

EMERGENCY EMPLOYMENT, PUBLIC ENJOYMENT:
PRE-NEW DEAL WORK RELIEF IN ONONDAGA COUNTY, NEW YORK, 1931-1933

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the impact of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau (OCEWB) on Onondaga County from 1931 to 1933. The OCEWB was created as part of the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA), a pre-New Deal work relief initiative by Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The work begins with an examination of the history of work relief in New York State before the Great Depression, followed by a discussion of the formation of TERA, which allowed for the creation of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau. The projects, personnel, challenges, and ultimate dissolution of the OCEWB are discussed with an emphasis on local political conflicts that stymied potential successful projects. Two case studies, the Onondaga Lake Parkway and Village of Jordan Erie Canal Park, are undertaken to illustrate the impact of the OCEWB on different parts of the county from the 1930s to the present day.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Grant Johnson was born in Dallas, Texas on August 31, 1979. Late that year, he moved with his family to Downers Grove, Illinois, and then to Manlius, New York in 1990. In 1997 he entered Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York.

While at Syracuse, Grant dual-majored in Anthropology and Women's Studies. He toured the country as a musician for a few years following college, and moved to Cypress, California in 2004. After two years in the sun, he returned to Manlius, New York in 2006, and obtained an internship with the City of Syracuse Department of Community Development in 2007. With the experience gained as an intern and an acute interest in preserving the history of the "salt city," Grant was admitted into the Historic Preservation Planning program at Cornell University in 2008. In the summer of 2009, he worked as a preservation intern for the City of Ogdensburg, New York, creating the first Historic Preservation Report in the history of the city. In May 2010, he graduated from Cornell University, receiving the John Reps Award for superior academic excellence at graduation.

A six-month internship with the National Park Service Midwest Regional Office drew Grant to Omaha, Nebraska. After returning to Syracuse in late 2010, he continued to work on various projects for the NPS after the completion of his internship. Grant currently resides in Syracuse, New York where he works as a historic preservation consultant, and will be awarded his Masters of the Arts in Historic Preservation Planning in the fall of 2014.

This work is dedicated to Cornell HPP: then, now, and forever.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AICP	Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor
CCC	Civilian Conservation Corps
CWA	Civil Works Administration
DOE	Determination of Eligibility
EWB	Emergency Work Bureau
FDR	Franklin Delano Roosevelt
FERA	Federal Emergency Relief Administration
FOHOL	Friends of Historic Onondaga Lake
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
OCEWB	Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau
OCPRPB	Onondaga County Park and Regional Planning Board
PLNYS	Preservation League of New York State
PWA	Public Works Administration
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
SUNY-ESF	State University of New York College of Environmental Science & Forestry
TERA	Temporary Emergency Relief Administration
WPA	Works Progress Administration

INTRODUCTION

After recovering from a severe economic depression following World War I, the United States experienced a surge of optimism and increasing affluence, leading many economists to popularize the idea that the country was on the threshold of a lasting era of prosperity of almost limitless scope. While rising stock prices and speculation attracted many novice investors to this promised path to wealth and success, studies of industrial unemployment in the 1920s indicated a growing, dire situation of joblessness created by accelerated production due to labor-saving devices. This led Alfred E. Smith, then-Governor of New York State, to pronounce a “serious condition of unemployment” affecting New York City and the state towards the end of the decade.

A report by the state Industrial Commissioner to determine if the public works program of the state could do anything to remedy this situation concluded that “if industrial conditions grow worse, growing unemployment, with its attendants of want and illness, will become an inevitable result.”¹ While such ominous pronouncements did not motivate the state legislature to take immediate action, the events of late October 1929 provided an unexpected shock to the state and nation in showing just how necessary state-assisted unemployment relief was going to become.

The Wall Street stock market crash of “Black Tuesday,” October 29, 1929 was a catalyst for the United States’ plunge into the Great Depression, a period of profound economic chaos that wreaked worldwide havoc. The ensuing poverty, unemployment and subsequent years of turmoil and despair have been heavily documented and examined through the lenses of

¹ Albert Deutsch and David M. Schneider, *The History of Public Welfare in New York State, 1867-1940* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1941), 293.

economics, sociology, history, labor and numerous other fields whose foci intersect with the widespread effects of the Depression on cities, states and regions, their people and economies. It remains an instructive event to the present day. As the United States continues to experience repeated economic contractions, the circumstances of the Great Depression and actions taken to combat its effects are again being compared and contrasted with the national climate to avoid a further downward slide, and perhaps search for possible avenues for improvement.

Though losses of employment, home and livelihood are most often associated with the Depression, there are significant triumphs that were achieved primarily through the efforts of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal. The work relief projects of the Civil Works Administration (CWA), Works Progress Administration (later the Work Projects Administration, or WPA), Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and other New Deal agencies are well known in the United States, commemorated through signage, museums, and even worthy of inclusion in school textbooks or lessons in history classes. The physical remnants of these agencies are often readily observable in the form of camps and rustic architecture built in state parks throughout the country by the CCC, bridges built and murals painted under the auspices of the WPA, and miscellaneous other infrastructure improvements and municipal structures built by one agency or another, often misattributed to a different agency than the one who was responsible for their creation.²

Several contributions to the built environment by the Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Progress Administration also share the interesting distinction of being listed on the National Register of Historic Places. One hundred seventy-six sites are currently listed on the National Register that have some association with the CCC (they are often listed as the

² Examples of signage and newspaper articles misidentifying structures as constructed by the WPA will be presented in chapter 4.

“architect”), and 199 sites are on the National Register having some association with the WPA; some sites have both agencies listed as contributing to their significance in some way.³

New York State does not appear to have any sites whose immediate historic significance, area of significance, architect, historic function, or theme (all of which are categories associated with the New York State Historic Resource Inventory form for National Register nomination) are attributed to the CCC or WPA.⁴ Correspondence with New York State Historic Preservation Office staff provided information that several park sites, such as Letchworth State Park near Rochester, that are listed on the National Register have significant CCC or WPA associations. Several more state parks are also potentially eligible, including all of the early parks designs of the early 1930s that were constructed in part with labor from Franklin Roosevelt’s pre-New Deal labor initiative, the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration.⁵

The national significance of the hundreds of projects undertaken by the various New Deal agencies that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places can be directly correlated to the impact of these agencies on the United States, and their legacy in our history. The lack of acknowledgment of the New Deal (and pre-New Deal) work relief contributions to New York State history via the National Register is troubling, but telling of the climate towards commemoration of significant work relief projects in the history of the state, and the country. Similarly, there is an important and inextricable footnote that has been passed over or only given brief mention in the dozens, if not hundreds, of books that have been written about Franklin Delano Roosevelt, his life and presidency, and his efforts and innovations: a work relief initiative

³ “State Listings,” National Register of Historic Places, <http://nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/>

⁴ “Document Imaging,” New York State and National Registers of Historic Places, <http://www.oprh.state.ny.us/hpimaging/default.asp>

⁵ Kathleen LaFrank, email message to author, Mar. 13, 2012.

of great success and longevity, whose results can be witnessed and experienced in the built environment and landscapes of New York State, over 80 years after its inception.

The Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA) was a commission of persons appointed by then-Governor of New York Franklin Delano Roosevelt to administer employment relief for a period of six months beginning November 1, 1931, including everything from job creation to funding for farm relief. TERA was so successful that its existence was extended (though its funding structure and administration was significantly altered upon Roosevelt's inauguration as president and establishment of the Civil Works Administration and Federal Emergency Relief Administration) eventually terminating in June 1937.⁶ Its earliest years were important for the completion of a wide variety of projects throughout the State.

TERA was far from the first public works work relief undertaking in the history of the state, however its scale and impact were widespread and profound in terms of immediate and long-term results, and their positive effects on municipalities, the men who were employed, and their families. The short interval of time between the earliest and busiest years of TERA and the creation of the various New Deal agencies is not a coincidence: the success of the agency provided the momentum Roosevelt needed to push the work relief agenda at the federal level. And yet, TERA is largely forgotten, or accorded a few paragraphs, only once the focus of its own book.⁷

One of the initiatives under the earlier years of TERA was the creation of countywide Emergency Work Bureaus, which were responsible for the hiring of men for

⁶ Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, "Five Million People, One Billion Dollars: Final Report of The Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, November 1, 1931—June, 30, 1937" (Albany, New York: The Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, 1937).

⁷ Alexander Radomski's 1947 *Work Relief In New York State, 1931-1935*, an invaluable exploratory study, but of a quantitative nature, that does not have the benefit of over seventy years of history to weigh the lasting impact of TERA and its projects in the State.

infrastructure construction and improvements, landscape improvements, and more significant projects when work was available. A report of the first two years of TERA activity by the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau (OCEWB) identifies among its many accomplishments: a variety of road improvements, clearing and landscaping of cemeteries, as well as work for the Central New York State Parks Commission on trail clearing and construction of recreational facilities in State Parks. The crowning achievement of the OCEWB was the construction of Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway, the largest and most costly project in the county and state, between 1931-33.⁸ Over eighty years, the park has grown to be one of the most utilized recreational sites in Onondaga County, and usage continues to evolve with new plans for the previously inaccessible west shore. (See Illustration I.1) Interpretation of the role of the OCEWB in the construction of the park and Onondaga Lake Parkway is limited to a few interpretive panels inside a visitor's center named for Joseph Griffin, who helped popularize the vision for a park and parkway on the east shore of the lake. (See Illustration I.2)

TERA served as the blueprint for FDR's New Deal successes, and yet very little has been written regarding the actual physical results of this administration or county work bureaus in general. What was built? What was improved? Where were the projects concentrated? How were projects chosen and administered? What remains today to remind us of these thousands of projects in the built environment and landscapes of New York State? How can we identify, assess and interpret these sites and projects today? What can be done to increase the profile of TERA sites and efforts throughout the state, so that the work relief legacy of New York State, pre-New Deal and beyond, receives its just attention and place in the historical memory and landscape?

⁸ Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau, "Report of Activities: November 1, 1931 to November 15, 1932," (Syracuse, NY: Onondaga County, 1932).

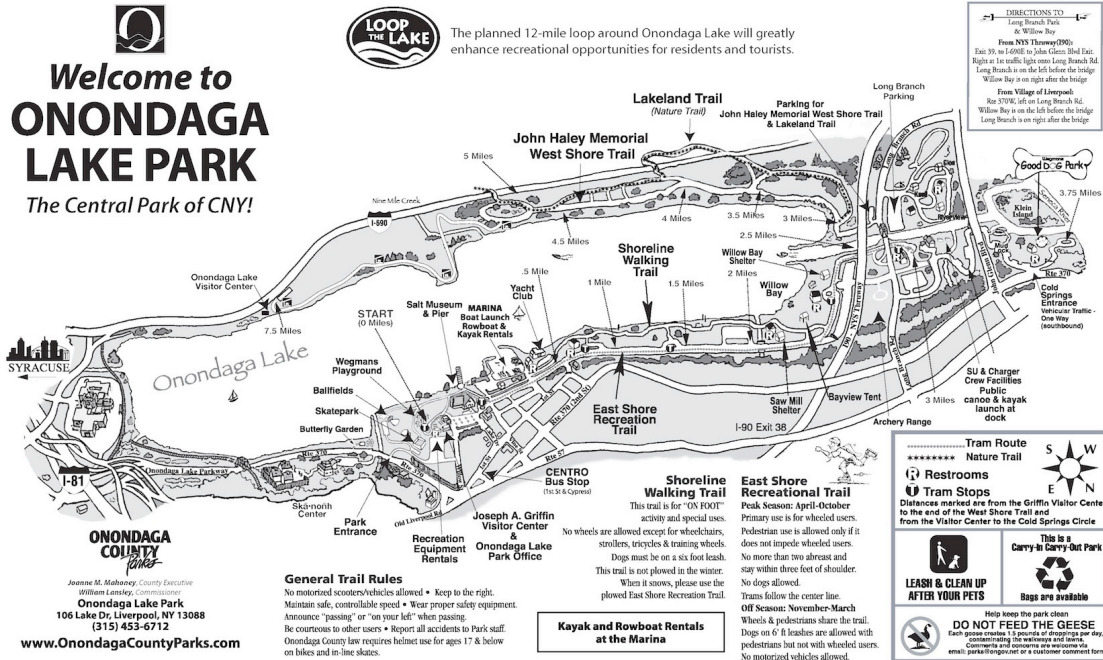


Illustration I.1. Map of Onondaga Lake Park, 2014. From the website of Onondaga County Parks Department.



Illustration I.2. Interpretive panels, Griffin Visitor's Center, 2014. Photograph by author.

Statement of Purpose

It is the intent of this thesis to examine the specific projects undertaken in Onondaga County in the early years of TERA, with specific attention focused on Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway in the village of Liverpool, and the Erie Canal Park in the village of Jordan, with additional exploration into the numerous other countywide tree-planting and road-clearing projects. These case studies provide examples of extant village and county parks built by the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau (OCEWB), as well as examples of county versus town projects undertaken through this program.

The evolution of these parks is inextricably linked to the work done through TERA, and the manifestation of a vision of decades of planning in Onondaga County toward creating a network of parks and recreation options throughout the region, as well as embodying the conservation and regional planning agenda of FDR, which has its roots even before TERA. Location, identification, documentation, assessment and evaluation, and widespread recognition of the products of TERA is necessary to protect these buildings, landscapes and landscape features, infrastructure, and other miscellaneous improvements from being lost to history through neglect, deferred maintenance or demolition.

The intent of this thesis is not to specifically inventory these or other Emergency Work Bureau projects and sites in Onondaga County, but merely to provide a guideline for their identification and recognition, and potentially lead to a future detailed inventory and perhaps guarantee of protection and promotion. Additional recommendations are provided for strategies to gather information, promote and maintain TERA sites to help illuminate this forgotten chapter of New York State history. This thesis is also the first lengthy exploration specifically into the

long-term impacts of TERA and emergency work bureau projects, and provides a template and an extensive bibliography for further research on these subjects.

This thesis also provides an analysis of the political climate of Syracuse and Onondaga County that pervaded, and ultimately hampered the continued efforts of the OCEWB in the reclamation of abandoned infrastructure for recreational purposes. The conflict between OCEWB chairman Crandall Melvin and Syracuse mayor Rolland B. Marvin provided a contentious backdrop for the construction of Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway, and hindered the eventual completion of the vision for a boulevard and park circling the lake, an effort that has been resumed in the early twenty-first century in attempt to reclaim the lake from decades of industrial pollution.

Methodology

Research was conducted beginning in the fall of 2009, with several site visits to case study locations in Onondaga County, with extensive archival research occurring throughout 2010. The primary challenge in researching TERA and the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau is the lack of knowledge of the work relief initiative, the people responsible for its undertaking, and the origins of what was built or improved. The period of focus here is from 1931 to 1933, with acute awareness of the 1928 efforts of the Onondaga County Park and Regional Planning Board that led to the construction of the Onondaga Lake Parkway under TERA. Finding persons directly involved in these agencies, or who may have worked for the Emergency Work Bureau (EWB), is all but impossible, as almost eighty years have passed, and those employed by the work bureau are sure to be deceased.

Fortunately, several people connected to Onondaga County history remember and knew Crandall Melvin, the chair of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau, a prominent

local lawyer, philanthropist, and enthusiast of Onondaga County's historic, scenic and recreational assets. Melvin was deeply involved in local politics beyond the work bureau, and his family has stayed in the area and continued his legacy in many ways. It is more difficult to obtain considerable information of other key players in the OCEWB, such as landscape architect Laurie D. Cox. However, enough evidence has been gathered to explain the roles of these men in the work bureau as the manifestation of Roosevelt's work relief vision in Onondaga County, and help explain the coordinated efforts in constructing what were considered to be among the most ambitious and successful projects TERA projects in New York State.

The primary sources of information related to TERA have been reports from the agency from 1932 to 1937, as well as the many books about Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and also select books on emergency work relief in the era of the Great Depression. Alexander Radomski's *Work Relief In New York State 1931-1935* provides the most thorough existing review of TERA, though neither it nor any other book or report on TERA, FDR, or the New Deal goes into great detail regarding the specific accomplishments by county emergency work bureaus beyond general descriptions e.g. expansion of roads, or clean-up of parks.

Much of the information on the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau was obtained from the archives of the Onondaga County Office of Museums and Historic Sites, previously located at the former Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois Museum (currently the Skaneateles Great Law Center of Peace), whose original buildings were constructed by the Work Bureau in 1933 as part of the Onondaga Lake Parkway project. Primary source documents, correspondence, reports and photocopied articles were obtained from these archives in October and November 2009. Additional newspaper articles were obtained from the archives of the *Syracuse Post-Standard*, as well as a visit to the Town of Elbridge Historical Society in June

2010, which was instrumental in obtaining information regarding the case study on the reclamation of the Erie Canal bed in Jordan.

Three people were encountered who knew Crandall Melvin, though preliminary discussions with them did not warrant more in-depth interviews, as their knowledge of Melvin or the OCEWB did not seem to extend beyond what was already known from other sources. Discussions with employees of the New York State Historic Preservation Office who have knowledge of or a specific interest in OCEWB landscape architect Laurie D. Cox added some facts, but mostly further elucidated that complete information on Cox is difficult to obtain. Several site visits to Onondaga Lake Parkway and the Jordan Erie Canal Park were necessary to locate, photograph and visually assess the current condition of the resources, so that conclusions could be drawn about how these sites have been maintained over the past several decades.

Though the majority of known TERA work in Onondaga County occurred on county projects, some endeavors benefited the city of Syracuse and its surrounding villages, as well as two state parks located in the county. It is likely that this was also the case in counties across the state, so research and analysis of TERA work statewide is a long-term and challenging project outside the scope of this thesis, but one well worth the investigation, based on the lasting impact this program has had on the local and regional level.

Chapter overview

Chapter 1 will serve to explain the roots of public works work relief in New York State, extending as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, continuing up to the passage of TERA legislation in 1931. Numerous work relief initiatives also existed in the state and country during the Great Depression, though none approached the magnitude or widespread approach of TERA and the Emergency Work Bureaus. Programs of New York State are briefly mentioned for

comparison and contrast with how TERA unfolded in its early years as a state-controlled work relief project, versus the city-funded and private efforts (including those of religious organizations) across the state in the years prior. Connections between the specifics of TERA and historical trends in New York State work relief display the great value these initiatives had for the cities and counties who benefited from the projects undertaken.

