continued to function. Throughout the latter half of the 19th-century, however, the economic basis for the region diversified. Men began primarily working at places like the Marine Corps Base, the docks along the Potomac River, and the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine, supplementing their wages with family farms, gardens, and logging. By the time the Resettlement Administration purchased the land, the valuable, old timber

⁷⁰ Recreational Demonstration Projects as Illustrated by Chopawamsic, VA., 6.

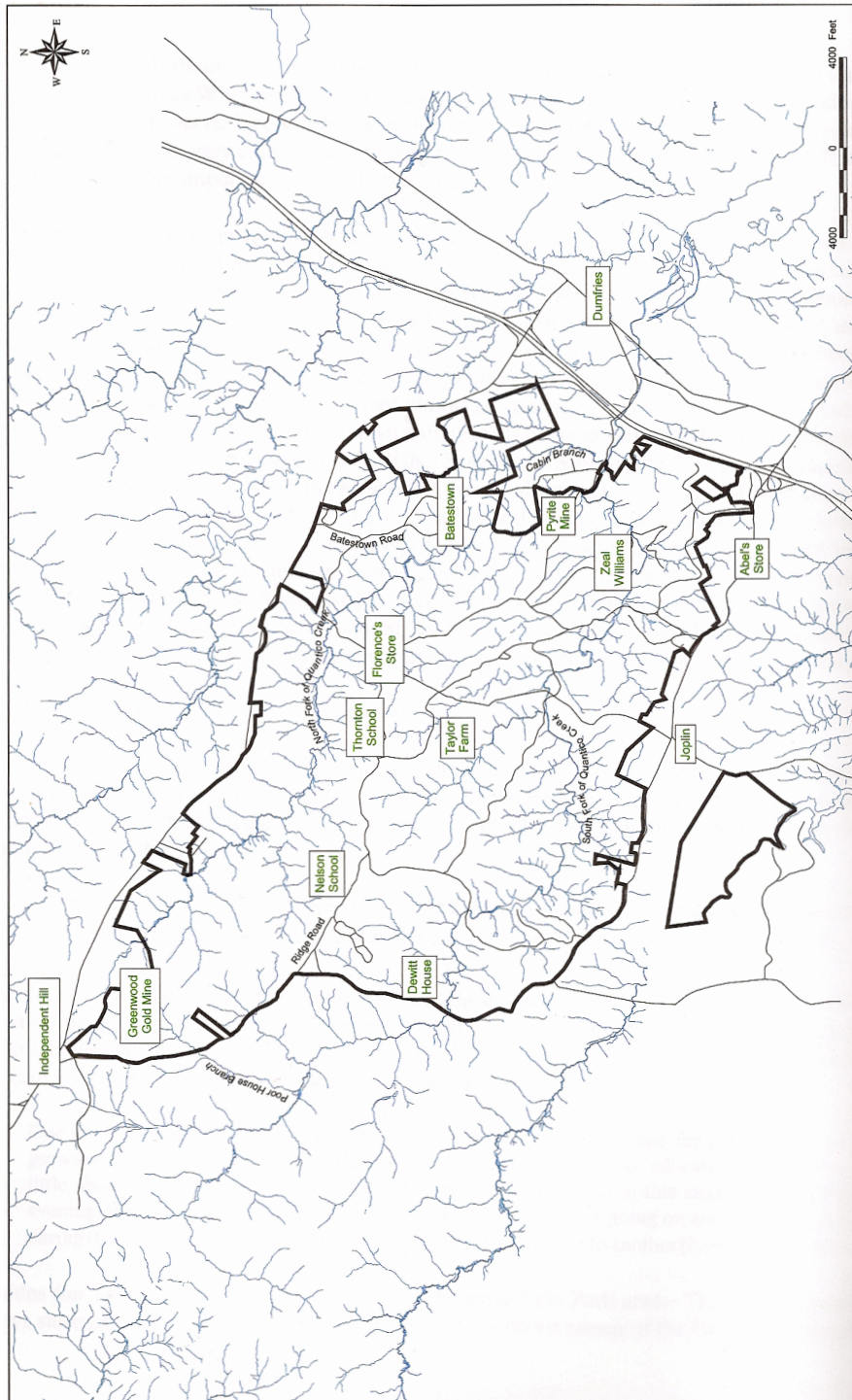


Illustration 4.7. Archaeological sites in Prince William Forest National Park. From “We Know that Such a Place Exists,” pg. 85.