Chapter 2 is an exploration of the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, with primary focus on the period of significance attached to this thesis, from its 1931 inception to the shift in funding by the state to the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in 1933. The circumstances leading to its creation are examined to unravel the synthesis of the political, social, economic, and philanthropic concerns that informed the administration in its early days. The appointment and turnover of the personnel of TERA is of particular interest because of the role of Harry Hopkins, later to become the director of almost every subsequent work relief agency created under FDR's New Deal. Though several books have been dedicated to Hopkins, a snapshot of his TERA involvement is crucial to understanding the meteoric success of the program in its first two years.

TERA did not just consist of public works work relief; much of its funding was for home relief. Though home relief is outside the scope of this thesis, it is a worth brief mention and elaboration, along with attention given to the other elements of the complete range of TERA-funded activities, such as subsistence gardens. The aforementioned emergency work bureaus were critical to the implementation of all levels of TERA activities, and their creation and administration is also examined in this chapter.

TERA was almost certainly a test for Roosevelt's future nationwide work relief initiatives. Its successes informed and are directly related to the work performed by the Civil

Works Administration and Works Progress Administration, as each agency was an evolution of the one preceding it. There is also crossover with the objectives and achievements of the Civilian Conservation Corps, perhaps the flagship work relief program of the New Deal, whose goals were deeply-rooted in Roosevelt's conservation agenda that predates even TERA.

Finally, the dissolution of TERA helped provide a long view for evaluating the success of the administration and its projects in quantitative terms, though a more qualitative picture can be obtained through examination of the work done at the local level by emergency work bureaus.

Chapter 3 delves into the focal point of this thesis, the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau, its creation, administration, and the scope of work performed between 1931 and 1933, under the supervision and direction of work bureau chairman Crandall Melvin. In addition, personnel such as OCEWB landscape engineer Laurie D. Cox are profiled based on their specific and lasting contributions to the Work Bureau projects, as well as their significance to the region for the work they performed over the course of their careers, of which the TERA projects were an important part. Demographic analysis of the workers of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau is also illustrative of who was performing the work, where they were from, what kinds of jobs they previously held, their age, and wages. Recognition of the thousands employed by the work bureau helps bring attention to the scores of others employed in public works, for purposes of work relief or other tasks, and their immense contributions to the fabric of our cities and regions.

Chapter 4 discusses the conflict between city and county work bureaus and their leadership, which led to the demise of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau, and gave rise to the short-lived Consolidated Work Bureau (CWB). The latter bureau came to pass as part of the Civil Works Administration, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first foray in

nationwide work relief in November 1933. While the CWA was of great benefit to the state and nation, its rules may have ultimately curtailed the momentum built up by the OCEWB from 1931-1933.

Chapter 5 illuminates the central case studies of sites where the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau had a recognizable if not profound impact. The Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway was the largest, most ambitious and most costly project in the early years of the work bureau (if not the entire state, under the early phase of TERA). Furthermore, it was the fulfillment of a regional planning proposal birthed years earlier and sunk by the Great Depression, with origins as far back as the mid-19th century for a vision of Onondaga Lake as the showpiece of a beautified City of Syracuse. The combination of several examples of commemorative architecture honoring the county's past, with massive infrastructure improvements and the conversion of the Oswego Canal into a functioning roadway, illustrate the comprehensive vision of Melvin in achieving his goals. That so many of the efforts of the work bureau survive and are observable today is a testament to the success and impact this group of men had on this corner of Onondaga County.

The Erie Canal Park in the village of Jordan, New York is another (albeit much smaller) example of the conversion of disused canal beds into a park for the enjoyment of all. Begun in the years of TERA and completed under the CWA, the evolution of the Canal Park is informative of the changing relationship between a village and its recreational assets, as exemplified by alterations to the landscape, and the importance placed on maintenance and preservation of this historic resource. Additional county work relief projects completed between 1931-1933 and still existing and utilized today are discussed to provide further evidence of the triumphs of TERA and the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau.

In the conclusion, the argument is made for further investigation of TERA sites across the state, their location, evaluation and potential nomination to the State Register for significance to the history of the State of New York, as well as the National Register of Historic Places, for providing a thread that led to the creation of several agencies and endeavors already recognized as nationally significant, worthy of celebration and preservation. To this end, a survey form has been created for the potential future surveys of TERA and county work bureau sites in New York State. The challenges of conducting such a survey, as well as the background research necessary to adequately justify the significance of other sites throughout the State, are acknowledged and discussed at length. Several recommendations are made for preservation planning strategies that can be taken to protect and promote TERA and Work Bureau sites statewide, with examples from Onondaga County provided for illustration. Challenges that may be encountered at each step of the recommendations are included to offer some common barriers that are encountered in the preservation process.

Finally, the question is raised that plagues historic preservation from the local to the federal level: how do we gain the interest of the public to tell an important story, while adequately representing the historic resource we seek to highlight, and maintain that interest over time? The first step is to tell the story, which in the case of TERA and the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau is compelling enough to warrant deeper investigation by the curious public of its not-so-distant history, often hidden in plain sight.

CHAPTER 1: WORK RELIEF INITIATIVES BEFORE TERA

Introduction

In order to full understand the magnitude of the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA) on New York State, the history of work relief in the state and nation prior to its inception should be summarized to provide an historic context. The measures taken to combat economic depressions throughout United States history often included work relief of a public works nature; this was often the case in New York State. The Great Depression in particular saw an increase in work relief initiatives as a reaction its effects on cities across the state. The projects undertaken by these cities were similar to those that would occur under TERA, though not often as well-funded or lasting as projects, would be under the direction of Roosevelt's administration.

History and Evolution of Work Relief in the United States

Work relief has deep roots in American history, occurring as early as the 17th century in New Amstel, in present-day Delaware.⁹ Often the motivation for public or private assistance was influenced by religious or social conventions of charity. Elizabethan poor laws and the Puritan work ethic usually shaped colonial and early American practices of caring for those in need. Public supervisors or overseers were highly selective in providing assistance, feeling that charity only encouraged dependency.¹⁰ Therefore the need for work in exchange for the benefits of charity evolved. The emergence of work relief in America is related to the high value placed upon toil per the Protestant work ethic, where hard work is looked upon as the duty

⁹ Alexander Leopold Radomski, *Work Relief in New York State, 1931-1935* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1947), 33.

¹⁰ Bonnie Fox Schwartz, *The Civil Works Administration, 1933-34* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 4.

of every able-bodied individual, as well as the primary method for acquiring what is needed to survive.¹¹

When it has not been incumbent upon individuals to aid themselves, relief has been available through other means, such as philanthropic or social organizations providing charity. The concept of private, dedicated charity organizations as a distinctive method to more effectively provide aid to people was developed in England as early as 1869.¹² In the United States, just as was the case with private social work, the origins of public welfare were closely associated with poor relief via charitable entities.¹³ When the country entered a new economic era after the Civil War, facilities for charitable work were augmented by private donations, often referred to as “bourgeois benevolence.”¹⁴ Private support for relief contributed to the expansion of existing church and public work, as well as an increasing number of nonsectarian charities, including housing betterment, prison reform, charity organization and social settlements, and welfare work. Public and private organized welfare work in the United States has included a variety of activities that existed well before and continued after TERA: mutual aid, pious almsgiving, philanthropy, charity, social uplift, child-saving, reform, humanitarianism, bourgeois benevolence, public and private relief, and social service.¹⁵

The two major forms of public relief in the United States have been generally referred to as indoor relief and outdoor relief. Public outdoor relief historically preceded indoor relief in most states, often because the lack of widespread poverty did not justify the establishment of almshouses, a major form of indoor relief in the eighteenth, nineteenth and part

¹¹ Alexander Radomski, *Work Relief*, 30.

¹² Radomski, 4.

¹³ *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 1-3.

of the twentieth centuries.¹⁶ Almshouse care was generally considered the best method of indoor relief in providing for the poor, while outdoor relief was primarily limited to cases of “temporary emergency” (as would be eventually the case during the Great Depression and ultimately TERA).¹⁷

Almshouses first appeared in the American colonies around 1700 as the most economical means of housing a variety of dependents, and for years were the only public charitable institution.¹⁸ Almost from their inception, attempts were made to connect almshouses and indoor relief with labor for the unemployed. As Radomski notes, “the place of work in conjunction with the almshouse was indicated as early as 1743 in the enabling act of Massachusetts”; laws such as this required able-bodied residents to be kept at work, and officials made specific efforts to make the “poorhouse...or poor farm, pay.”¹⁹ An 1821 report in Quincy, Massachusetts concluded that “the most economical method of relief was through care in almshouses or houses of industry in which work is provided for every degree of ability in the pauper,” and in another report for the years 1818-1824, the Society for the Suppression of Pauperism of New York City suggested “aid in giving employment by establishing houses of employment, or by supplying materials for domestic labor” as one remedy for pauperism.²⁰

Thus was a precedent for outdoor work relief via charitable organizations established. Though towns or cities did not yet utilize it as a tool to combat unemployment, the use of work relief by almshouses and charitable organizations served as instructive for implementation at the municipal level. The County Poorhouse Act enacted by New York State in 1824 attempted to offer early guidance at state-sanctioned aid, though it also reflected the

¹⁶ Ibid, 7.

¹⁷ Ibid, 8.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, 9.

²⁰ Ibid, 31.

reluctance of states to support poor relief. Under the law, counties were assigned the responsibility of poor relief through the construction of poorhouses, with no state funding.²¹

Demands for outdoor work relief were comparatively minimal while the country remained largely agricultural, though local authorities would occasionally administer outdoor relief in rural and urban areas out of local tax funds. Outdoor work relief survived as a method of addressing unemployment, pauperism and idleness due to the function it performed during several depressions, which occurred about every twenty years from 1837 onward to the Great Depression. From the beginning of the twentieth century, it slowly expanded into an increasingly vital service.

Work relief in previous depressions

Emergency unemployment relief during the six large-scale economic dislocations prior to the Great Depression 1929 resulted in the creation of temporary emergency relief initiatives in affected communities, some but not all of which had existing relief organizations. Emergency relief committees made their first appearance during the depression of 1893-1897, and except for the depression of 1907-1908, they were crucial components of later unemployment crises. Committees were primarily local groups, and either unofficial voluntary committees or semi-official bodies appointed by mayors. Occasionally these committees implemented direct work relief programs of their own creation, often patterned after prior or current efforts of established agencies.²² Most frequently, committees aimed at coordinating their efforts with other charitable groups, thus effectively mobilizing private funding and

²¹ David Levinson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Homelessness* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004), 452.

²² Radomski, 21.

volunteer public resources in their respective communities to combat the conditions with which they were faced.²³

The periods of economic depression prior to 1929 saw the utilization of work tests, work relief and public works implemented to combat unemployment. These initiatives, while closely related, have historically been differentiated. Whereas work relief “consists of operations definitely undertaken to provide employment for those whose need of relief has been established, and who are expected to make a return for it through the work thus performed,” public works as used in this context is defined as “needed public improvements, which may have been advanced to give work in times of unusual unemployment, but which must have been undertaken in the near future regardless of the depression.”²⁴ The work test, however, was not always perceived as a form of relief, but rather an examination of the applicant prior to extending relief, the aims of which were to assess the applicant’s “willingness to work, worthiness, genuineness,” and also to force the applicant to go to work.²⁵ Despite likely meeting the work test criteria, immigrants and other non-white races were not subject to the same benefits, as per the nativist sentiments of the era.

Work test assignments typically included “employment at woodyards and stoneyards, maintenance of shelters, and, occasionally, street-cleaning.”²⁶ Work tests were common throughout the history of work relief, and their usage increased with the frequency of economic depressions, as part of the battle against unemployment. In the two depressions immediately preceding 1929, public works was regarded as a means of absorbing some of the unemployed, whereas early efforts in this direction were sometimes looked upon as more large-

²³ Ibid, 22.

²⁴ Ibid, 32.

²⁵ Ibid, 36.

²⁶ Ibid.

scale work tests, and incorporated at least some of the desired results of work relief, such as keeping families off the relief rolls.²⁷

Each of the six economic depressions prior to 1929 exhibited a variety of efforts comprised of work tests, public works, or work relief, as defined above. In the depression of 1857-1858, a private agency in Boston filled jobs offering board or moderate wages in return for work; New York City employed up to 1100 men in the construction of Central Park; Philadelphia authorized construction of culverts and reservoirs; and Newton, Massachusetts, gave work to sixty men and twenty-five teams on road construction. For the depression from 1873-1879, the homeless in Boston and New York City were given work in return for shelter and food; an organization of skilled workers requested public works in Indianapolis; the New York legislature granted Kingston permission to raise funds to employ idle men in breaking stone for public roads; and men were employed on public road work in Boston, where a private agency also sponsored several work relief projects.

From 1893-1897, work relief was a major form of assistance to the unemployed, with projects being reported in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Indianapolis; public works were also undertaken in cities like New York, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Indianapolis. From 1907-1908, various communities required work from the homeless for relief, many cities developed small work relief projects, and public works projects were undertaken in Cleveland, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, and Newark. In 1914-1915, approximately 100 cities implemented work relief or public works projects to combat that depression, most notably New York City (see page 26). And from 1921-1922 work tests for the

²⁷ Ibid.

homeless were limited by the amount of available projects, work relief was conducted in small units, and a few cities instituted public works.²⁸

Whereas public works were often carried on under public auspices, in at least the depressions of 1857 and 1875, “public” work was often administered by charity societies, and at least in one instance private funds were used for public works.²⁹ The projects performed in these depressions, while not individually enumerated or described, could be generally classified as construction, repair or maintenance of streets, roads, or highways; sewers; parks; buildings; and water-supply systems.³⁰ Minimal information exists on the number of persons employed, or on the amounts expended or appropriated for emergency employment undertakings in all of these depressions.

Similar to what would later be the rule under TERA, a recurring problem connected with the planning of work relief programs was selecting projects that would not compete with private industry. In the earlier depressions the emphasis was on heavy outdoor work, especially suited for the employment of unskilled labor; in later depressions, more attention was given to diversification of projects, in order to utilize special skills and provide lighter indoor work for women as well as some men, though outdoor work was still the province of solely men.³¹ In many communities, married women were discouraged from, and even dismissed from public service positions, likely in favor of men, or single women.³²

The six economic depressions that occurred prior to 1929 saw various manifestations of work relief in New York State, particularly in the 1855 employment of “able-

²⁸ Ibid, 33-35; where not specified, individual information on cities implementing work relief or public works was not available.

²⁹ Ibid, 37.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, 39.

³² Deutsch and Schneider, *A History of Public Welfare in New York State*, 296.

bodied male applicants” on the first Erie Canal enlargement, as well as the use of 1100 men in the 1857-58 construction of Central Park.³³ The summer of 1931 saw the New York State Association of Community Chests and Councils circulate a questionnaire to cities nationwide with over 25,000 residents, and a total of 184 cities in thirty-eight states (and Washington DC) reported some form of work relief undertaken.³⁴ A report on twenty-six communities was undertaken by the philanthropic agency, which revealed there were twenty-eight separate major work relief programs in these cities using public, private or a combination of funds and agencies to administer work relief. Of the twenty-eight programs studied in *Emergency Work Relief As Carried Out in Twenty-Six American Communities, 1930-1931*, seventeen were financed entirely or almost entirely from public funds, eight solely by private funds, and three with funds from both these sources. For example, as discussed below, New York City had a work relief program administered by a citizen’s committee, and another program under the auspices of city authorities; by contrast, Milwaukee, Wisconsin had two programs carried on simultaneously by the city and county governments.³⁵

All of the communities studied in the Sage Foundation report except one relied upon public works under the direction of one or more departments of the city government for the whole or part of the work opportunities offered. This work consisted primarily of manual labor that would be historically categorized as outdoor relief. Repairs and renovations to public buildings and private institutions, such as churches, hospitals, libraries, schools and homes for children and the aged, were also noted in eight of the projects.³⁶

³³ Radomski, 33.

³⁴ Joanna C. Colcord, William C. Koplovitz and Russell H. Kurtz, *Emergency Work Relief As Carried Out in Twenty-Six American Communities, 1930-1931, with Suggestions for Setting Up a Program* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1932), 253.

³⁵ Ibid, 15; though not stated specifically by Colcord, et al. for Milwaukee, work relief projects administered by city or county governments were often under the control of the welfare agency of that branch of municipal government.

³⁶ Ibid, 21.

New York was already known for widespread work relief across the state. Of the 210 cities listed in *Emergency Work Relief* reporting work relief programs during 1930-1931, twenty-three were located in New York State.³⁷ This was the most of any other state covered by the survey. The following cities reported work relief programs, with the nature of funding or administration noted: Auburn (public); Binghamton (public and private); Cedarhurst (private); Corning (public); Elmira (public and private); Hudson (public and private); Ithaca (public and private); Jamestown (public); Newburgh (public); New Rochelle (private); Poughkeepsie (private); Rome (public and private); Syracuse (public); Troy (public and private); Utica (private); Watertown (public); and Yonkers (private).³⁸ Though individual data was not provided for these seventeen cities as far as the type, scale and cost of work performed, Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Rochester, and New York City were all profiled in the Sage Foundation report. This provided a glimpse into the type of work relief that was occurring across the state in the months leading to the passage and implementation of the Emergency Relief Act.

In Buffalo, the mayor of the city called upon citizens to “cooperate in the widest possible use of the municipal employment agency known as the Industrial Aid Bureau,” which had been established under the newly created Department of Social Welfare (1928) for the relief of unemployment through finding temporary or permanent work for the jobless.³⁹ Beginning in the fall of 1930, the major projects implemented by the city included: a work-relief program through various public service departments during the winter months; an “odd jobs campaign” that developed into an organized plan of neighborhood hiring of men for snow removal known as the “man-a-block plan,” and a corresponding program of work relief for women through casual domestic employment. In addition, a large-scale work test was arranged in April 1931, by

³⁷ Ibid, 254.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid, 54.

several city departments and the public employment agency, where recipients of public relief were required to give one day's employment a week in the parks or on some other public work in exchange for one week's worth of relief wages.⁴⁰

A number of public works projects designed to furnish employment on a merely part-time basis to as many of unemployed people as possible were created by the city, the first of which was tree trimming. Additional projects included "laying water mains under the direction of the Water Department, filling and grading streets and carrying out improvements at the airport under the Department of Public Works, and making repairs for the Department of Buildings."⁴¹ The work began in November 1930 and continued to April 1, 1931, several months before TERA legislation was passed and would provide for more comprehensive work relief for the city of Buffalo. Unfortunately, as was the case with earlier depressions, no records were kept of exact work performed, or number employed on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, nor was data maintained on number of persons employed, hours worked or wages earned on the various work relief projects.⁴² However, the estimated cost of materials expenditure for this yearlong period amounted to \$215,000, with \$535,000 in estimated wages paid, or a total cost of \$750,000.⁴³

By contrast, nearby Niagara Falls spent \$73,765 from November 1930 through August 1931, with work relief efforts benefitting approximately 2,500 men.⁴⁴ Niagara Falls' organized effort to cope with the emergency unemployment situation began late 1930 when a meeting was called by the Chamber of Commerce to consider the need for action. Different than Buffalo's course of action driven by the mayor, Niagara Falls saw the appointment of a mayor's committee, leading to the launching of their own "odd-jobs drive," the development of a

⁴⁰ Ibid; the amount of work relief wages was not specified.

⁴¹ Ibid, 58.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, 59.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 164.

man-a-block organization for snow removal, and the inauguration of a municipal program of work relief financed by tax-raised funds.⁴⁵ Initially, the city manager proposed to the Niagara Falls City Council that it borrow \$25,000 to be repaid in 1931, with which to provide work in the parks in rotation for persons needing relief. The city manager then directed work relief in the city, via an executive committee of the mayor's committee.⁴⁶ The majority of work performed in Niagara Falls during this period dealt with improvements in public parks, which were common to work relief in other cities of that period, as well as projects that would be performed under TERA.⁴⁷

Rochester had one of the most extensive and well-documented work relief programs in the years leading up to the passage of TERA legislation. Some activities were even occurring prior to the onset of the Great Depression. As early as 1928, the Family Welfare Society of Rochester presented a plan to a department of the city government for "putting able-bodied recipients of relief to work in the parks, (with) the private agency paying them wages in lieu of relief."⁴⁸ But it was not until 1930 that a determined group of citizens organized the Civic Committee on Unemployment, which, with ample financial and community backing, developed into a well-organized and efficient entity, with a paid staff.

In early November of that year, the City Manager of Rochester, a member of the Civic Committee, proposed to the City Council that the rising needs created by the Depression be met as much as possible through a program of work relief. A \$250,000 appropriation was added to the 1931 city budget, for work relief. In the months to follow, two additional appropriations

⁴⁵ Ibid, 161.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 163.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 192.

of \$250,000 each, and some other, smaller appropriations, brought the total sum up to \$815,000 to fund work relief projects.⁴⁹

The Rochester program was exemplary in the extent and variety of the seventy-seven projects undertaken, with many of the improvements intended to be permanent.

Unemployed engineers and surveyors were supplied and paid by the Emergency Bureau to assist the city engineer in laying out projects, which included such tasks as

Land clearing and road building in a municipal park about six miles from the city, together with the construction of a new golf course and erection of a clubhouse; the creation of several playgrounds, one on the site of a gravel which had been both unsightly and dangerous; the building of skating shelters, refectories and bathhouses in other parks; demolition of condemned buildings; preparing sites for a new zoo and a library; renovating school buildings and beautifying grounds; electrical repairing, painting, and carpentry on public buildings; grading of bridge approaches and digging incinerator pits; and construction of a restaurant at the municipal airport.⁵⁰

Work relief under this program began on November 25, 1930, and continued over the next year until September 28, 1931, just after the passage of the Emergency Relief Act that gave birth to the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration.⁵¹ Whether or not the passage of this legislation influenced the discontinuation of the Rochester program is not known. Over the course of the ten months of work relief in Rochester, 7,917 men were given work in varying amount, with the total cost of the project amounting to the total \$815,000 appropriated, of which \$108,395 was spent for materials and \$706,605 for wages.⁵² As is consistent with work relief projects of the time (and in earlier depressions), no women were employed for work projects, only for clerical service in the Committee and Bureau of Public Welfare offices.⁵³ No further demographic information was available.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 197.

⁵¹ Ibid, 198.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 199.

New York City had been exceptionally active in several types of work relief prior to the Great Depression. The depression of 1914-1915 saw work relief practiced on a considerable scale thanks to the efforts of the New York Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor (AICP). The New York AICP made arrangements with several of the large parks of the city to supply men drawn from its relief lists, and pay their wages, to carry out improvements to grounds and buildings under the direction of the regular staff in the parks.⁵⁴ Projects performed in the parks “involved real work of a useful nature, performed under the same conditions as would prevail if the men had been hired in the labor market, (and) there was nothing to indicate to the passerby that they were in any way different from other gangs of men at work.”⁵⁵ The AICP also instituted a similar project and approach to work relief in the downturn of 1921-1922, but only managed to find work for just over 1,500 men for a brief period of time.⁵⁶

Similar efforts were undertaken by the AICP at the onset of the Great Depression, starting in the winter of 1929-1930. The association spent over \$200,000 in wages and other relief funds in the first several months, when a second New York relief-giving organization, the Charity Organization Society, drew up a plan to meet the continued emergency needs.⁵⁷ These were not the only active relief efforts in New York City at this point in time, as the pervasive and acute nature of the Great Depression mobilized public and private efforts to combat unemployment, hunger and economic woes.

There were two large, public work relief programs in New York City beginning in the winter of 1930 that continued into the spring and summer of 1931. The first started in

⁵⁴ Ibid, 136.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 13.

⁵⁶ Schwartz, *The Civil Works Administration*, 15.

⁵⁷ Colcord, et al., 136.

October 1930 was financed with funds raised privately, but administered by the Emergency Work Bureau of New York (no relation to the Emergency Work Bureaus that would be created under TERA legislation). The second began in April 1931, financed by public funds and administered through the city Department of Public Welfare.⁵⁸ On the private side of work relief, Seward Prosser, a prominent New York banker, organized the Emergency Employment Committee in September 1930, collecting over \$8 million in funds from private financiers intended to fund Emergency Work Bureau activities for six months.⁵⁹ The following month, this body, also known as the Prosser Committee, “began a drive to raise \$150,000 a week to pay work relief wages to 10,000 heads of families applying to the AICP and the Charity Organization Society,” aiming to provide jobs to men with families who were current residents of New York City, regardless of long they had lived there.⁶⁰ Residency requirements were often a condition of municipal work relief programs, and would again come to bear under TERA, so it was significant that the Prosser Committee responded to the emergency need without discrimination in one of the largest cities in the country.

Under this privately funded committee, a great variety of work was undertaken for the park systems in the five boroughs of the city, including “constructing walks and roads, resurfacing playgrounds and tennis courts, building fences, water fountains, bridges, and bridge approaches, clearing and removing brush, planting trees, and repairing motor equipment.”⁶¹ Men from the Emergency Employment Committee were also available to city departments for work relief projects: the Department of Sanitation used 3,500 men to clean up vacant lots; the Tenement House Department used men to remove dirt and rubbish from cellars and backyards;

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Schwartz, 15.

⁶⁰ Colcord, et al., 137, 140.

⁶¹ Ibid, 143.

and, the Department of Hospitals used 2,500 men on a program of general renovation in twenty-three hospitals.⁶²

The various work relief initiatives in New York City during the early part of the Great Depression were also notable for the employment of women at various non-clerical tasks. From the beginning of the Depression, women who were the earning heads of family groups appealed to the Emergency Employment Committee and Emergency Work Bureau seeking work, and some but not all were granted employment, though at still what were traditionally “feminine” tasks. As sewing was one of the things in which most of them were skilled to some degree, sewing rooms were opened in connection with churches and social settlements, making clothes for children as well as uniforms for city departments. The Committee or Bureau placed those who were not suited for work in sewing shops in non-profit-making institutions as clerical workers.⁶³ As is common with demographics of early depressions, no racial or further demographic data has been provided for analysis, though it is assumed the majority of those benefitting from work relief were white males and females.

According to statistical reports from November 1930 through July 1931, the Emergency Work Bureau of New York City received a total of \$8,522,240 from the Emergency Employment Committee and other sources, providing work relief for 31,326 men and 6,205 women, or 37,531 people total.⁶⁴ The Department of Public Welfare, the other public agency implementing work relief in the city, helped an estimated 64,900 persons at a cost of \$5,680,992 (in wages) in the five months between April and August 1931.⁶⁵ Typical with work relief projects of the era, as well as those performed by the Emergency Work Bureau, the work

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, 147.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 148.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 155.

performed was in repairing of highways, roads, sewers, hospitals, and other public buildings, as well as street cleaning, renovating parts of public buildings, and park work. As this work was in addition to that budgeted for and performed by existing employees of city departments, none of the work projects undertaken came at the expense of those departments, another theme continued under TERA.⁶⁶

Work relief in New York City was extremely diverse and atypical in its combination of public and privately funded agencies. The efficiency of the privately funded operation allowed it to remain active for a year in tandem with the state-funded Emergency Work Bureau created by TERA legislation at the end of 1931. William Matthews, director of the Emergency Employment Committee, noted

It had become plain by this time that the job was far too big, and promised to be too long continued to be handled by private, voluntary contributions. (The private committee) was, however, to remain for a year or more in partnership with the larger programs started at this time by city and state, and later by national agencies. As no funds were immediately available for the operation of the City Work Bureau, the privately supported Bureau for a period of six months supplied from its own work relief lists practically the entire staff necessary to the operation of the public bureau.⁶⁷

The success of Prosser's committee was a benefit to the state program, which was at first unable to fund any work. The privately supported bureau lasted until September of 1933, when the shift of the funding structure and administration of TERA to the Federal Emergency Relief Administration subsumed all other state relief.⁶⁸ The private New York Emergency Work Bureau is unique among pre-TERA work relief in New York State for its collaboration with city and state efforts, as well as its longevity, outlasting all other work relief programs that began before the passage of the Emergency Relief Act in the fall of 1931.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ William H. Matthews, *Adventures In Giving* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1939), 210.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 213.

In contrast to the Association of Community Chests and Councils surveys and findings, a July 1931 survey by the Joint Committee on Unemployment Relief of the State Board of Social Welfare and the State Charities Aid Association found that work relief had been carried on under private and public auspices during the winter of 1930-31 in twenty-seven of forty-five upstate cities studied. Relief was financed by public funds in seventeen cities (Batavia, Buffalo, Corning, Fulton, Ithaca, Jamestown, Lackawanna, Little Falls, Lockport, Newburgh, Niagara Falls, North Tonawanda, Oswego, Rensselaer, Rochester, Watertown, and Watervliet), while three cities (Auburn, Cohoes and Utica) used exclusively private funds, and seven cities (Binghamton, Cortland, Elmira, New Rochelles, Poughkeepsie, Schenectady and Troy) used public and private funds.⁶⁹ As is the case with pre-TERA work relief, there is minimal additional information available on many of these communities, but the type of work and persons employed are consistent with those cities profiled above.

Conclusion

Work relief, in varying manifestations, has been a mechanism to combat unemployment and social and economic ills for hundreds of years. Its application has varied based on the type of agency or entity responsible for its administration, as well as the society that was using it. Early uses of work relief in the colonies focused on a more punitive approach, or offered it in exchange for bare necessities such as food and shelter. Over time, work projects were given out as a matter of charity, though the impetus still existed for the primarily male workers to “earn” their wages through hard work, which kept with the earlier, Protestant-influenced idea of work as a form of toil.

The use of public works projects through the various depressions links them with the growth of municipalities towards more urban and industrial ways of life, requiring stronger

⁶⁹ Deutsch and Schneider, *A History of Public Welfare in New York State*, 305.

and increased infrastructure be built and maintained. In addition, social need for more recreational activity meant that new parks, and continued maintenance of existing parks, remained a priority. The public works work relief that would soon occur under TERA reflected this evolution of solutions to unemployment during economic depressions, though the effort was more widely focused, and aimed towards a long-lasting solution to benefit the entire state, rather than one community at a time.

The specific efforts of cities across the state to implement work relief before the passage of TERA legislation is instructive by demonstrating how equipped they were without state relief. Certain programs were short-lived due to a lack of funding, while those with significant backing and a constant flow of laborers, as in the case of New York City's Emergency Work Bureau, demonstrated how a well-funded and well-administrated work relief program could be successful in addressing the economic and social woes of the Great Depression.

CHAPTER 2: THE TEMPORARY EMERGENCY RELIEF ADMINISTRATION (TERA)

Introduction

The economic depression facing the United States beginning in 1929 was its worst and most challenging to date. The previous 150 years of the country's history had seen many ebbs and flows in the economy, with various forms of work relief taken to combat joblessness and hunger in previous convulsions. The types of aid in previous depressions ranged from church-sponsored charity to city-funded public works, but almost all involved projects that had a public benefit upon their completion.

In 1930 and 1931, unemployment had seen a meteoric rise throughout the United States, affecting approximately one million workers in the state of New York by summer 1931.⁷⁰ This was already twenty-four percent of the workforce, and would continue to rise to as high as thirty-three percent during this economic crisis of "Old Testament proportions."⁷¹ In New York City, more than one-third of the 29,000 manufacturing firms had shuttered their doors, summarily leaving one in every three potential employees in the city without a job.⁷² Approximately 1.6 million New Yorkers were receiving public relief of some sort. Those who retained jobs were often considered "underemployed," implying they worked only portions of the week or month, or were significantly undercompensated for full-time work.⁷³

Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt was obviously well aware of the growing problem, noting "a great portion of our machinery and our facilities stand idle, while millions of able-bodied and intelligent men and women, in dire need, are clamoring for the opportunity to

⁷⁰ Conrad Black. *Franklin Delano Roosevelt: Champion of Freedom* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 215.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 323.

⁷³ Ibid.

work.”⁷⁴ Roosevelt first endeavored to address the unemployment epidemic through a Committee on Stabilization of Industry for the Prevention of Unemployment. This was a major step towards addressing the challenges he faced as a leader: the creation of a new agency and apparatus to combat the economic convulsion. This would be prophetic for the rest of his term as governor of New York State and when becoming president, beginning with the creation of the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration via the Emergency Relief Act of September 1931.

The Committee on Stabilization of Industry for the Prevention of Unemployment

The importance of state-supported unemployment relief was foreshadowed by the increased role of the state government under Roosevelt. As governor, he became interested in the workforce. This was due to the efforts of state industrial commissioner (and future Secretary of Labor under Roosevelt) Frances Perkins. Stabilization of employment became a goal, and term that was specifically defined as “the ironing out of seasonal fluctuations in employment in order to provide a guaranteed annual wage for workers.”⁷⁵ On March 29, 1930, he became the first governor in the country to “stress openly and emphatically that unemployment was a major and growing problem” to be addressed by state government. He did this through the creation of a Committee on Stabilization of Industry for the Prevention of Unemployment, whose primary purpose was to develop a lasting program for industrial mobilization and prevention of unemployment.⁷⁶ The committee was concerned with obtaining and analyzing data on several areas, including “the extent of unemployment, stabilization of employment, cooperation with and supervision of philanthropic efforts, active stimulation of small job campaigns in communities throughout the state, coordination and encouragement of local re-employment undertakings, and

⁷⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Looking Forward* (New York: The John Day Company, 1933), 45.

⁷⁵ Kenneth S. Davis, *FDR: The New York Years, 1928-1933* (New York: Random House, 1985), 158.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 158-159.

finding of jobs through public and private employment agencies.”⁷⁷ In his “Statement On Unemployment” announcing the creation of the committee, Roosevelt cited three key contributing factors leading to unemployment:

Seasonal fluctuations which have become chronic in some industries, technological unemployment or the displacement of men by labor-saving machinery and methods...(and) the depression due to the business cycle, which is an economic phenomenon recurring with some regularity throughout the Nation as well as in this State.⁷⁸

Throughout 1930, the committee of four business and labor representatives appointed by the governor, sought to work out practical methods to stem current unemployment from growing, and control its future resurgence. In tandem with an earlier group appointed by Frances Perkins to explore methods of combating unemployment, the Committee on Stabilization was successful in aiding several New York cities in the creation of local emergency committees dealing with relief, emergency employment, and stabilization by the middle of November 1930.⁷⁹

Following the success of this joint venture, Roosevelt re-appointed a larger stabilization committee, asking it to organize on a more permanent basis, “to help communities meet their own problems of unemployment relief by setting up local committees, and to act as a clearing-house and advisory body for relevant plans submitted to State officials.”⁸⁰ By the start of 1931, forty-eight cities in New York State had organized emergency committees to address unemployment, of which fourteen were only responsible for employment registries, and many did not have definite programs for creating any jobs or finding work for the unemployed.⁸¹ As

⁷⁷ Radomski, 64.

⁷⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt, *The Public Papers And Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Volume One: The Genesis Of The New Deal* (New York: Random House, 1938), 447.

⁷⁹ Bernard Bellush, *Franklin D. Roosevelt As Governor Of New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 132.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid, 134.

indicated in Chapter 1, a number of larger New York cities had managed to establish work relief programs successful in finding jobs for unemployed men, but aside from New York City, none of these programs managed to last more than a year before coming to an end.

Even in New York City, the programs were not often effective in guaranteeing successful and lasting repairs to its infrastructure and amenities via work relief. In the early 1930s, a New York City Park Association survey revealed there was “not a single structure of any type in any park in the city that was not in need of immediate repair.”⁸² Hundreds of statues were damaged and defaced, iron fences, benches and playground equipment were corroded and rusty, paths and roadways were rendered treacherous by broken pavement, lawns were overgrown, trees were dying or senselessly pruned down to stumps through careless maintenance.⁸³ This state of affairs was surely evident in many cities statewide, with creeping decay affecting the public landscape.