had been completely exhausted. The aforementioned forest cover could be attributed to the loggers rejecting young trees.⁷¹

The Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine attracted new residents to the region when it opened in 1889. Initially a small-scale enterprise of the Detrick and Bradley families, operations grew and the Cabin Branch Mining Company was incorporated in 1907. The Cabin Branch pyrite deposit ranged over more than 20 acres, up to 18ft thick in certain places. In the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries, pyrite was used to produce sulfuric acid, an important ingredient in the chemical and electrical industries, and an issue of national concern to the military complex during World War I. In 1916, the company was purchased by the American Agricultural Chemical Company, which expanded the operation considerably. After World War I, demand for pyrite declined precipitously, and a labor dispute in 1920 resulted in the mine being closed permanently.⁷² Acid runoff from the mining activities polluted the North Fork, causing the previously noted absence of fish in the streams. A massive reclamation effort was undertaken in the 1990s. Yet more than a decade later, the evidence of the devastation caused by the mine is evident in the landscape.⁷³

Two predominantly African American communities were absorbed, Batestown partially and Hickory Ridge completely, into the Chopawamsic Recreational Demonstration Project. Little archeological evidence remains of Batestown, because the CCC workers lived on the site and appeared to have destroyed the architectural remnants of the community. Historical research, however, tells us something about

⁷¹ “We Know that Such a Place Exists,” 82-88.

⁷² Ibid, 88.

⁷³ National Park Service. “Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine,” *Prince William Forest Park* <<http://www.nps.gov/prwi/historyculture/cabin-branch-mine.htm>>, (accessed November 16, 2008).

the towns' past. Despite living in an era when slavery was a common practice, a black man named Henry Cole purchased 78 acres along Cabin Branch in 1842 and additional 77 more by 1855, becoming the second-largest African American landowner in Prince William County. Another black landowner, Thomas McKee, owned more than 100 acres in the vicinity of Cole's property. Some of the lands purchased by Cole came from another African American named Thornton Kendall, whose wife, Sarah Bates nee McKee, is credited in oral histories as one of the founders of Batestown.⁷⁴ The familial connections between the major landowners showed the regional tradition of early landholdings being kept within African American families during the 19th-century.⁷⁵

In the early 1930s, Hickory Ridge was a small community situated on a parcel of land that would eventually be incorporated into the Chopawamsic Project. Archaeological and historical information suggest that there were approximately 16 houses on the site, as well as a school and an Oddfellows Hall. Although ownership of the land can be traced back to the 1700s, Hickory Ridge developed from 100 acres purchased by Zeal Williams from Edith Norville in 1869. Williams, an African American, was listed in the 1860 agricultural census as a farm laborer. One of his sons purchased an additional 25 acres in the 1870s, and these parcels of land formed the basis for a growing African American community. The land was predominantly

⁷⁴ "We Know that Such a Place Exists," 57-58. Unfortunately, a map could not be located that clearly showed these individual tracts. It appears that the authors of "We Know that Such a Place Exists" gleaned this information from deed records.

⁷⁵ Edna Greene Medford, "Land and Labor: The Quest for Black Economic Independence on Virginia's Lower Peninsula, 1865-1880," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 100, no. 4 (2002): 567-582.

divided and subdivided among the same families, and the holders of deeds to the land in the mid-1930s were likely the descendents of the original owners.⁷⁶

Chopawamsic Recreation Demonstration Project - RA Justifications for the 'Taking' and Objections

In the 1936 report on the Recreational Demonstration Projects, the Chopawamsic initiative was chosen to “illustrate” the scope and nature of their work throughout the country. The Resettlement Administration used three main justifications to support their right to acquire the Chopawamsic land previously held in private hands. First, the quality of the soil was deemed too poor to for long-term agricultural pursuits. It was easily exhausted through sustained farming because its material composition allowed plant nutrients to leach downwards. The report also noted that the chemical conditions were unfavorable, with low levels of phosphoric acid, an important plant nutrient. In a 1918 textbook, Liberty Hyde Bailey stated that “a liberal supply [of phosphoric acid]...is necessary to young plants to give them strength and vigor.”⁷⁷ The report indicated that the area had been briefly successful at growing tobacco in the mid-18th century, but that the soil quickly proved unsuitable for long-term usage. Additionally, inappropriate farming methods further exacerbated the land by contributing to erosion issues.⁷⁸

Second, the joint report discussed widespread poverty among the region’s inhabitants. “About 150 families live in the project area. The heads of about forty of them had steady employment or regular income; seventy had part-time employment

⁷⁶ Ibid, 89, 96.

⁷⁷ Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Principles of Agriculture: A Text-Book for Schools and Rural Societies* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1918), 93.

⁷⁸ Recreational Demonstration Projects as Illustrated by Chopawamsic, VA., 6-7.

and forty had irregular, inconsequential or no employment or cash income during the last few years.”⁷⁹ A noted priority of the Resettlement Administration was to reduce the number of rural people dependent on the government for relief, or shifting the burden on their poverty to their community. In 1935, Tugwell wrote, “Resettlement attacks what might be called the chronic rural-relief problem. The present situation, in which families are trying to live on land that will not support them, is costing the taxpayers money.”⁸⁰ Although the report acknowledged that the inhabitants of the area affected by the project did not seek relief publicly, through work projects or the dole, a significant percentage owed back taxes. Between 1929 and 1933, Cole and Dumfries Magisterial Districts, the ones most affected by the Chopawamsic Project, averaged delinquencies of 22%.⁸¹

The final justification used for the federal appropriation of land for the Recreational Demonstration Project program generally and Chopawamsic specifically, was the idea that the “land [was] not being put to its highest social use.”⁸² Simply, the land around Dumfries, Hickory Ridge, Batestown, and Joplin was deemed unsuitable for farming by the government, therefore negating the rights of the individuals to retain possession of their land. Instead, the government asserted that it was in the public’s best interest for the land to be adapted, under federal management, for another social purpose. The report emphasizes tangible human issues, weighing the rights of poor DC urbanites to outdoor recreational facilities against the needs of poor farmers to use of their land. It charges that enabling the former will benefit society by

⁷⁹ Ibid, 7.

⁸⁰ Tugwell, “The Problems of Rural Relief.”

⁸¹ Recreational Demonstration Projects as Illustrated by Chopawamsic, VA., 7-8.

⁸² Ibid, 2.

exposing the city dwellers to the healthy benefits of the environment, while simultaneously relieving Prince William County from a perpetual cycle of tax delinquency.⁸³

An analysis of the Chopawamsic project provides an excellent opportunity to challenge the Resettlement Administration's blanket justifications regarding their right to remove land from private ownership and placing it under federal control. Quite simply, their arguments for acquiring the land to form Chopawamsic were full of discrepancies and inaccuracies. First, the agency asserted that the land was unsuitable for sustaining agriculture, and, therefore, farming should be abolished and the land adapted for recreational use. The Berger archeological report supported the fact that the land had been historically inappropriate for wide-scale farming, but that was never its predominant use. Instead, small-scale agriculture, such as kitchen gardens and a few livestock, was maintained as a way for families to supplement their incomes and meet their nutritional needs. The land, in fact, was suitable for such tasks. The archeological report further concluded that the only areas of severe erosion were in sloped areas, and probably dated prior to the Civil War.⁸⁴ Essentially, by the early 20th-century, farmers in the region had developed a symbiotic relationship with the land, and were not guilty of overtaxing it as the Resettlement Administration suggested.