The creation of committees to deal with unemployment via work relief, though neither an innovation nor panacea, was an important step for Roosevelt in what would become a long-lasting battle against the effects of the Great Depression. The Governor’s Committee on Stabilization of Industry For the Prevention of Unemployment acknowledged this in a November 1930 report noting their emergency measures were merely “palliatives, not cures.”⁸⁴ Despite New York’s progressive approach to work relief, economic and social conditions were the same, if not worse, across the nation. Local relief efforts had collapsed across the country, as local governments could not hire the able-bodied unemployed. New infrastructure projects had diminished before the stock market crash and ensuing downturn, and with private underwriters

⁸² Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker*, 332.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ The Governor’s Committee On Stabilization Of Industry For The Prevention of Unemployment, *Less Unemployment Through Stabilization Of Operations* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Co., 1930), 3.

reluctant to purchase city notes to fund new improvements, city officials deferred or altogether canceled plans for such work. Within two years local treasurers were forced to beg for subsidies from Washington.⁸⁵

Mirroring the aggressive attitude of his home state in addressing unemployment relief, Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York was the first member of Congress to suggest a federal response. Wagner proposed a modest national program based on recommendations of a 1921 conference on unemployment, calling for “a system to gather statistics on the jobless, a national board to plan public works, and a federal-state employment service financed by grants-in-aid from Washington.”⁸⁶

Wagner’s initiative reflected the push from the rest of the states in the country, hundreds of cities, towns and counties of which sent politicians to Washington to plead for federal relief funds, in the form of money they would not have to repay.⁸⁷ Several leading Democrats had already introduced relief legislation. In 1931, Senators Edward Costigan of Colorado and Robert La Follette of Wisconsin had submitted a joint measure to Congress calling for the distribution of \$375 million in the form of grants to various states for unemployment relief.⁸⁸ Soon after, Senators Hugo Black of Alabama, Thomas Walsh of Montana, and Robert J. Bulkeley of Ohio introduced a relief measure similar to the La Follette-Costigan bill, except for the important difference that the \$375 million would be loaned to the states, instead of granted.⁸⁹ The administration of President Herbert Hoover, unconvinced that massive relief legislation was necessary because it would drain the Treasury and make a balanced federal

⁸⁵ Schwartz, 16.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 17.

⁸⁷ Jesse H. Jones, *Fifty Billion Dollars: My Thirteen Years With the RFC* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), 173.

⁸⁸ James Stuart Olson, *Herbert Hoover and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, 1931-1933* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1977), 66.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

budget impossible, defeated these measures. Hoover would eventually cave to pressure from the states to pass an Emergency Relief and Construction Act by 1932. By then, much more significant, comprehensive, and effective work relief was already taking place in New York State, making Hoover's efforts pale in comparison to that of Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt.

As the Depression wore on, nearly every city in New York had spent as much or more on relief in the first half of 1931 as they did for the entire year of 1930. As such, equally large expenditures were expected for the rest of 1931, and the foreseeable future.⁹⁰ As noted in Chapter 1, the private and public entities involved in work relief were ill-equipped to devise long-term solutions, and even in New York City, which had the most successful work relief programs, the Welfare Council estimated that during the winter of 1931-32, municipal authorities would have to expend at least \$20,000,000 to provide for emergency work and wages.⁹¹ As a result of such discouraging reports, Governor Roosevelt predicted that the coming winter would result in as many as twice the amount of unemployed as the previous winter. He concluded that since private charity was unable to meet the increasing and ceaseless burden, the state would have to intervene, to avert a complete breakdown of local relief.⁹² Roosevelt's solution forecast what would become a theme of the New Deal, when he informed the legislature that the time had come for the state to assume responsibility to provide either work or food for its unemployed, calling the contention that the state must assume responsibility to provide work, food, shelter, and clothing for its unemployed was "a challenge to American traditions."⁹³

⁹⁰ Bernard Bellush, 139.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid, 140.

The Temporary Emergency Relief Administration

By June 1931, Roosevelt was well on the way to parlaying his ideas on addressing unemployment through a network of initiatives, of which work relief was a major part. That same month, at an annual governors' conference at French Lick, Indiana, Roosevelt took the opportunity to describe his nascent program for dealing with the ever-worsening economic crisis, calling for reduction of tariffs, reduction of most taxes with a more progressive tax system (resulting in more taxes for those could afford it), unemployment and health insurance, and what he characterized as "a better balance between rural and urban life."⁹⁴ However, the most important step in codifying his program came with the delivery of a speech entitled "New York State Takes the Lead in the Relief of the Unemployed: A Message Recommending Creation of Relief Administration," to an extraordinary session of the New York State Legislature on August 28, 1931.

FDR repeatedly stressed the crucial role of the state in determining the course that economic relief would take, defining it as the "duly constituted representative of an organized society of human beings, created by them for their mutual protection and well-being."⁹⁵ He continued by remarking that state government "is but the machinery through which such mutual aid and protection are achieved," concluding,

The responsibility of the of the State undoubtedly applies when widespread economic conditions render large numbers of men and women incapable of supporting either themselves or their families because of circumstances beyond their control which make it impossible for them to find remunerative labor. To these unfortunate citizens aid must be extended by Government, not as a matter of charity, but as a matter of social duty.⁹⁶

This landmark address to the legislature laid out the role of the state in Roosevelt's new initiative, which he named the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, or TERA.

⁹⁴ Black, 215.

⁹⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt, *The Public Papers And Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Volume One*, 457.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 458.

In his introduction of his program to care for the relief of distress and the alleviation of unemployment, Roosevelt made several key recommendations, while noting its restrictions.⁹⁷ His first suggestion was that the administration of unemployment and distress relief within the state be placed in the hands of a temporary emergency commission of three persons who would serve without pay. He suggested that it would be responsible for the distribution of twenty million dollars, which he believed was the estimated amount required to meet the needs of the coming year among the various counties and cities of the state.⁹⁸ Distribution of this money would be based on key factors such as the number of people (and families) employed in localities requiring assistance, as well as the willingness of those communities to raise money on their own, by public or private means, to be matched by the state.⁹⁹

Roosevelt structured the apparatus of TERA to rely heavily on local government to implement relief at the county level. He noted, “the actual disbursement of this money should be in the hands of the local welfare officer of the municipality,” subject to the approval of a local commission (what would come to be called emergency work bureaus) that would act in an advisory capacity to the local welfare officer as well as to the state administration.¹⁰⁰ Emphasis on local bureaus to coordinate relief was stressed with the assumption that people would be induced to work after seeing the effort being put in by local officials to employ citizens, not to mention compel private agencies to lend their financial backing and personnel to local relief activities.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 462.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 463.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

A number of restrictions would be attached to the disbursement of these funds, namely that no money would be paid in the form of a dole; relief would be restricted to persons who resided in New York State for a minimum of two years prior to the enactment of the statute; and no employment or relief be undertaken outside of that which was allowed and governed by the TERA.¹⁰¹ The only specified restriction on monies disbursed was that one million dollars be set aside for work performed by the state, such as grading state lands, and construction and maintenance of state roads and parkways.¹⁰²

The money for relief of distress and unemployment was to be raised via a short-time supplementary fifty-percent income tax increase as part of the Dunnigan Act, which was passed simultaneously with the Emergency Relief Act.¹⁰³ The structure of this tax was aimed at those with relatively high incomes, with the low income threshold of \$2,500 (for single persons or married couples) being subject to no tax, while a net income of \$10,000 would yield \$37.50 in annual taxes for singles, and \$26.00 for married couple; the upper income example given would generate \$1,162.50 in tax from a single income of \$100,000, and \$1,128.00 for a married couple at the same level.¹⁰⁴ The State Tax Commission had informed Roosevelt that the twenty million dollars needed for TERA could be raised from imposing this tax structure on the approximately 300,000 personal income tax payers in New York.¹⁰⁵ An additional suggestion in Roosevelt's initial TERA speech was to include the appropriate money from existing state revenues to fund unemployment relief, which could be paid back or supplemented by the added income tax.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 464.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Udo Sautter, *Three Cheers for the Unemployed* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 285.

¹⁰⁴ Roosevelt, *The Public Papers And Addresses*, 465.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 468.

The need throughout New York state and the country, was not just for immediate economic relief but also to counteract the social and psychological effects of the Great Depression. The purpose of TERA legislation and resulting work relief had to also “preserve the morale of those who had become in need through the interplay of economic forces out of their control.”¹⁰⁷ Roosevelt sought to create a program and an initiative whose approach was more holistic in addressing the effects of the depression across the spectrum of people (and though not explicitly stated, did so regardless of race, class, or gender) whether they were located in urban or rural areas.

The comprehensive approach of TERA is what makes it such an important moment in work relief history for New York State, and the United States. Roosevelt did not necessarily set out to completely alter the economic system of America, as he was seeking to preserve what was already in place, with some adaptations to allow for effective work relief. He believed it was “time for the country to become fairly radical for at least one generation,” and TERA was a step in this direction.¹⁰⁸ TERA, the first of the “alphabet agencies” created by Roosevelt, set a precedent he repeatedly followed in the New Deal: devising a new agency to meet the challenges of a new problem instead of relying on an existing, overburdened or inadequate department or bureau.¹⁰⁹

The Emergency Relief Act of 1931

Though Roosevelt’s initial address to the legislature regarding TERA in August 1931 got the attention of New York State, passage of this legislation was not immediate or without political resistance. Nearly a month passed before the Emergency Relief Act, commonly

¹⁰⁷ Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, “Five Million People, One Billion Dollars: Final Report of The Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, November 1, 1931-June, 30, 1937” (Albany, New York: The Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, 1937), 27.

¹⁰⁸ Bellush, 140.

¹⁰⁹ Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt And Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1948), 31.

known as the Wicks Act after its sponsor in the legislature, was passed into law. Roosevelt faced a Republican-dominated legislature, hostile to public power, labor, conservation, and social reform.¹¹⁰ Both major parties were in agreement regarding the major objectives of the act to address unemployment relief, but differed considerably over the means to attain it.

The Republican members of the legislature, preferred that the Department of Social Welfare handle the state relief monies, and wished for members of their own party to head the relief commission.¹¹¹ They presented their own version of a relief plan, which avoided raising personal income taxes as Roosevelt suggested, but would instead be financed through budget economies and short-term loans.¹¹² Roosevelt believed that assigning relief duties to an existing state agency would make relief a permanent function of the state, rather than of a temporary, emergency nature. He protested the Republican suggestion that provided for unlimited matching of local relief funds with state funds, arguing this strategy could bankrupt the state. Roosevelt also maintained it was the responsibility of the wealthy to “to come to the front in such a grave emergency and assist those who under the same industrial and economic order are the losers and sufferers.”¹¹³ Roosevelt promised to veto the Republican measure, and threatened to order the legislators back into another special session to reach a swift compromise so that the relief process could begin. Faced with a veto, as well as the potential burden of expense related to another special session of the legislature, the Republicans capitulated, and both parties revised the bill into an acceptable form meet the Governor’s approval and adjourned the session twenty-four hours before Roosevelt’s veto threat became reality.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Crisis Of the Old Order: 1919-1933* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957), 393.

¹¹¹ Radomski, 69.

¹¹² Ibid, 70.

¹¹³ Bellush, 141-42.

¹¹⁴ Kenneth S. Davis, *FDR*, 241.

Though three states with smaller populations—New Hampshire, Maryland, and Oklahoma—had passed legislation to provide limited direct unemployment aid, the State of New York was the first state to undertake extensive and long-continued assistance to municipalities in meeting the relief needs precipitated by the long period of unemployment.¹¹⁵ The Temporary Emergency Relief Administration was created under the Emergency Relief Act to administer relief by providing employment, food, clothing, and shelter for persons in need who had been residents of the state for two years prior to November 1931.¹¹⁶ The act that became effective September 23rd declared that

The public health and safety of the State and each county, city and town therein being imperiled by the existing and threatened deprivation of a considerable number of their inhabitants of the necessities of life, owing to the present economic depression, such condition is hereby declared to be a matter of public concern, State and local, and the correction thereof to be a State, county, city and town purpose, the consummation of which requires, as a necessary incident, the furnishing of public aid to individuals.¹¹⁷

By Chapter 798 of the Laws of 1931, the TERA was created and supplied with funds for the primary purpose of assisting the local governments through partial reimbursement for administration costs and work relief expenses. Home relief in each community remained in the hands of the regularly constituted public welfare officials, though they were required to adhere to rules promulgated by the state commission, as a condition of receiving financial assistance.¹¹⁸ Eligible public welfare districts compliant with the rules of the TERA were entitled to a forty percent reimbursement of the expenditures for home relief, and 100 percent match for work

¹¹⁵ Sautter, *Three Cheers for the Unemployed*, 284; Emma O. Lundberg, “The New York State Relief Administration,” *The Social Service Review*, Vol. VI, No. 4 (1932), 547.

¹¹⁶ Bellush, 145.

¹¹⁷ Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, *Report of the New York State Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, October 15, 1932* (New York: The Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, 1932), 7.

¹¹⁸ The Governor’s Commission on Unemployment Relief, *Work Relief Projects of the Public Works Type in the State of New York* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Co., 1935), 29.

relief. If financial conditions were to become worse in a given area, the TERA could increase appropriations beyond the initial forty percent as needed for home relief.¹¹⁹

Franklin Delano Roosevelt's TERA legislation aimed at a comprehensive program to reduce the scourge of rampant unemployment precipitated by the Great Depression. The major goals of this initiative could be characterized as follows: to estimate and seek to obtain the amounts of federal and state funds needed to carry forward the programs of relief, to distribute these funds as to "supplement, encourage and stimulate" local effort, to render a strict accounting for the disbursement of state and federal funds, to set forth the conditions or restrictions under which such funds might be expended by the localities, to assist the local units to satisfy these conditions, to check upon the compliance of the local units with the conditions or restrictions, to assume rather direct administration of such activities as relief for transients and disability allowances for relief workers injured in the performance of their jobs, and to serve as a clearance house of information and as a center of advice concerning the statewide programs of relief.¹²⁰

The primary mechanism of achieving these goals was work relief, which was defined by TERA as "wages paid by a municipal corporation to persons who are unemployed or whose employment is inadequate to provide the necessities of life for themselves and their dependents."¹²¹ As specified by Roosevelt in the initial August 1931 address, work was to be given to employable persons seeking work relief, paid in cash or check according to prevailing rates in the locality, commensurate with the type of work performed. Discrimination based on race, color, religion, citizenship, political connections and activities, or class distinction was

¹¹⁹ Bellush, 142.

¹²⁰ Radomski, 186.

¹²¹ Temporary Emergency Relief Administration. *Report of the New York State Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, October 15, 1932* (New York: The Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, 1932), 18.

prohibited.¹²² As was typical of unemployment relief of the era and in previous depressions, no specific mention was made of the role of women in work relief projects or TERA as a whole.

TERA officials employed a number of strategies to stimulate the development of effective and efficient work projects. Initially, they matched local money for relief wages dollar for dollar, but did not contribute towards the cost of materials, equipment, supervision and accident insurance. Though those expenses were shouldered at the local level, projects were not approved if those costs exceeded ten percent, as the intent of relief funding was to provide wages to men for work performed.¹²³ As the duration of TERA was intended to only be six months, project approvals at this early stage of the program were less formal, and applications gave little more than the name of the project and the estimated total cost, split between the categories of relief wages and other items, since it was assumed that the considerable percentage of local money involved would undertake work that was locally desirable.¹²⁴ For this reason, precise data relating to types of projects and the total program costs in the earliest stages of TERA have never been available through the state administration, as districts only reported their reimbursable expenditures, which consisted of relief wages paid. Once TERA was extended in June of 1932, reimbursement on work relief wages was reduced to 40 percent, the same reimbursement given for home relief, and project application forms were updated to allow a more detailed control and itemization of expenses for materials and equipment, which was increased at the request of local officials from many parts of the State.¹²⁵

In order to assure that the greatest possible part of relief money was targeted to those with the greatest need, every emphasis was placed on volunteer workers. This extended to

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, *Five Years*, 41.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

the administration at the state level, as well as local governments actually providing relief. Members of the TERA Commission, as well as the chiefs of local work bureaus served without pay, and the first Executive Director was loaned by a private health organization on a part-time basis; his staff was comprised of fifteen persons, four of whom were volunteers.¹²⁶

TERA Personnel

As it was a pioneer program in its size and scale, there was limited historical precedent to provide guidance in (a) establishing an administrative apparatus, (b) in establishing policies regarding state-local collaboration when developing and following new standards of individual needs, (c) in the design and implementation of medical and other special services, (d) in drafting fiscal procedures, and (e) in the crucial training and utilization of personnel for a variety of tasks new to governmental responsibility. As a result, confusion and delay were unavoidable. Early challenges were encountered in drawing up rules and regulations for emergency work relief programs specific to the character of the various communities in the state, as well as coordinating the efforts of a large number of existing public and private agencies, temporary and permanent. Relief work was often limited in New York and other states due to the overlapping nature of many private and public agencies.¹²⁷

As indicated earlier, Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt initially appointed an administration of three persons to TERA for its intended six months of operation. The Emergency Relief Act did not specify any particular qualifications for membership on the TERA commission. Those appointed were listed in *Who's Who In America*, with high "prestige rating" outside the field of public welfare, as was consistent with the contemporary practice pertaining to

¹²⁶ Ibid, 24.

¹²⁷ Deutsch and Schneider, 310-11.

the selection of members of state welfare boards.¹²⁸ The first appointees were Jesse Isidor Straus, president of R.H. Macy & Co.; John Sullivan, president of the New York State Federation of Labor; and Philip J. Wickser, a prominent lawyer from Buffalo.

During the existence of TERA, the chairmanship alternated between high-ranking businessmen and social workers with administrative experience. It is assumed the appointees were sympathetic to the relief effort or they would not have accepted an appointment. Their volunteer work required continuous attention, with only expenses allowed for members. When they departed, the reason often given for the resignation of members was “pressure of personal business.”¹²⁹ Additional political or other factors may have been at work, as there was a noticeable turnover in the commission’s early membership.