Second, the Resettlement Administration report emphasized that the inhabitants of the region were placing an undue financial burden on their fellow citizens by failing to pay their taxes. This, in fact, might have very well been the case. However, the Resettlement Administration report did not specify that it is the owners

⁸³ Ibid, 2, 7-8.

⁸⁴ "We Know that Such a Place Exists," 96.

of the land within Chopawamsic who are responsible for the 22% delinquency, simply that 22% of all tax payers in the Cole and Dumfries Magisterial Districts were behind in their payments. Therefore, without wading through the tax records of approximately 150 families, it is impossible to determine whether or not the government's claim that the landowners were the ones in default was accurate. The fact that they did not seek public relief is not in question, but suggests that the small communities found alternative ways, non-cash ways to make ends meet.⁸⁵

Third, the right of the federal government to appropriate and repurpose the land under the Recreational Demonstration Project program was rooted in the assertion that the land was a national resource, under the purview of the government, and that it should be used in a manner beneficial to society. This begs the question, however, of determining who constitutes the "society." In the process of creating Chopawamsic, a lower-income rural population was displaced to provide recreational facilities for a lower-income urban population.⁸⁶ Although the report stipulates that land was taken from individuals who "found" it to be unfavorable for farming—placing agency with the owner—the history of ownership and use of the site tells a far different story. In short, the rights of urban residents to have access to recreational facilities was given priority over the historical connections of the owners to their parcels of land, and, in the process, the history of the recent past or of the African American communities in the area was completely ignored.

⁸⁵ An unanswered question remains whether or not a 22% delinquency rate was either high, low, or average in comparison to the surrounding area and the nation as a whole during the Great Depression.

⁸⁶ "Recreational Demonstration Projects as Illustrated by Chopawamsic, VA.," 4.

Racial Consideration at Greenbelt, MD and Chopawamsic

An examination of Greenbelt, MD and Chopawamsic Recreational Demonstration project is incomplete without a brief discussion of the implications of racial segregation between Caucasian Americans and African Americans. In Resettlement Administration literature and internal documentation, the question of race is conspicuous in its absence. Even Tugwell, a man of bold dreams and broad visions, shied away from the issue in his writings. Such evasive tactics, however, did not mean that the agency could entirely avoid racial issues.

By the time tenancy became an issue at Greenbelt, Tugwell was far removed from public office. Yet the high application rates for the Greenbelt homes reflected the depth of the housing crisis in Washington, DC, and partially confirmed his justification for choosing a site on the periphery of the nation's capital. More than 5,700 families applied for 885 homes,⁸⁷ and the first five superblocks were soon filled with 2,831 new residents⁸⁸ with an average income of \$1,250 per year.⁸⁹ Although the residents embraced a diverse mix of political views and Judeo-Christian religious traditions, on the whole they were a fairly homogeneous group.⁹⁰ At least 70% of the original residents were government employees with families, the majority of the parents were under thirty,⁹¹ and a mere fourteen were African American.⁹² While

⁸⁷ Arnold, 137.

⁸⁸ Stein, 128.

⁸⁹ Arnold, 139.

⁹⁰ Stein, 128. In a modern context, "diverse" and "Judeo-Christian" might seem like an oxymoron. However, the fact that in 1938, 30% were Catholic, 7% were Jewish, and 63% percent were Protestant should be considered relatively progressive.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Arnold, 143.

African Americans accounted for approximately 27% of the Washington, DC population in 1930,⁹³ they comprised less than half of 1% of the Greenbelt residents.

Although Tugwell cannot be held directly responsible for the exact racial composition of Greenbelt, the actions of the agency during his tenure significantly contributed to the situation. In the summer of 1935, the Suburban Division appeared to briefly consider the possibility of creating a separate community for African Americans in the same general location as Greenbelt, but ultimately the project was tabled in a nascent stage.⁹⁴ A second proposal for a housing development at Newport News received Tugwell's attention in December 1935, but it appeared to never be pursued actively.⁹⁵ While racial segregation was rather common in government housing programs of the era, there was no rule mandating it, and some exceptions could be found. Instead, the agency left the decision to the discretion of local and regional politicians, who strongly favored excluding African Americans from the community.⁹⁶

Even before the first mothers and children arrived for outdoor adventures in the summer of 1936, the question of racial separation was a long-standing point of concern for Chopawamsic planners. In contrast to the Greenbelt project, Tugwell was

⁹³ U.S. Census Bureau, "Table 23. District of Columbia – Race and Hispanic Origin: 1800 to 1990," *Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States* Working Paper Series No. 56, compiled by Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, September 2002.
<<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/twps0056.html>> (accessed 24 January 2009).

⁹⁴ Arnold, 143.

⁹⁵ "Tugwell Decides Negro Housing," *Washington Post* 25 December 1935, sec. A.

⁹⁶ Arnold, 143-144.

in office during the arrival of the first wave of campers, but he completely delegated the question of race to the NPS, which was responsible for the implementation process. Because it was initially believed that the project would be eventually turned over to Virginia, state NPS officers were allowed to weigh into the discussion with their own opinions. M.R. Tillson, the head of Region One office of the NPS, located in Richmond, VA, took a firm stance on the necessity of maintaining local segregation policies. He wrote, the “long-standing attitudes and customs of the people, which require, as a fundamental, that recreational areas and facilities for the two races be kept entirely separated.” Tillson went further, asserting that “Such a policy should not be considered discriminatory, since it represents the general desires of both races.”⁹⁷

Initially, the NPS refused to make the decision itself. As previously discussed, separate camps were constructed in order to be leased to private agencies. In doing so, the NPS transferred the responsibility for racial segregation to the agencies themselves. For instance, the Family Service Association who traditionally operated Camp Good Will in Rock Creek Park, transferred its programs for “white mothers and children” to Chopawamsic.⁹⁸ Finally, in 1939, a master plan was designed that clearly delineated separate camps and facilities for African American and Caucasian campers.⁹⁹

Conclusion

Construction activities and programmatic developments continued at Greenbelt and Chopawamsic long after Tugwell resigned from Roosevelt’s administration. Many of the immediate implications of the two projects were still invisible when the

⁹⁷ National Park Service, “Cabin Camp Segregation (1937).”

⁹⁸ “Chest Agencies Apply for Use of New Camp,” *Washington Post* 29 March 1936, sec. X.

⁹⁹ National Park Service, “Cabin Camp Segregation (1937).”

Resettlement Administration was officially absorbed into the Department of Agriculture in January 1937. However, the ideas connected Greenbelt and Chopawamsic to the ideas and goals of the Resettlement Administration clearly developed during Tugwell's tenure, and reflected his beliefs.

Tugwell's staunch and unrepentant stance that an appropriate role of government was demonstrating the best ways to live and function in the modern age is the foremost connection between Greenbelt and Chopawamsic. He believed that would provide an opportunity for federal, state, and local officials and bureaucrats, as well as the general public, to learn about how to design provide affordable, healthy, enjoyable housing for the lower-class Americans. For Chopawamsic, the educational component of the project was explicit in the name. In a 1936 report describing the numerous projects initiated by the Resettlement Administration through cooperation with the NPS, Chopawamsic was the example. In either case, the importance of the proximity of Washington, DC cannot be underestimated. These were not projects simply imposed upon other locales, but efforts undertaken in the backyard of the nation's capital. Their accessibility to Tugwell and other Resettlement Administration officials no doubt influenced their progress and oversight. Although two additional satellite cities were eventually completed, Greenbelt was the first priority.