In the first phase of TERA, Straus served as chairman until his retirement from the commission in March 1932, and Wickser followed but resigned a month later, after serving as chairman in the wake of Straus’ departure. In April 1932, Harry L. Hopkins, former executive director of the New York City Tuberculosis and Public Health Society, became the first executive director of TERA as well as chairman of the Commission, with Charles D. Osborne, newspaper publisher and former mayor of Auburn, New York, filling the remaining vacancy. Sullivan was the only constant member of the commission during this transitional period.¹³⁰

The TERA commission under Hopkins’ leadership would see its most progressive and productive period, until his departure in early 1933 to head the Federal Emergency Relief Administration under newly elected President Roosevelt. While at the head of the largest state relief fund at \$25 million, Hopkins used his “brash, innovative spirit” to spearhead what was

¹²⁸ Radomski, 183.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 185.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 184.

considered to be the most daring public program ever undertaken.¹³¹ Under his guidance, the rules of TERA were enforced to the letter: standards were set to correct deficient county procedures in performing work projects, discrimination was strictly forbidden, programs for the white collar and professional unemployed were implemented to ensure a comprehensive work relief program for all, and Hopkins required periodic accounting of funds, needs, and expenditures to ensure honest, efficient disbursal of state monies. For this, TERA remained untouched by corruption, and was praised by social workers and politicians across the country as an agency that “made relief a social work function.”¹³² These achievements did not go unnoticed by Roosevelt, who knew TERA was a major asset to his presidential campaign, with Hopkins largely responsible for its successes.¹³³

Emergency Work Bureaus

Under the Emergency Relief Act, work relief was to be in the hands of local emergency work bureaus, which were unpaid boards of public-spirited citizens, with a similar administrative structure to the state administration.¹³⁴ The work bureaus’ primary function was to directly supervise relief, whereas the state’s duties were largely financial and administrative purposes. As such, work bureaus were the primary devices by which work relief was so successfully coordinated, and their smooth operation was required for maximum efficiency. As noted earlier, similar committees were already functioning in some cities, using private funds. Though no mention was made of women in TERA legislation, efforts were undertaken to

¹³¹ Schwartz, 25.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Davis, 242.

¹³⁴ TERA, *Five Million*, 26.

distinguish this program from previous programs of poor relief, with local work bureaus often using a different building for intake with a separate division for women applicants.¹³⁵

Towns were not eligible for direct state appropriations, though commissioners of public welfare would make such reimbursements as they saw fit. Commissioners were responsible for any monies granted, and had to make report of them to the administration, but in no instance did the state administration make a direct appropriation to a town.¹³⁶ Similarly, there was no provision in the Emergency Relief Act that forbade a county work bureau from furnishing relief to workers who perform work for the towns within its boundaries. It was up to the county if they wished to provide the materials and wages to the towns from the funds provided to them by the state. The county work bureaus were the sole units of government the state administration dealt with directly.¹³⁷

Emergency work bureaus were charged with administering relief in public welfare districts. TERA defined public welfare districts as “incorporated cities and county territory beyond the limits of such cities.”¹³⁸ In order to receive funding from the state administration, the governing board of a city or county welfare district needed to adopt a resolution to be filed with the administration on or before November 16, 1931, which, once filed allowed for provision of the two forms of relief: home relief and work relief, the former to be administered by city or county commissioners of public welfare, and the latter by the specially created local emergency work bureaus.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Temporary Emergency Relief Administration. “Emergency Relief In The State of New York: Statutes, Regulations, and Opinions and Interpretations of Counsel,” (Albany, New York: The Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, 1934), 149.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 150.

¹³⁸ TERA, *Report*, 11.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

Emergency work bureaus were placed in charge of boards of three or more members, who were jointly appointed by a city's chief executive, and the county board of supervisors.¹⁴⁰ Membership of the advisory board was not comprised of or limited to strictly men.¹⁴¹ Bureaus were subject to the same supervision, direction and control of the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration as the local welfare officials charged with the distribution of home relief, as per the rules set forth by the legislation. In the beginning, the control exercised over emergency work bureaus by the TERA focused upon issues with clients instead of work projects. As noted previously, the TERA did not exercise close control over specific projects until after it became a more long-term program that required more close scrutiny of work and expenses. Selection and management of the projects, however, was the responsibility of the local emergency work bureaus. Cities and counties had the option of doing "public work through and under its local emergency work bureau, or by its public works or other department under the supervision and control of its local emergency work bureau."¹⁴²

The most effective mechanism of work relief was operated and controlled through county emergency work bureaus, which were to submit all proposed work projects to the administration for approval, setting forth a description of the project, days of work required, the number of laborers and skilled workers to be given employment, and the total cost of the project for wages, materials, machinery, and so forth. Major projects consisted of new construction work or enlargement of existing facilities, such as roads and streets, sewers and disposal plants, reservoirs, dams, water mains and general improvements of water supply systems. Additional work projects included new buildings, renovation of old ones, improvement of school buildings,

¹⁴⁰ Governor's Commission, 30.

¹⁴¹ As was known to have been the case in Onondaga County, New York (see chapter 3).

¹⁴² Governor's Commission, 30; quoted from Chapter 798, Laws of 1931.

hospitals, firehouses, police stations, and public institutions, and reconditioning of equipment and beautifying of parks.¹⁴³

Roosevelt's personal interests in conservation and regional planning helped color his suggestions for work relief, both in rural New York, as well as in urban areas. Conservation to Roosevelt meant more than planning for land and resource use. He envisioned regional planning as a way of improving farm abandonment in New York State, which meant the reclamation of sub-marginal farmland, as well as increased reforestation. Speaking in 1931 on the role of government in conservation, he stated that the "implications of saving and protecting that which is of genuine worth, whether of wealth, of health, or of happiness, is inclusive enough to take in all functions of government."¹⁴⁴ Corresponding to this celebration of the importance of rural life and land, Roosevelt through TERA subsidized the resettlement of as many of the unemployed as possible on marginal farmland, with proper tools instructions on how to effectively cultivate the land.¹⁴⁵ Through TERA, Roosevelt was able to create a program that helped promote his wishes for a rural-industrial society, where every acre was utilized for the purposes most appropriate, and contributed toward improved agriculture, reforestation, and even development of electric power resources across the state.¹⁴⁶

This conservation agenda would become even more evident upon the election of Roosevelt to presidency and the establishment of federal work relief programs such as the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps, the latter of which dealt largely with park and other natural improvements and projects. The large number of TERA projects dealing with parks reflected the widespread and growing interest in the advancement of public

¹⁴³ TERA, *Report*, 32.

¹⁴⁴ Schlesinger, 390-91.

¹⁴⁵ Black, 217.

¹⁴⁶ Daniel R. Fusfeld, *The Economic Thought of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Origins of the New Deal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 123.

recreation in the late 1920s and early 1930s, with the establishment of several new state parks. TERA work projects took place in city, state and county parks throughout New York, providing new recreational facilities, and improvement of existing athletic fields, tennis courts, golf links, and swimming pools and bathing beaches.¹⁴⁷ Generally speaking, the projects undertaken by the various county emergency work bureaus fell into one or more classifications: highways, sanitation, water supply, parks and playgrounds, utilities and structures, clerical and professional, general public improvements, and other miscellaneous jobs as needed.¹⁴⁸

A significant amount of TERA work was undertaken in the state parks of New York. The New York State Department of Conservation provided the projects, and used TERA funding to employ men from local work bureaus on dozens of projects across the state. In 1932 and 1933, TERA funds and labor were used for park improvements, enlargements of fish hatcheries and game farms, clerical work, and even restoration projects.¹⁴⁹ The historic Phillipse Manor Hall in Yonkers, New York, underwent a complete renovation in 1932 using labor from the Westchester County Emergency Work Bureau, and \$10,000 of TERA funds for repairs of wood and stonework, new wiring, and painting. Overall TERA disbursements totaled \$800,430 for 1932, with over 10,000 men employed in reforestation activities alone.¹⁵⁰

Continuation of TERA

As implied by its name, the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration was only intended to provide interim relief, and the \$20 million was intended to last a mere six months before the unemployment problem was greatly reduced by the work relief apparatus of

¹⁴⁷ TERA, *Report*, 35.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ New York State Conservation Commission, *Twenty-Second Annual Report* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyons Co., 1933), 21.

¹⁵⁰ New York State Conservation Commission, *Twenty-First Annual Report* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyons Co., 1932), 424.

emergency work bureaus. However, the circumstances required much more money or effort than Roosevelt or anyone within the TERA organization expected, and the initial monies were exhausted before the original statutory end of the program. These events, beyond the control of anyone within the New York State Legislature or TERA itself, resulted in the people of the State of New York voting for bond issues to expand relief appropriations, leading to continuation of the temporary emergency program long past its initial life expectancy.

In March 1932, Roosevelt informed legislators that the \$20 million was spent, with additional funds required as soon as possible to continue the administration without interruption. A report from the TERA showed that 75,000 persons were receiving and benefitting from work relief (and 82,000 receiving home relief), with an additional 112,000 applicants in need of work relief that would not be available.¹⁵¹ The state's unemployed had jumped by 50 percent in six months to 1,500,000, and without continued funding, the existence of Emergency Work Bureaus statewide was endangered.¹⁵² Discussions between legislative leaders from both parties resulted in the extension of TERA past its original June 1st expiration, through November 1st, 1932, at the cost of an additional \$5 million.¹⁵³ Due to the funding of the first phase of TERA from increased taxes, Roosevelt and legislators agreed to fund the extension from existing state revenue.

Roosevelt had an ulterior motive to carry on the work of TERA to Election Day of that year, when a statewide referendum would be submitted to the people for an additional bond issue of \$30 million fund the continuation of the program through January 1, 1934.¹⁵⁴ In "A Message to the Legislature Urging Continuation of Relief of Unemployment Distress," on

¹⁵¹ Bellush, 143.

¹⁵² Black, 216.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 144.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

March 10, 1932, asking for the approval of the additional \$5 million, Roosevelt noted this was a “departure from the pay-as-you-go policy,” but felt that the conditions that faced the state, “in their gravity akin to war conditions, warrant this deviation from that principle.”¹⁵⁵ In an address to the people of New York State on October 29, 1932, the three-year anniversary of “Black Tuesday” that helped propel America into the Depression, Roosevelt requested the \$30 million bond issue, to be paid in two \$15 million installments, to avoid another special session of the legislature or new taxes for relief purposes.¹⁵⁶

At the federal level, Roosevelt had been endorsing the efforts of New York Senator Robert F. Wagner to enact federal unemployment relief to reduce the economic hardship and burden nationwide.¹⁵⁷ Wagner had already unsuccessfully attempted to pass relief bills, which, like all suggested bills under Herbert Hoover, had been vetoed by the President despite their popularity within Congress. Roosevelt’s success through TERA demonstrated the role the government could perform in preventing starvation and distress in the existing crisis, which he would pursue beyond state and regional boundaries in his presidency.

National Response to TERA

When TERA was created through the Emergency Relief Act in September 1931, it is not likely anyone foresaw the national significance of this unemployment initiative. Yet its success due to Roosevelt’s insistence it be continued past its original deadline, and subsequent developments within the program, suggest that the principles and policies incorporated into the Emergency Relief Act and propagated through TERA rules and regulations were to become a model for relief on the national level. The national attention received by TERA surely influenced relief efforts in other states, which had been presented with a successful model they

¹⁵⁵ Roosevelt, *Public Papers*, 471.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 473.

¹⁵⁷ Bellush, 147.

could imitate, or at least adapt to their local needs. By the end of 1931, eight states other than New York had assumed financial responsibility for emergency unemployment relief through some sort of program or initiative.¹⁵⁸ One year later, four more states had some kind of program, and by the end of 1933, sixteen additional states had adopted similar relief measures.¹⁵⁹ The extent to which these were directly influenced by TERA is unknown, but it is not likely a coincidence that New York was the first state to undertake comprehensive relief; the coast-to-coast extent of the states partaking in programs shows both the national need for work relief, but also perhaps the nationwide effect of TERA.

The pattern of activities within New York State under TERA was similar to the path eventually followed by the federal government under President Roosevelt. Though the full scope of work relief programs following TERA is outside the scope of this thesis, some basic facts bear mention due to the profound influence the success of TERA had on the subsequent federal programs, all of which implemented a similar relief model through the state and country. After the creation of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (or FERA) in May 1933, New York's unemployment was reorganized into the context of federal programs, with a corresponding change in the structure of TERA, until work relief was taken over by the federal government during the latter part of 1935.¹⁶⁰

The success of TERA under FDR figured prominently in his first presidential campaign, as he spoke of his intended policies of job creation through public works, reduction of conventional government spending, securities regulation, mortgage relief, the increase of farm

¹⁵⁸ Radomski, 72; the states were California, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid; the 1932 states were Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, and Wisconsin, while the 1933 states included Arizona, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 71.

prices through voluntary production controls, among other issues.¹⁶¹ By contrast, President Herbert Hoover put little stock in notions of work relief or government aid for unemployment, favoring instead increased taxes and tariffs, and loans to foreign countries to stimulate purchase of perceived American surplus goods.¹⁶² Though Roosevelt would eventually adopt the position of taxing the incomes and savings of citizens to “transfer the resources for a comfortable life to those who could not achieve it without public assistance,” he did not state this publicly as part of his platform. Instead he implied that the costs of unemployment relief could be borne merely through cuts in various categories of government.¹⁶³ Despite later contradicting some of his campaign promises, the transfer of Roosevelt’s work relief agenda to the federal arena was inevitable with his landslide victory over Hoover.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was sworn in as the 32nd President of the United States on March 4th, 1933; the Federal Emergency Relief Administration was created on May 22nd, 1933 with Harry Hopkins as its executive director. The same leadership that had spearheaded TERA and facilitated its success just eighteen months earlier, was now at the helm of relief at the federal level, and would continue to apply the patterns that had served them so well at the state level.¹⁶⁴ The supervision of work relief in New York through TERA continued unabated, though in a different form, through its end in 1937. The three periods of TERA could be defined as: November 1, 1931 to November 19, 1933, the original state-funded TERA relief program; November 20, 1933 to March 31, 1934, the Federal Civil Works Administration (CWA) program; and April 1, 1934 to July 31, 1935, featuring combined FERA-TERA work relief, also

¹⁶¹ Black, 239.

¹⁶² Ibid, 245.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 247-48.

¹⁶⁴ Radomski, 72-73.

known as the Work Division program.¹⁶⁵ After these four years, relief TERA came to an end with the federal government assuming responsibility for the whole of work relief through the Works Progress Administration, which absorbed TERA relief in New York City starting August 1, 1935 and in the rest of the state by December of that year.¹⁶⁶

The Results of TERA in New York State

In TERA, New York State had a program of unemployment relief that was profoundly significant, as it was the first state emergency relief administration to get under way, and also because it set standards of relief and personnel, established principles, policies and procedures, and adopted far-sighted imaginative methods of administration, which were later continued in Federal programs of work relief. For over five years, including the yearlong period when it acted in tandem with the federal Civil Works Administration activities in the State of New York, TERA was still the “central organ of advice, supervision, direction and control with respect to the statewide emergency relief.”¹⁶⁷

In the five years and eight months of TERA, approximately five million men women and children, comprising forty percent of the New York State population, benefited from TERA, either through home or work relief.¹⁶⁸ Total costs to the public were approximately \$1,155,000,000, of which \$234,155, 962, or 20.3 percent, came from state contributions. In the later stages of TERA, \$506,023,610 or 43.8 percent of funding came through the CWA and other Federal programs. Total local contributions over the duration were \$415,131,229, or 35.9 percent.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 73.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 74.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 183.

¹⁶⁸ TERA, *Five*, 10.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 31.

Expenditures throughout the state were commensurate with the size of cities and their welfare districts, as well as the districts of corresponding counties. The city of Syracuse was fourth in spending on work relief, with over \$4,310,297.75 in wages and \$830,523.25 in materials, which, combined with home relief figures amounted to \$10,905,782.28 in TERA funds allocated to the city in its five years. Only New York City (\$381 million), Buffalo (\$36 million), and Rochester (\$17 million) required more funds to meet the needs of their greater populations. As such, county welfare district expenditures (measured independent of city figures) were similarly ranked, with Onondaga County sixth in monies spent, behind Nassau, Erie, Westchester, Monroe, and Suffolk Counties. In Onondaga County, a total of \$1,208,225.10 was spent, with \$1,562,425.29 spent on wages and \$146,883.32 spent on materials towards work relief projects.¹⁷⁰ All told, over \$12 million was spent countywide in the five years of TERA, with some of the most significant projects enabled by these monies occurring in its first two years.

Roosevelt's initiatives under TERA (carrying into the early years of his presidency) had also been of benefit to union workers in New York. Labor unions had suffered in the 1920s as a result of several court decisions that ultimately protected companies by ruling that they were not obligated to offer a minimum wage, in an attempt to limit government interference in private enterprise. Union protection of workers had also suffered as a result of the Great Depression, and membership had fallen significantly in the early 1930s. Beginning with TERA, the early programs of the New Deal helped provide employment to union workers, while labor-friendly federal legislation such as the 1932 Norris-LaGuardia Act bolstered unions at the legal level by abolishing "yellow-dog" contracts (where workers contractually agreed not

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 65.

to join a union), preventing labor disputes from entering federal courts, and disallowing military intervention.¹⁷¹

Conclusion

No other governor in the United States had acted so swiftly and directly as Roosevelt to generate effective and pervasive work relief activity that enabled thousands of families to return to self-sufficiency. At its conclusion, an internal TERA report concluded that “so thoroughly was the program permeated with crusading idealism that the accomplishments were far greater than might have been expected of jobs with so little technical supervision.”¹⁷² The triumph of TERA was the commitment of everyone involved, from Roosevelt its creator, to the workers and administrators of the over one hundred emergency work bureaus across the state, to the execution of work projects as a unemployment relief, helping the citizens earn a living wage while improving their communities, and maintaining or restoring self-respect.

As noted, the earliest stages of TERA saw a split in the funding between the state administration and local emergency work bureaus, allowing for a quicker allocation of project funding at the local level. The addition of federal funding post-1933 certainly helped continue the duration of the program, but also added layers of approval needed and a more complex chain of command to navigate, which changed the tenor of the program, making it more difficult for local programs to expedite local relief projects. This was a particular problem in Onondaga County, as will be discussed in the next chapter. However, the earliest years of TERA, from September 1931 to November 1933, were its most fertile, and this can be witnessed through the work performed at the county level, much of which is still observable today.

¹⁷¹ Philip Dray, *There Is Power In a Union* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 413-17; bill sponsor Fiorello LaGuardia was a New Deal-friendly Republican representative and 99th mayor of New York City who is remembered largely for his support and legislation favoring unions and immigrants in the 1920s and 1930s.

¹⁷² TERA, *Five*, 42.

CHAPTER 3: THE ONONDAGA COUNTY EMERGENCY WORK BUREAU, 1931-1933

Introduction

By 1931, the cities and counties of New York State had an obvious and demonstrated need for work and home relief, and the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration was to provide the apparatus for the delivery of such relief. Ultimately, TERA would only be as effective as the emergency work bureaus created according to its rules and instructions. Therefore, it was incumbent upon local work bureaus to be as efficient as possible to maximize their effectiveness in providing jobs to able-bodied men on relief projects, while following the guidelines of TERA to provide consistent funding for work projects to improve communities statewide. This would be accomplished through the selection of key personnel to administrate the emergency work bureaus.

The Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau (OCEWB) was the most ambitious, effective and successful of work bureaus statewide. The most well known project of the OCEWB was the construction of Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway, and was the largest endeavor in scale and expense under the auspices of TERA. Despite being a very high profile project during its creation, and requiring considerable manpower and organization over the course of two years, the park and parkway was not the only work undertaken by the OCEWB. Dozens of work projects were completed in the two years of the work bureau as a state-run entity, before the administration of such work relief transferred to federal control as part of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and Civil Works Administration (CWA). (See Illustration 3.1)

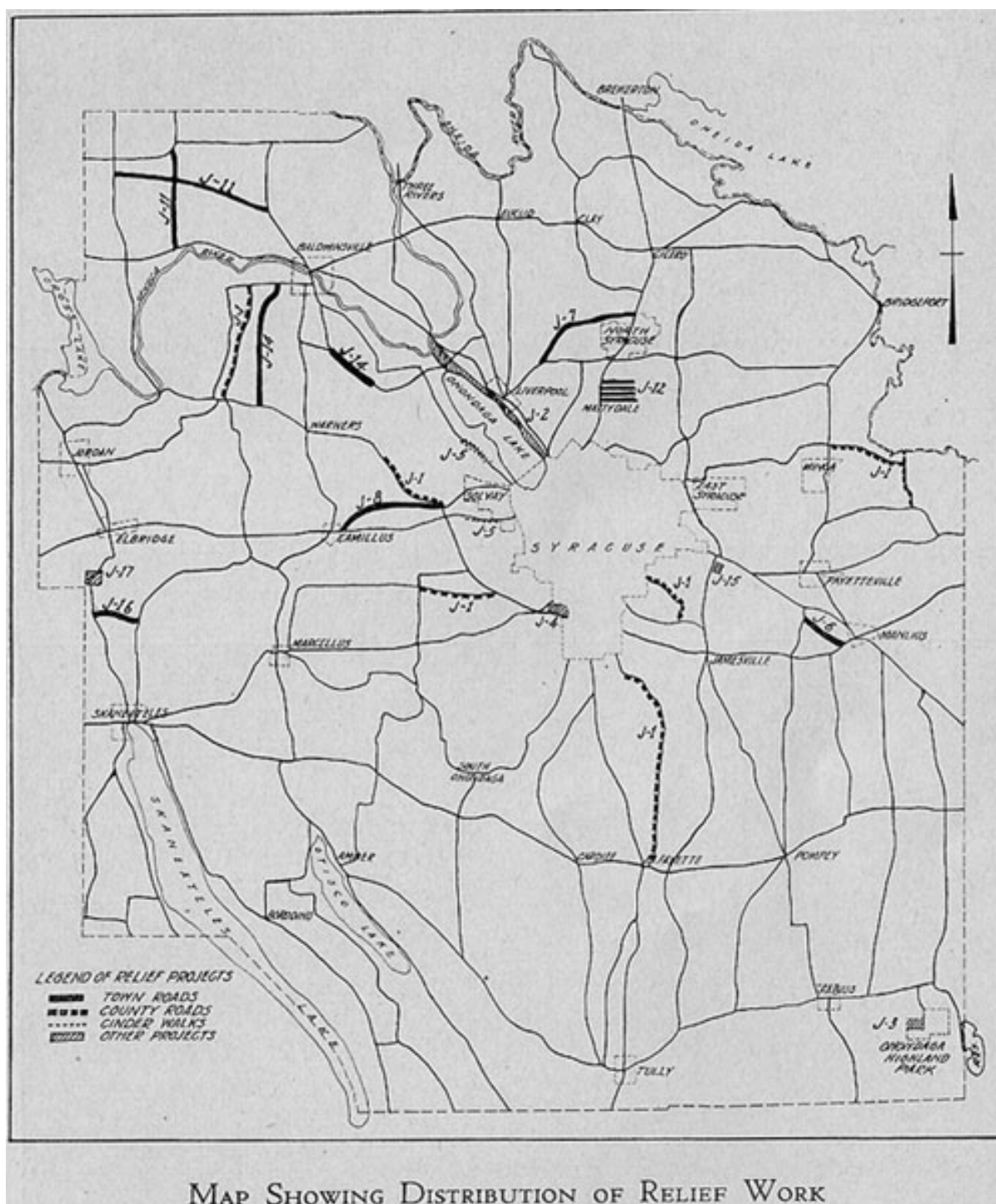


Illustration 3.1. Map showing distribution of OCEWB projects throughout county, 1932. From Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau report – collection of the author.

The OCEWB specifically excelled at the reclamation of abandoned canal lands into areas of recreation for public enjoyment. In addition to the transformation of a portion of the long dormant Oswego Canal into the Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway, a section of the Erie Canal running through the village of Jordan was reclaimed as a public park for village residents. (See Illustration 3.2 and 3.3) Though the Erie Canal Park in Jordan was not fully completed until 1934, its construction began under the supervision of OCEWB chairman Crandall Melvin, and is another outstanding example of a TERA project completed by the Bureau due to the drive and perseverance of work bureau administration and laborers.

The work undertaken by the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau has its roots a full decade before its creation. The plan for construction of Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway by the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau began with the establishment of a planning commission in Syracuse in 1919, and a proposal by the Onondaga County Park and Regional Planning Board in 1928 for a parkway around Onondaga Lake. The story of the demise of the OCEWB, however, is less known, and can be linked to political conflict on the local level, and also to the creation of the Civil Works Administration, as is discussed in the next chapter.

Proposed Parkway Around Onondaga Lake

While the west shore of Onondaga Lake experienced the rise and fall of several types of recreation throughout the nineteenth century, the east shore was dominated by salt production until the 1920s. The Oswego Canal was created along the entire east shore of the lake in 1828, as a north-south extension of the Erie Canal, to help facilitate the transportation of salt from Onondaga Lake to Lake Ontario.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Alexander, 12.

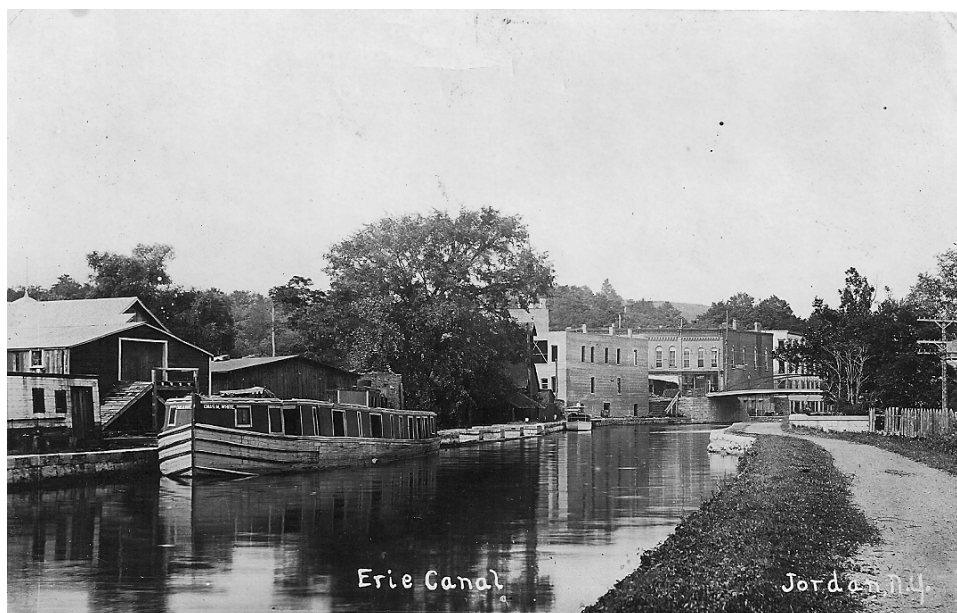


Illustration 3.2. Undated postcard showing Erie Canal running through Village of Jordan. From archives of Town of Elbridge Historical Society.



Illustration 3.3. December 1954 photograph showing Erie Canal Park in Village of Jordan. From archives of Town of Elbridge Historical Society.

After the construction of the Oswego Canal, no significant development occurred on the east shore for the next ninety years due to the considerable number of structures erected to support salt production. Use of the canal declined as the salt industry began to wane in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, finally closing in 1918.¹⁷⁴ The subsequent abandonment of this waterway allowed scattered initiatives to be promoted that would reclaim the land around the lake, including the east shore. Although they would not be immediately recognized, these ideas would lead to some of the most significant infrastructure redevelopment in Syracuse and central New York history.

Pursuant to a 1913 change in the general municipal law of New York State, a planning commission was created by the city of Syracuse in 1914, and its first comprehensive plan followed in 1919. Several of the goals contained within the plan pertained to increased use and development of Onondaga Lake, including the development of “a boulevard that would encircle the lake,” the redevelopment of the lake’s southern shore into a park, a boulevard that connected Syracuse to the New York State Fairgrounds, creating an “aerodrome” on Lake View Point, and “the development of a canal connecting Oneida Lake with Onondaga Lake.”¹⁷⁵ The lake was obviously a focal point of the planning commission’s plans, with the proposal for a boulevard connecting several parks in Syracuse helping facilitate the flow of traffic and trade. Such a boulevard “would serve as a tool to help develop the land around Onondaga Lake,” and not just the eastern shore.¹⁷⁶

Though the suggestions of the 1919 comprehensive plan with regard to the lake were not implemented, they formed the basis for an ambitious proposal less than a decade later. Entitled *Proposed Parkway Around Onondaga Lake* and published in November 1928, the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 33.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 34.

prospectus was produced by the Onondaga County Park and Regional Planning Board (OCPRPB). Secretary of the OCPRPB Joseph Griffin was “outraged by the destruction of the Lake,” and wished to revive the Syracuse Planning Commission’s 1919 proposal of a boulevard around the Lake by designing a new parkway.”¹⁷⁷ (See Illustration 3.4) The City had acquired the abandoned Oswego Canal property in 1924 and proposed the formation of a county regional planning commission to undertake the project, which led to combining with the Onondaga County Park Board to form the OCPRPB. Griffin proposed the Civic Development Committee to oversee its design, which the mayor approved, with him as chairman.¹⁷⁸

The inclusion of the term “regional planning” in the name of the board is instructive for their goals in promoting the lake as a truly regional resource. Griffin and the OCPRPB, which was comprised of several local officials, businessmen and distinguished citizens, recognized the value of the Lake. To this end, Griffin published a list of what he deemed “public benefits” to be gained in developing the proposed parkway, including the “widespread beautification of lands that will afford pride and satisfaction to the residents of Onondaga County.”¹⁷⁹ In attempting to plan for achieving this benefit to the region, Griffin lobbied for public support and collected dozens of testimonials, which, through the *Proposed Parkway* prospectus, he had published as an attempt to alter the perception of Onondaga Lake.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 41

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 42.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 42-43.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 42-43.



Illustration 3.4. Birdseye view of Proposed Parkway Around Onondaga Lake, 1928. From *Proposed Parkway Around Onondaga Lake* – collection of author.

The testimonials were almost entirely positive. One negative response commented that “the proposal for a 100 foot boulevard is wrong,” and that “very wide boulevards” are “more dangerous than roads of ordinary width.” The vast majority spoke of the expected benefit of a parkway and its positive effects, referring to the lake as being in a “present hideous condition,” and the city had somehow “disfigured this splendid piece of scenery,” which would be corrected by the Onondaga Lake Parkway. Multiple letters also remarked on the possibility of a beach for children, indicating this was not just to be an infrastructure project for the automobile, but one to benefit all ages through recreation.¹⁸¹

This was an expansion on the 1919 Comprehensive Plan. The proposed parkway would pass by the city of Syracuse at the south shore (depicted as benefitting from “proposed development”), traverse the former Oswego Canal site along the east shore, and coming to the Village of Liverpool, opening up this important direct connection to one of the previously less directly accessible suburbs. The east shore would be augmented by a number of historic sites, such as “Hiawatha’s Landing,” and “Meeting Place of Iroquois Tribes,” before reaching Long Branch Park at the north end of the Lake. The parkway along the west shore would travel near the New York State Fairgrounds, along the path of the existing boulevard from the city, but would also include a city airport at Lake View Point, allowing access to the Lake and city on the same site as the first west shore resort some fifty years previous.

The transformation of Onondaga Lake’s eastern shore was more dramatic because the 138 year-old salt industry no longer stood in the way. The development of the shore into a public park with a new yacht club, athletic fields, walking paths, and the planting of numerous trees and shrubs to repopulate the area with plant life was anything but industrial in nature. The

¹⁸¹ “Testimonials in Response to 1928 Proposed Plan,” MG2, Box 8, Folder B3.d10, Sainte Marie Museum Archives, Syracuse, NY.

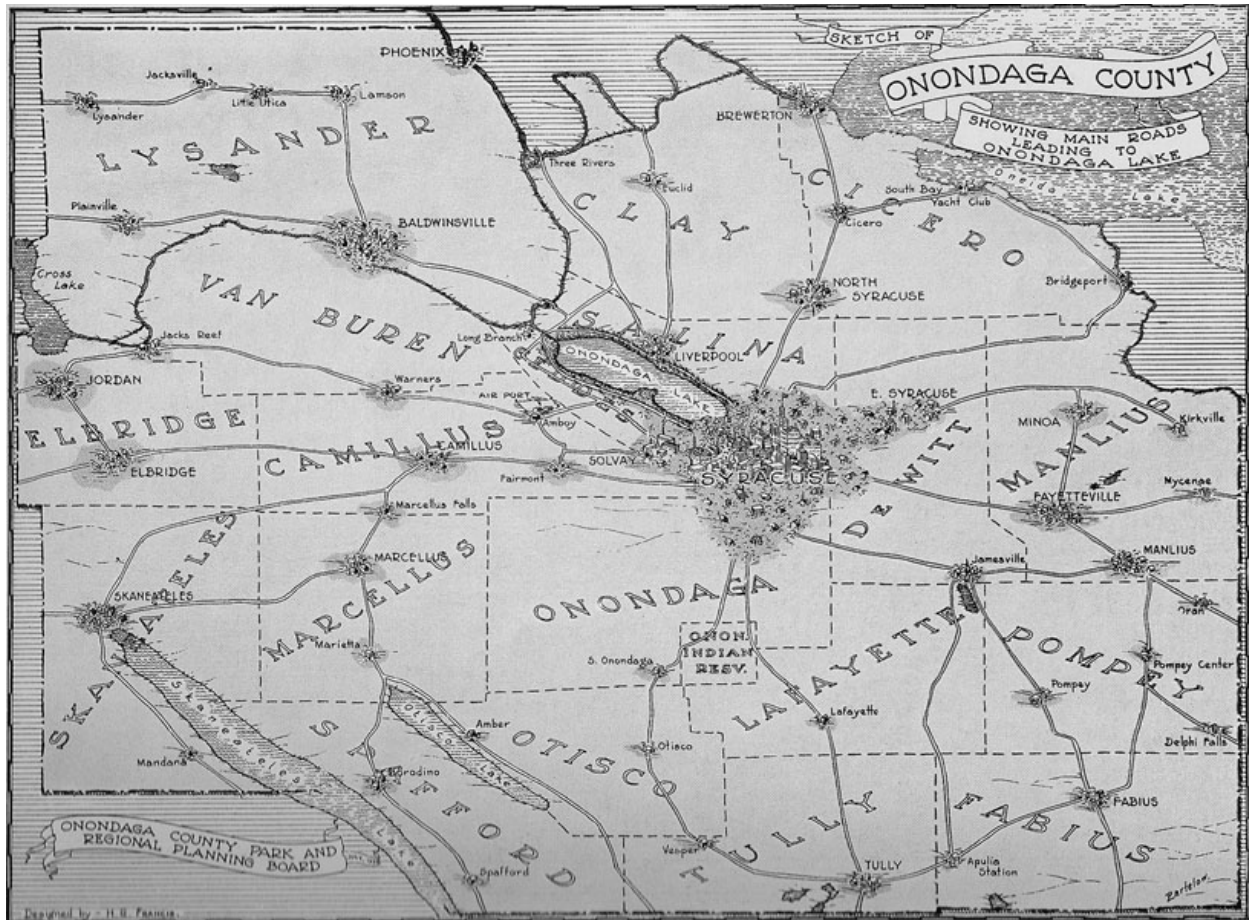


Illustration 3.5. Map of Roads leading to Onondaga Lake, 1928. From *Proposed Parkway Around Onondaga Lake* – collection of author.

park and parkway were suggested to be constructed atop the Oswego Canal, which would be filled in.¹⁸² As illustrated in *Proposed Parkway*, the OCPRPB had considered regional access to the lake, creating a road of maps leading to it, and connecting to its proposed parkway. (See Illustration 3.5)

A movement toward the construction of automotive parkways as public recreational spaces that was occurring in the early twentieth century likely inspired the motivation for a parkway around Onondaga Lake. The Bronx River Parkway was planned and built between 1906 and 1925 as the world's first automotive parkway, including a "reservation" extending over fifteen miles north from New York City, covering 1,155 acres, including twenty miles of cinder walking paths, thirty-seven rusticated steel-and-stone bridges. It was combined with efforts to restore the natural beauty of a landscape spoiled by modernization and pollution. This was achieved in part through reclamation of the land through condemnation and slum clearance, and removal of unsightly billboards, but also through the restoration of the Bronx River. Naturalistic design, before-and-after photography, and selective storytelling about the past of the river valley contributed to the effort to build a "memory infrastructure" that would ultimately feed a more clandestine program of landscape speculation associated with the construction of the parkway: to create a desirable place between the city and suburbs for not only recreation, but potential relocation.¹⁸³

The Bronx River Parkway was not the first parkway, though it was the first built explicitly to handle automobile traffic. Parkway had a precedent in the winding roads and paths of Olmsted and Vaux's Central Park of the 1850s in New York City, but also in Olmsted's

¹⁸² Alexander, 45.