The second and third areas of consideration are interrelated, namely the kind of person targeted by the Resettlement Administration to benefit from each project, and the type of lifestyle which was being advocated in the process. Despite Tugwell's repeated assertions that the Resettlement Administration was designed to assist rural, chronically poor citizens, the precedents established at both Greenbelt and Chopawamsic undermine this argument. At Greenbelt, the average resident was white, employed by the federal government, poor without being destitute, spending 25% or less of their total income on housing, physically healthy, relatively debt-free,

and a member of a small nuclear family. Families with less means, who would have to spend more than 25% of their income on housing and, therefore, receive additional subsidization by the government, were unwelcome. New residents did not come off of the relief roles.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, in fact, the most needy were excluded, and acceptance became a reward for wholesome living. Again, Tugwell cannot be directly blamed for these admittance standards, but the design elements of the project sought to define the way people should live. The idea of creating a wholesome society through carefully planned communities was intrinsic to the project, which can be directly tied to the Resettlement Administration under Tugwell's leadership.

At Chopawamsic, the value judgments regarding acceptable standards of living was concentrated in the purchasing of land, and the type of history deemed worthy of acknowledgment. Many of the owners of the tracts of land that were purchased to form the demonstration area appeared to be in a low economic sphere, but were still capable of resisting the need to go on public relief. For the better part of a century, the land that became the park was independently owned by African Americans, but the only historical information that the Resettlement Administration was interested in concerned the period prior to the Revolutionary War. Simply, the African Americans in and around Hickory Ridge and Batestown were forced to sell their property because they were declared to be inappropriately using it by the Resettlement Administration. Instead, the agency believed the land would produce far greater benefits to society at large if it was used as an educational ground to expose low-income urbanites to the healthful benefits of nature. Although facilities were constructed for both Caucasians and African Americans, the emphasis was decidedly on servicing the former.

Ultimately, both projects were physical responses to the desire of the Resettlement Administration to provide new ways for Americans to live and function

¹⁰⁰ Arnold, 140-143.

within the modern world. The Chopawamsic and Greenbelt undertakings reflected the tensions of the age between rural and urban considerations, and exposed the weakness and contradictions within the Resettlement Administration and its partner agencies, racial issues being one of them. Despite the emphasis placed on the rural resident in the early writings by Tugwell on the Resettlement Administration, the resounding conclusion that the primary beneficiaries of both projects were urbanites, and that low-income rural agriculturalists were denied access to the fruits of the labors.

CONCLUSION

With Rexford Tugwell's resignation, the era of the influential liberal Brain Trust drew to a close, and January 1937 marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency. Tugwell's largest initiative, the Resettlement Administration, was a brief federal experiment to respond to the economic and social challenges of the era, the most innovative of the sixty programs funded by the work relief bill. Dissatisfied with the experience, Tugwell would later refer to the entire endeavor as a failure.

In short, in just two years, the Resettlement Administration dramatically contributed to the development of federal housing programs, foreshadowed the future evolution of American housing conceptions, and contributed to the reorientation of citizenship from an agricultural basis to an urban/suburban, industrial one. On a much smaller, but no less noteworthy, it altered the lives of hundreds of families from the Hickory Ridge and Batestown communities. Only in recent years has the history of those families has been uncovered and appreciated.

In contrast to the unplanned development and perceived poverty of Hickory Ridge and Batestown region, the planned Greenbelt Towns, designed to provide affordable, healthy, enjoyable housing, appealed to the Resettlement Administration as a viable alternative. As a result of the absorption of the agency into the Farm Security Administration, only three were completed, although Tugwell had hoped to spread the initiative throughout the nation.

Like Greenbelt, MD and Chopawamsic, many of the ideological goals of the Resettlement Administration remained unfinished at the conclusion of 1936, and constituency tensions were never resolved. Although initially established to address America's agricultural and rural life inadequacies, the primary beneficiaries of the

Greenbelt and Chopawamsic projects were urban residents. The agency tried to pass responsibility for racial segregation of facilities to local officials, overtly prioritizing the standard of living of Caucasian Americans over that of African Americans.