¹⁸³ Randall Mason, *The Once and Future New York: Historic Preservation and the Modern City* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009): xxxii, 178, 182, 184-85; Mason's chapter on the Bronx River Parkway is the definitive modern analysis of the construction of the parkway, as well as the financial and social motivations of those who planned and would benefit from its construction.

proposed treatment of the Back Bay marshes as part of a network of parks and parkways in Boston in 1877. In 1892, Kansas City made a study of the city and considered the aid of a landscape architect named George Kessler who suggested a system of parks including almost ten miles of boulevards connecting 324 acres of parkland located throughout the downtown as well as outlying residential sections of the city.¹⁸⁴

The planners behind the *Proposed Parkway* prospectus were keenly aware of the successes and benefits of the Bronx River Parkway, including a two-page feature written by the chief engineer of the Westchester County Park Commission. Titled “Enhanced Values Pay Cost of New Parkway,” the feature outlined the successes of the Bronx River Parkway, particularly the costs and financial benefits of such a system.¹⁸⁵ The parkway envisioned for the west shore of Onondaga Lake would have several things in common with the Bronx River Parkway, as far as the reclamation of a polluted waterway (the Oswego Canal, as well as Onondaga Lake) and associated landscape to reap the natural benefit of the lakefront. A list outlining the “public benefits to be gained in developing the proposed parkway noted among the outstanding features that “the increase in assessed valuations of surrounding property will carry the costs of this proposed development,” and “the greatest public benefit will be the attendant beauty which will afford pride and satisfaction to the residents of Onondaga County in having its natural water gem furnished with an appropriate setting.”¹⁸⁶ It was this language of boosterism that carried this dynamic and ambitious planning project to the public, though it still had to overcome the obstacle of funding in order to become a reality.

¹⁸⁴ John Nolen and Henry V. Hubbard, *Harvard City Planning Studies Volume XI: Parkways and Land Values* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1937): 14, 42, 47; in an interesting coincidence, Kessler was rumored to have been consulted on the potential for a network of parks and parkways in Syracuse, though no official record of this has been located.

¹⁸⁵ Onondaga County Park and Regional Planning Board (OCPRPB), *Proposed Parkway Around Onondaga Lake* (Syracuse, NY: Onondaga County Park and Regional Planning Board, 1928), 36-37.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 13.

The *Proposed Parkway Around Onondaga Lake* suggested a cost of \$600,000 for acquisition of lands, filling in the Oswego Canal, development of land and water areas, and the construction of permanent structures. The city was to pay eighty percent of the cost, with Onondaga County making up the difference. The first year of implementation would cost \$100,000, with the filling of the canal projected for the summer of 1929, only a few months prior to the stock market crash of that same year. The plan for Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway did not come to fruition as immediately as was hoped, largely because the money was not available.¹⁸⁷

Filling of the Oswego Canal began on January 6, 1930. A *Syracuse Herald* article announcing the start noted that “a lake shore boulevard at least 30 feet wide is to be constructed on the site of the old waterway,” with sixty-five percent of the costs shouldered by the state, and thirty-five percent by the county.¹⁸⁸ Thomas Gale, former salt baron and then owner of much of the former salt lands east of the canal, agreed to donate the earth used to fill in the waterway, in addition to allowing the stationing of the county’s largest steam shovel on his property, which was relocated from Jamesville for the task. Despite this progress, the Onondaga County Board of Supervisors proclaimed its skepticism of the amount of time it would take to complete the canal reclamation project, noting “it is doubtful if the present decade will see it finished despite the most vigorous efforts on the part of the planning commission.”¹⁸⁹ Though it took over three years, the completion of the Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway would likely not have been as successful if not for this earlier excavation activity. A lack of funds halted further construction efforts until the passage of TERA and creation of the OCEWB.

The Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau – 1931-1932

¹⁸⁷ Alexander, 47.

¹⁸⁸ “Oswego Canal Filling Will Be Started Tomorrow,” *Syracuse Herald*, January 5, 1930, 2.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

On November 2, 1931, the Onondaga County Board of Supervisors named Crandall Melvin, Julia A. Ryan, and William Spaulding as chief administrators of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau.¹⁹⁰ Melvin, as the chairman, wasted no time in putting men to work. By the end of 1931, 400 men were employed by the county on relief projects, primarily on road construction or improvement, at forty cents an hour, eight hours a day.¹⁹¹ Work continued apace through late 1931 into early 1932. A February 1932 survey by the *Syracuse Herald* found that up to 40,000 citizens of the city and county were being helped by relief provided by the Emergency Work Bureaus, as well as the efforts of the City Welfare Department, Veterans Relief Bureau, County Welfare Department, Community Chest agencies such as Catholic Charities, and a man-a-block campaign giving 600 men working on snow clearance and ash removal. The City Work Bureau was at that time employing 1,000 men, with 10,500 registered for work, while the county provided work for 820 men, with 1,500 registered as able to work.¹⁹²

According to the 1930 United States Census, the total gainfully occupied workforce both male and female ages ten and above in the City of Syracuse was 91,059. This was almost 52% of the total population (175,453) of the same age group. One year into the depression, over 77% of males and 27% of females were still employed in some fashion in Syracuse.¹⁹³ These figures begin to illustrate the gap in city and county work relief that would later become a point of conflict between Syracuse mayor Rolland B. Marvin and Crandall Melvin. Though the city employed a greater number of men on work projects, those working

¹⁹⁰ "Melvin, Julia A. Ryan and Spaulding Named On County Aid Board," *Syracuse Herald*, November 3, 1931, 7.

¹⁹¹ "100 More Men Get Jobs On County Roads," *Syracuse Herald*, December 23, 1931, 6.

¹⁹² "\$175,000 A Month Spent For Relief Of 40,000 Needy By Linked Agencies In Syracuse and Onondaga County," *Syracuse Herald*, February 21, 1932, 1.

¹⁹³ Bureau of the Census, *1930 Census of Population and Housing, Occupations By States*: New York, 1083, accessed March 3, 2012, <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1930.html>.

represented less than ten percent of men registered to work, whereas the county employed over fifty percent of those men registered to work. At this point and as per TERA rules, city work projects employed only city men, and county projects employed strictly county men.

The dire situation with work relief in Syracuse raised anxieties that resulted in a thousand men storming the Syracuse Emergency Work Bureau (EWB) office on March 7, 1932, clamoring for work. The bureau was able to place approximately 800 men on snow removal for the Department of Public Works immediately due to a recent blizzard, but hundreds more spent the night outside the office until it reopened at 4:00 am the next day. This reflected the ongoing need for work relief projects, as well as the city's lack of preparedness to deal with the demand for work relief from its citizens.¹⁹⁴ Though the men of Syracuse were having great difficulty achieving work relief employment, many women were kept occupied as dressmakers and seamstresses in the clothing-reclaiming department of the Syracuse EWB, repairing and reconditioning garments donated by more fortunate residents of the city. Some local stores also donated cloth remnants, usually to be made into children's dresses, as well as shoes, leather clippings and sewing machines. The clothes made were generally for women and girls, as larger fabric remnants that could be used for men's clothes were not as plentiful.¹⁹⁵

The progress made at Onondaga Lake was significant enough to draw attention and praise from national officials. On a tour given by Joseph Griffin in March 1932, National Recreation Association park recreation service director L.H. Weir "expressed pleasure and surprise at the progress made" since his visit to Onondaga Lake three years prior, and characterized the improvements at the lake as "one of the most comprehensive and most important development projects now under way in the United States." Griffin enumerated the

¹⁹⁴ "1,000 Storm City's Jobless Relief Office," *Syracuse Herald*, March 8, 1932, 6.

¹⁹⁵ "150 Garments Reclaimed For Needy By Dressmakers at Emergency Bureau," *Syracuse Herald*, April 10, 1932, 6.

long-term plans for the lake pursuant to his *Proposed Plan* document from 1928, including “the reproduction of Webster’s Landing salt manufacture, site of the organization of the Iroquois Confederacy, planting of trees in memory of Onondaga County soldiers who gave their lives in the World War, club house for the Syracuse University crews and race course on the lake, and a lakeside airport.”¹⁹⁶ Though the momentum had been created through tremendous advancements in the construction of lakeside projects, only the salt museum and the Syracuse University rowing club-related improvements discussed by Griffin at this time would ever come to fruition.

In late May 1932, with work progressing at a rapid pace, Melvin requested the Board of Supervisors provide the necessary funding to extend the lake shore boulevard to Long Branch Park, farther north into Liverpool. Harry Hopkins, executive director of TERA, had provided an in-person guarantee to Melvin on a May 27 visit to the county that the state would certainly approve and reimburse such a project (estimated at \$250,000), as it was expected to give employment to 1,800 men throughout the summer. As the Oswego Canal bed had failed to be fully filled in 1930, Melvin requested a dredge be donated by the State Department of Public Work to use silt from the bottom of Onondaga Lake for the task.¹⁹⁷ The dredge did not arrive until July 3rd, delayed by high water and strong winds, as well as several difficulties encountered in towing the massive apparatus from Poughkeepsie to Syracuse via the Hudson River and New York State Barge Canal. Many men would be required to handle and monitor the pipe running from the lake to the canal.

Syracuse mayor Rolland B. Marvin took issue with the employment of strictly county men on such a significant project as the parkway. At that point Crandall Melvin

¹⁹⁶ “Park Expert Praises Lake Shore Work,” *Syracuse Herald*, March 26, 1932, 3.

¹⁹⁷ “Melvin Wants Lake Boulevard Extended to Long Branch,” *Syracuse Herald*, May 28, 1932, 3.

characterized it as “the only one of importance in the county outside the city limits.”¹⁹⁸ Pursuant to the laws of the TERA regarding welfare districts, unemployed men were to be taken exclusively from the county rolls for work on county projects. This tension would be repeated at several junctures during the existence of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau, with Melvin and Marvin pitted against one another on this issue.¹⁹⁹

By June 1932, the New York State Legislature had extended TERA another six months, with funding of \$3 million. Over half a million dollars was allocated to the Syracuse EWB for eight work relief projects, including work on Onondaga Creek, construction of a sewer, and grading of parks, playgrounds and other city facilities.²⁰⁰ Despite the increase in the number of work projects, city officials felt the need for employment was still not fully met in the city. Mayor Marvin inquired directly to TERA about the prospect of using city men on county projects, as the city paid an estimated 85 percent of the costs of county government. Charles D. Osborne, TERA secretary, responded that the Onondaga County EWB could absorb city men on their projects, but they could not be forced to do so by the city or state.²⁰¹ Additionally, some city work relief projects reported only 50 to 70 percent of men reporting for work.²⁰²

Still, Marvin was persistent on the matter, sending Crandall Melvin a letter (also forwarded to TERA chairman Harry Hopkins) underscoring that 550 men were employed on the Onondaga Lake Parkway project, and practically none were residents of the city. Citing the fact that fourteen percent of the population of Syracuse received public charity versus two percent of county residents, and that the need for relief was more pronounced in the city than in county

¹⁹⁸ “Long Delayed Lake Dredge Is Due Today,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 3, 1932, 3.

¹⁹⁹ See page 94 for more on this conflict.

²⁰⁰ “\$517,398 Work to Put 1,020 in Jobs,” *Syracuse Herald*, June 7, 1932, 1.

²⁰¹ “County May Use Relief List of City,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 10, 1932, 10.

²⁰² “Six Projects To Augment Work Relief,” *Syracuse Herald*, August 7, 1932, 2.

towns and rural areas, Marvin claimed it was only fair that city men be given “equitable consideration” in the allotment of jobs on the Parkway project.²⁰³

Back at Onondaga Lake, the first cubic yard of silt was pumped on July 11th, leading the *Syracuse Herald* to proclaim that “Joseph A. Griffin Sees Dream Realized As Onondaga Lake Shore Fill Begins.” Griffin spoke at a brief ceremony before county officials and residents, dedicating the Onondaga Lake Parkway and Boulevard to the people of the state and county as “America’s Garden of Eden,” and remarking that “it will be a happier day still when we can see 10,000 children bathing in the purified waters of Onondaga Lake, playing in the parks lining its shores and enjoying to the utmost the advantages which were known to a past generation but which were lost to the present.”²⁰⁴ Perhaps expecting imminent success, an aid project for extension of the parkway width to forty feet, allowing for four lanes of travel, was filed with the state in late July 1932, with the hope of providing continued work for men on the Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway.²⁰⁵

Such increased capacity may have also been expected due to the additional amenities planned by the OCEWB. On August 22nd, Sergei N. Grimm, project engineer for the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau (and also head of the City of Syracuse Planning Commission), announced the completion and filing of plans for the complete Onondaga Lake Parkway along the eastern shore of the lake. Grimm described the fountain at the entrance to the park and parkway “of a new design to Syracuse,” where...

Instead of solid jets of water playing up at the center of the pool, the water will be sprayed from the edges toward the center in curved streams of large separate drops and at night these streams of drops will be illuminated by multi-colored

²⁰³ “Marvin Asks Work at Lake for City Idle,” *Syracuse Herald*, August 28, 1932, 3.

²⁰⁴ “Joseph A. Griffin Sees Dream Realized As Onondaga Lake Shore Fill Begins,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 11, 1932, 6.

²⁰⁵ “K of C Takes Up Marking of Salt Site,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 28, 1932.

flood lights, providing a beautiful effect on the myriads of drops streaming and sparkling on the background of the darkness of the night.²⁰⁶

Former salt baron Thomas Gale donated the property where the fountain was located. He also donated the land along the eastern side of the Parkway (where the memorial salt well now bearing his name was later constructed). Grimm also described some additional features to be constructed or already underway including a swimming lagoon and accompanying wading pool, and a “building housing a museum of old salt making.”²⁰⁷

In August 1932 it was announced that the New York State College of Forestry, including project landscape architect Professor Laurie D. Cox, would cooperate with county officials and private architects “in drawing up a comprehensive long-time plan in devising ornamental schemes and in supplying a certain amount of nursery stock” for work at Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway. College of Forestry Dean Hugh Baker remarked that Cox and others would “assist in developing the landscapes by devising sub-plans for all immediate activities supply planting plans for the replica of Father Lemoyne’s stockade.”²⁰⁸

December 1932 saw the approval by TERA of ten projects for the county, and fourteen for the city, as a result of the \$30,000,000 bond issue passed the previous month. County projects consisted of grading and widening various roads across the county, “improvement of woods” at two sites, and, most significant, project number eight: “Filling in abandoned Oswego Canal which was purchased from the State for the construction of a highway from Syracuse to Seneca River in the vicinity of Liverpool,” which accommodated the extension of the Onondaga Lake parkway north as Melvin had desired. Emphasizing the importance of

²⁰⁶ “New Onondaga Lake Park To Provide Beauty, Usefulness and Recreation,” *Syracuse Herald*, August 22, 1932, 5.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ “Help of Forestry College On Development of Lake to Save County Thousands,” *Syracuse Herald*, August 21, 1932.

adding new jobs through these new projects, a statement from TERA executive director William W. Pettit in approving the projects, stated, “work relief, the administration believes, preserves the work habits of the unemployed and their independence, while it is a constructive effort in producing local improvements.”²⁰⁹ That same month, Gale Salt Well was nearing completed, with stone masons exhibiting “more than ordinary skill.”²¹⁰

Meanwhile, the winter saw no retreat by Syracuse officials in pursuing work for men on county work projects. City Supervisor John F. Giminski introduced a resolution at a board of supervisors meeting, suggesting sixty percent of those employed on county work relief projects should be from the city of Syracuse, again citing that the city paid eighty percent of the cost of county government. Melvin countered that one of the primary reasons for undertaking the development of the shores of Onondaga Lake as a county relief project was because the city would derive the major benefit from the parkway.²¹¹ For the time being, the parkway remained a strictly county affair, and while the county EWB was proceeding apace with work along Onondaga Lake Parkway, the city of Syracuse Emergency Work Bureau was having difficulty finding projects, aside from grading and landscaping improvements at the State College of Forestry, and proposed road-widening work.²¹²

The Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau – 1933

Despite conflicts between Marvin and Melvin over city versus county work relief, 1933 continued to bring good fortune for the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau. In early February, likely due to his success at administrating and undertaking work relief, Melvin was appointed by Governor Herbert Lehman to serve on a committee “to promote self-

²⁰⁹ “24 Onondaga Aid Projects Are Approved,” *Syracuse Herald*, December 3, 1932, 3.

²¹⁰ “Steam Shovel Lent By State Speeds Onondaga Lake Reclamation Project,” *Syracuse Herald*, December 11, 1932, 2.

²¹¹ “More County Work Sought For City’s Idle,” *Syracuse Herald*, December 16, 1932, 6.

²¹² “City Pressed to Find New Aid Projects,” *Syracuse Herald*, December 18, 1932, 4.

liquidating projects which will be financed by funds to be loaned by the Reconstruction Finance Corporation.” The purpose was not to grant emergency relief funds, as TERA already functioned in that capacity, but to serve as an advisory capacity for the conveyance of RFC funds as loans to be repaid by cities and counties. Robert Moses (then chairman of the State Council of Parks) chaired the committee, whose membership was comprised of primarily New York City businessmen and members of committees on public works and planning. Melvin and one other committee member from Rochester were the only upstate personnel, with Melvin the sole representative of a county work bureau.²¹³

Despite the slow start that year in finding projects for the city Emergency Work Bureau, the City of Syracuse received \$40,000 towards home and work relief projects in January 1933. This was \$24,000 above the normal forty percent TERA reimbursement, due to a perceived increase in demand in the city for relief of both types.²¹⁴ Also with 1933 came renewed efforts by Marvin to get city men on the parkway job, demanding that the County Board of Supervisors intervene and force Melvin to take the city men. Approximately 1,500 men were employed on the parkway, with an estimated one hundred being Syracuse residents.²¹⁵

By March 1933, the announcement was made that “one of the finest baseball parks to be found in America,” would be constructed as part of the “Liverpool Stadium” to be located along the boulevard along Onondaga Lake. Laurie D. Cox, as work bureau landscape engineer was among the staff responsible for the “soil and architecture” of the field, which was said to be patterned after Wrigley Field in Chicago.²¹⁶ This is one of the larger plans that never fully materialized at Onondaga Lake Park, owing largely to the demise of the OCEWB within

²¹³ “Melvin to Aid In Promotion of Job Relief,” *Syracuse Herald*, February 2, 1933, 3.

²¹⁴ “\$40,000 State Funds Given For City Aid,” *Syracuse Herald*, January 7, 1933, 3.

²¹⁵ “Marvin Again Asks County Share Job Aid,” *Syracuse Herald*, January 22, 1933, 2.