If historical memory is any judge of value, the largely forgotten Resettlement Administration deserves Tugwell's dismal assessment. Indeed, the agency failed on numerous scores: Greenbelt, MD was criticized for its expensive price tag, Congress refused to appropriate money for it, a federal court declared it unconstitutional, and its administrator was tried for socialist tendencies in the court of public opinion.

Tugwell's own failings as an administrator contributed to the situation. Yet, the Resettlement Administration is worthy of examination because it was a manifestation of a dream that both Roosevelt and Tugwell shared: that the government was capable of significantly improving the lives and livelihoods of the American working class through the coordination of land practices. The severity of the situation, the depth of the economic crisis demanded federal action, and the Resettlement Administration offered the most radical, creative approach. Economic and social trends of the 19th and early 20th-century, as well as Tugwell's own academic positions, provided the philosophical and programmatic foundation for the new agency.

Tugwell's assessment of the Resettlement Administration was a failure requires a brief reevaluation of the criteria for identifying it as such, and short discussion on the status of its two flagship programs at the beginning of the 21st-century. First, on the basis of administrative longevity, treatment of minority property owners, and political opinions of the era, the Resettlement Administration could not be considered a success. It was a short-lived, land-absorbing bully, who acquired land around in the Chopawamsic area with little sensitivity to the history of its inhabitants and the impact the project would have on them. Congress, the press, officials within the Roosevelt administration and even Columbia University were disinclined to view

Tugwell favorably at the end of 1936. In short, it is understandable that Tugwell felt disenchanted by the experience, and he contributed to this firestorm of criticism. He did not appreciate the political temperament of the day and the paramount importance work relief job creation, and failed to adequately promote his successes, such as the efficiency of his former Bonus Army work force and functional recreation projects such as Chopawamsic.

On the basis of a different set of standards, however, the Resettlement Administration could easily be considered a successful venture. First, Greenbelt became a vibrant and active community, although the industry that Tugwell hoped would engage its residents never fully emerged. Nevertheless, the community easily transitioned from federal to private ownership, and provided lasting, affordable, practical housing, without succumbing to the unfortunate fate of numerous urban housing projects. Chopawamsic, lamentably, was created by destroying several African-American communities, but that did not prevent it from functioning successfully as a federal park. It remains the closest federal environmental playground outside of Washington, DC, land that would have undoubtedly been swallowed up otherwise through suburban Virginia sprawl.

Limitations and Future Work

Ideally, this examination of the Resettlement Administration would have included a longer discussion of all four of the working divisions, evaluating them based on their relationship to Tugwell's philosophies and goals, and involved more of the personalities involved in the agency. The depth and breadth of the agricultural crisis in America prior to the formation of the Resettlement Administration is its own thesis topic, and one cannot help but be frustrated by attempting to summarize it in a few short pages.

As is frequently the case in scholarly pursuits, there is a fine line between inundating the reader with too much background information and providing enough to establish a reasonable context for understanding the themes involved. Future scholars should engage agricultural census materials to provided statistical information as to the scale of the Great Depression in rural life. Additionally, the involvement of the development of the automobile and its influence in feasibility of suburbanization is not discussed in this thesis, but would be a critical element in a more in-depth analysis of the design of Greenbelt. It was excluded from this project because Tugwell, as the lens through which the Resettlement Administration is examined, paid scant little attention to this particular technological phenomenon.

Finally, subsequent academics should consider the relationships between federal and states governments during the New Deal era, and whether Tugwell's emphasis on demonstrating new approaches to land-use planning influenced state projects. To succeed in this endeavor, one would be best served by first examining the evolution of both the Greenbelt and Chopawamsic programs over time, starting with the World War II era, to understand modifications and changes to Tugwell's original plans.

In many ways, the Resettlement Administration was ahead of it time. Suburbanization, in fact, would become the wave of the future in American residential development. Land that might otherwise have been consumed by urban and suburban sprawl became retreats and playgrounds for the public. By studying the Resettlement Administration---the historical background of US land-use patterns, the obstacles it faced, and the vision of its founder---one's understanding of complexities of the American political environment during Roosevelt's first administration is greatly enhanced.

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