²¹⁶ “Modern Baseball Park to Be Available to Syracuse and International League, June 1,” *Syracuse Herald*, March 2, 1933, 22.

months of this announcement. Still, the parkway project continued to attract attention outside of the region for its importance. On April 15, Crandall Melvin delivered a radio address, per the request of the New York State Conference of Mayors, on the subject of county relief and the work at the Onondaga Lake Parkway. The conference of mayors had become interested in the major development of the shores of Onondaga Lake and their reclamation for public recreational purposes.²¹⁷

That same month brought a different kind of development for the OCEWB, as the state TERA began an audit of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau due to “alleged scandals” in its operation. It was actually the second audit of the work bureau by the state, and chairman Harry Hopkins stated that it was not an investigation, but merely a review that was a matter of course.²¹⁸ After three days of investigation, auditors announced they have “failed to uncover anything even simmering of an irregularity.” Crandall Melvin was reported to have laughed at the demands for an investigation and offered the full cooperation of the OCEWB, whose records were found to be in perfect order.²¹⁹ Despite these positive findings, six more TERA representatives arrived in Syracuse on April 11th to investigate charges of favoritism in the hiring and employment of men as well as teams of workers. Noting that the accusations were in fact rumors, the auditors still sought to resolve the issue by interviewing those employed on the parkway project as well as the people who passed on the rumors, who remained unidentified.²²⁰ Within ten days, the investigation concluded, with no findings of impropriety.²²¹

²¹⁷ “Lake Shore To Be Topic For Melvin,” *Syracuse Herald*, April 2, 1933, 6.

²¹⁸ “State Audits County Aid,” *Syracuse Herald*, April 4, 1933, 19.

²¹⁹ “Work Bureau Books Found Satisfactory,” *Syracuse Herald*, April 7, 1933, 8.

²²⁰ “Six More State Aids In County Relief Inquiry,” *Syracuse Herald*, April 11, 1933, 3; the source of the accusations made toward Melvin and the OCEWB is never defined in the historical record. However, it is likely that it was a surreptitious attempt by Marvin, his staff or supporters to undermine the authority of Melvin and the OCEWB.

²²¹ “First County Aid Inquiry Nearing End,” *Syracuse Herald*, April 20, 1933, 6.

By the end of April, public events had already begun to occur at the soon-to-be-completed Onondaga Lake Parkway. A “spontaneous, unofficial opening” on April 29 featured a college regatta pitting Syracuse University against nearby Cornell University, drawing an estimated crowd of 20,000, speculated to be “the largest ever gathered on the shores of the lake” and “the biggest crowd assembled in Liverpool in the history of the village.” The masses gathered along the shores and hills overlooking the parkway and lake, “near the legendary place of the formation of the Iroquois Confederacy, and the embarkation point of Hiawatha in the canoe in which he passed into the beyond saw something of the realization of the old settler’s dream of hanging gardens along the shore of Onondaga Lake, and part of Joe Griffin’s Round-the-Lake boulevard plan.”²²²

With the parkway scheduled for completion in June, approximately 2,000 men employed on that project would be without work. A program calling for the transfer of the bulk of Onondaga County’s highway construction from the Highway Department to the Emergency Work Bureau was suggested through a \$500,000 bond issue, needing approval by the Board of Supervisors. Through this change, not only would a large number of county workers from the towns with the highest unemployment rate in the county (Geddes, Dewitt and Salina) retain employment, but the county could receive a reimbursement of forty percent from TERA, which would not be possible if the work was performed by the Highway Department.²²³ This plan was potentially compromised by the May 1933 ruling of state Industrial Commissioner Elmer F. Andrews that minimum wage for work bureau labor in Onondaga County (independent of Syracuse) would rise from thirty to forty cents, but the work week would be scaled back to twenty-eight hours a week from thirty-five hours. Crandall Melvin asserted that he was bound

²²² “20,000 Line Onondaga’s Shore as Lake ‘Comes Back’,” *Syracuse Herald*, April 30, 1933, 1.

²²³ “Work Relief to Help Build County Roads,” *Syracuse Herald*, April 30, 1933, 2.

by law to follow this new rule, noting that though the overall wages earned by working men increased seventy cents, the overall productivity would decrease as a result of the shorter work week by one-third, as they would only work four days instead of five.²²⁴

On May 25, Melvin gave thirty-five town supervisors and welfare officers a tour of Onondaga Lake Parkway, providing in-depth descriptions of every phase of the development, coupled with the local significance of historical features such as the stone steps marking the spot where French priests and colonists landed in 1656, the proposed French fort site, the Jesuit Well, Griffin Field, the Salt Museum, Willow Bay, and Seneca Park. The visitors also learned of the crucial drainage system for the parking locations throughout the parkway, which were built on enormous beds of cut willows.²²⁵

By early July and with Franklin D. Roosevelt now elected President of the United State, the *Syracuse Herald* proclaimed Onondaga County to be “on the eve of the greatest road building program in its history if projects contemplated by Federal, State and county governments (were) undertaken.” Among the county projects proposed for the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau were conversion of a railroad right-of-way to a new artery to relieve traffic congestion in the village of North Syracuse, and, more significantly, the long-proposed beautification of the west shore of Onondaga Lake, reclaiming wastelands and eliminating dangerous railroad crossings.²²⁶ Residents of the Town of Geddes (to which the west shore was closest) had been pleading for 25 years for the west shore to be rescued from the ravages of pollution by the Solvay Process Company, and abandonment of the many resorts and recreational facilities that once lined its banks. After five years, the 1928 vision of Joseph

²²⁴ “County Raises Relief Pay to State Scale,” *Syracuse Herald*, May 12, 1933, 3.

²²⁵ “Town Officials Inspect Lake Development,” *Syracuse Herald*, May 26, 1933, 2.

²²⁶ “County Drafts Greatest Road Building Plan,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 2, 1933, 1.

Griffin and the Onondaga County Park and Regional Planning Board for the *Proposed Parkway Around Onondaga Lake* was a major step closer to becoming a reality.

That dream was soon placed in jeopardy, as on July 6th, 1933 the Work Bureau had to suspend all projects, due to the Board of Supervisors failing to commit anymore funds to work relief efforts until their meeting later in the month. This abruptly ended the employment of 1,800 men and women and compromised all active projects save for the water pipeline improvements at Onondaga Sanatorium, which would continue to employ 150-to-200 men until its expected completion a week later. A member of the board of supervisors framed the situation as positive, and that the unemployed who were not previously inclined to look for full-time jobs could now do so. Due to the passage of federal work relief bills, a new optimism pervaded New York State and likely the rest of the country, with the newly minted “New Deal” expected to cause factories to reopen in Syracuse and the rest of the state and nation. Unfortunately, this would not help finish the parkway, French fort, salt-water lake and bathhouse, and other features still under construction, now abandoned with only volunteer labor to guard tools.²²⁷

Whether original OCEWB member William Spaulding was disillusioned by the situation or felt his role was fulfilled, he resigned in the wake of this announcement. Work bureau chairman Crandall Melvin was already frustrated with the climate of work relief in the county due to persistent arguments with city administrators over the employment of city men on county projects outside of their welfare district. City officials argues that because the city paid 85 percent of the county’s taxes, their men should be employed on the massive work relief efforts of the county. Melvin replied that the TERA, not he, was responsible for the allotments

²²⁷ “County Halts Work Relief Until July 17,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 6, 1933, 6.

of money based on the number of men on work relief rolls, and their perception of where aid was most needed, and that there was no reason to employ men from the city work bureau.²²⁸

A number of factors likely contributed to the county board of supervisors' decision to discontinue funding the county EWB, as they had been for nearly two years previous. With the election of Roosevelt to president, and passage of \$3 billion Federal work relief legislation, it was boldly proclaimed by the New York State Board of Trade that "the Great Depression is over," and significant changes had taken place, including increases in numbers of persons employed, substantial gains in bank deposits, and rising commodity prices. Perhaps reflecting this shift in mood, the front page of the *Syracuse Herald* evening edition on July 6th, 1933 displayed the first in a four-part-series on "Hollywood Hangouts," describing the "rendezvous of filmdom's famous," while the stories of 1,800 area residents out of work was buried in later pages.²²⁹ Work relief was no longer front-page news.

It was no secret that Mayor Rolland B. Marvin was anticipating that Syracuse would be able to obtain some of the expected \$25 million in federal "recovery funds" New York was to receive for highway construction, or that he expected this money to go to the Ley Creek sewer project first and foremost. Though this project would primarily benefit the city, Marvin expected the county to shoulder the weight of the seventy percent contribution in the cost of the project (with the Federal funds covering the remaining thirty percent in the form of a loan) through bond issue, so that city monies could be spent improving and construction city highways and roads.²³⁰

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Fred Betts, "America Has Recovered, Says Board of Trade," *Syracuse Herald*, July 6, 1933, 1.

²³⁰ "City-County Relief From U.S. Awaits State Chief," *Syracuse Herald*, July, 7, 1933, 1.

Despite his frustrations, Melvin would not abandon his post or his duties as the chairman of the work bureau, publicly disavowing his proposed candidacy for Justice of the State Supreme Court, noting

No work bureau performs its full duty to the public and to the unemployed man unless work in the field proceeds with reasonable speed and dispatch. Efficiency of performance of work relief is not only a credit to the State and a benefit to the public but gives security to the unemployed; inefficiency and irregularity in performance of work relief discredits the State, cheats the public, and lowers the morale of men on work relief rolls.²³¹

Thankfully, the situation in Onondaga County was not as volatile as in other upstate cities such as Rochester, where the reduction work relief wages and work stoppages there had led to a riot of 500 relief workers at city hall in July 1933, forcing police to break up the crowd with tear gas and night sticks.²³²

Another possible motivating factor in the county discontinuing funding of the Emergency Work Bureau was a meeting between newly appointed state TERA director Frederick I. Daniels and Marvin. Following this meeting, the mayor told Syracuse newspapers that Daniels hinted at full federal financing for the Ley Creek project. If this were the case, the county board of supervisors would not have to raise any additional funds to pay for Ley Creek, which was sure to get underway after the completion of the Onondaga Lake Parkway, and would provide, by Melvin's estimate, employment for 4,000 men. Marvin was confident that Federal funding would fluctuate between the thirty percent previously discussed, and full funding for worthwhile projects.²³³ Marvin's assertion was publically bolstered when Daniels visited Syracuse for a conference of TERA field representatives and declared the state agency was "very much interested" in the Ley Creek project, which he characterized as being of "such worthwhile

²³¹ "Relief Work Public Duty, Melvin Says," *Syracuse Herald*, July 7, 1933, 6.

²³² "Police Battle Rochester Job Relief Rioters," *Syracuse Herald*, July 7, 1933, 1.

²³³ "U.S. May Fund Indian Dam And Ley Jobs," *Syracuse Herald*, July 9, 1933, 1.

and essential nature as to merit favorable consideration under the Federal public works program.”²³⁴ In the meantime, \$100,000 was still needed to finish Onondaga Lake Parkway, which Melvin suggested could come from a new \$600,000 bond issue, to be approved by the board of supervisors in a special meeting. The remaining \$500,000 would go towards county highway projects, “sufficiently large to provide work for the bulk of the county’s unemployed for the remainder of the year.”²³⁵

Two weeks after the work stoppage the board of supervisors had failed to furnish additional monies to the OCEWB to restart work relief. A \$1.7 million bond issue was held up by the board, using the justification that a number of men had found work in that two-week interval, and that factories would be starting back up and hiring new workers due to the National Recovery Act passed earlier in the month providing a financial boost to industry nationwide. In the meantime, Onondaga Lake Parkway had suffered considerably due to the work shut down. Shrubbery valued at \$20,000 was lost due to lack of regular watering, new grass had “burned to a crisp under the scorching rays of the sun,” and heavy rain had gouged out “big crevasses” in the terraces and landscaping of the Parkway. Equipment and building materials were stored under voluntary guard at the Salt Museum, while the French fort, Danforth Swimming Lake and Griffin Athletic Field remained unfinished. Crandall Melvin was called into conference with the Board, and the issue of city men on county projects was raised again. Melvin noted this employment arrangement would reduce state TERA allocations for the city and create additional costs for the county projects, which the city would have to bear.²³⁶ This would be an untenable arrangement

²³⁴ “Daniels Predicts 100% Aid For Highway Dam, Ley Creek Job Plans,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 13, 1933.

²³⁵ “Board Moves to Give Back Jobs to 1,783,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 9, 1933, 6.

²³⁶ “County Job Bond Issue May Be Cut,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 17, 1933, 6.

for the city, whose debt had risen considerably during the Great Depression due to heavy borrowing by Marvin.²³⁷

In lieu of allocating the full \$1.7 million bond issue, the board of supervisors authorized the county treasurer to borrow over half a million dollars in anticipation of floating the tabled bond issue at its next meeting. Approximately \$179,000 of this money was to be made available to the emergency work bureau, with \$75,000 going toward work to resume on the parkway, and \$10,000 allocated to the Erie Canal fill and improvement at Jordan. The majority of the loan was intended for twenty-seven county road projects designated by the board of supervisors, using men from city and county work relief lists. Three thousand dollars was appropriated toward preparing the final plans for the Ley Creek sewer project. Additionally, a new wage scale was announced where instead of working forty hours a week at thirty cents an hour, men on work relief projects would receive forty cents an hour for thirty hours a week, representing a net loss in time spent on work, but designed to conform to the rate paid to full-time county highway workers.²³⁸

On July 20, 1933 two hundred carpenters and masons returned to work on the unfinished parkway and its buildings, with Melvin commenting it was “the work bureau’s duty to preserve the investment of time and money on the east shore of Onondaga Lake.” Melvin also noted logs intended for construction had been stolen from the French fort site, which would have to be replaced at public expense. Though sufficient work existed for all the unemployed men on work bureau lists, only enough were allowed to return to work to finish the fort, swimming pool, athletic field, and Jesuit Well.²³⁹ By July 24th, 130 more men were called to the parkway to build

²³⁷ See Martin, et al. *Decisions in Syracuse* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1961), 41-42 for a discussion of the rising city budget under Marvin’s administration.

²³⁸ “Lake Parkway Project Is to Be Resumed On Thursday,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 18, 1933, 3.

²³⁹ “Resume Work On Parkway Improvement,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 20, 1933, 3.

up relief forces, and attempt to repair damage done by cessation of work three weeks prior. Additionally, fifty men returned to work on the Jordan canal project, though plans for that site were revamped to meet a limit set by the board of supervisors, limiting expenditures to \$15,000. The uptick in the economy precipitated by the enactment of the National Recovery Act was leading many to believe that the proposed bond issue for Onondaga County would be its last necessary relief measure, and therefore the amount spent should be curtailed in anticipation.²⁴⁰

In a July 23, 1933 *Syracuse Herald* editorial, Virgil Clymer, chairman of the Onondaga County Board of Supervisors, gave a summary of work bureau and expenditures to date, at the county and city levels. Clymer singled out the contentious Onondaga Lake Park project as a project of considerable value to city and county. He also made a point to distinguish between the functions of county and city government, perhaps as a public response to Marvin, stating that “county work relief projects have all been outside of the city, but the city benefits, of course, indirectly as it should, for it pays a very large percentage of the total county tax.” This subtle point punctuated Clymer’s editorial, which seemed to place the board of supervisors on Melvin’s side, due to his obvious successes as chairman of the county EWB.²⁴¹

On July 28, Mayor Marvin announced that he had worked out a deal with the state TERA that would allow 2,500 city men to return to work—on county projects. Stating that reimbursements would not be diminished (as Crandall Melvin had asserted), Marvin’s proposal was advanced by the state on the basis that emergency work projects in the city were lacking, and that city taxpayers defrayed eighty-five percent of the costs of county government. Therefore, Marvin believed the city workers should be allowed to share in county projects as a means of relief. Unfortunately for Marvin, the proclamation by TERA was only a guarantee of

²⁴⁰ “130 More Men Join Parkway Work Crew,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 24, 1933, 6.

²⁴¹ Virgil Clymer, “County Vs. City Relief,” *Syracuse Herald*. July 23, 1933, 2.

reimbursement, and not an *order* to Melvin to employ city workers immediately. That decision was still at the discretion of the chairman and the rest of the county emergency work bureau.²⁴²

As such, county projects continued to employ county men, per the rules of TERA.

Less than a month later, the board of supervisors authorized and directed the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau to employ as many as 1,200 city residents on county work relief projects. Melvin fired back that no such action could be taken if the county were to be reimbursed by the state for wages, as such a decision would require the approval of TERA. Marvin demanded a “show down,” but Melvin noted he was at the mercy of TERA, though he expected them to approve the men for assignment to county projects.²⁴³ Due to the general shutdown of county work relief projects July 1st, neither the 1,200 city men, nor 1,000 county men were employed on any project. As a result, a bond issue to raise money for continuation of the relief projects was considered inevitable, as money to be received from TERA for the month of August was only enough to pay the added city men for one day of work. The state only increased disbursements to the county by two percent, forcing the county to shoulder the balance of the wages to be paid from its own funds.²⁴⁴

Despite the work stoppage and delay, the OCEWB men employed on the Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway project were able to complete the road and a number of the amenities along the Parkway as planned in time for a grand opening in early August 1933. Attendance for ceremonies commemorating the opening of the parkway, nicknamed “Employment Day,” was estimated at 25,000 spectators. The program was slated to include awards to workmen who made the project successful, as well as dedication of the Jesuit Well,

²⁴² “Way Cleared For County to Take 2500 Off City Welfare,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 28, 1933, 3.

²⁴³ “TERA Must Sanction Aid Jobs for City,” *Syracuse Herald*, August 14, 1933, 6.

²⁴⁴ “County Seeks Funds to Put Men at Work,” *Syracuse Herald*, August 16, 1933, 3.

reconstructed French fort, and Salt Museum, and “several pageants depicting the founding of the colony” that now included Syracuse.²⁴⁵

The county EWB suffered another setback in August when the state attorney general instructed TERA that as the result of two rulings earlier in the year, county supervisors were not eligible to serve as members of emergency work bureaus. These rulings noted in part that although the board of supervisors appointed the EWB, the bureau was an agency of the state-run TERA, not the county-run board, who could not lawfully appoint one of its own members to a public position. This led to the replacement of original EWB member Julia Ryan and newcomer Arloe Sleeth, who had replaced William Spaulding the previous month. As Crandall Melvin was not a board of supervisors member, he retained his position as OCEWB chairman for the time being.²⁴⁶

Despite the consternation surrounding the continuation of work relief projects, residents of the village of Solvay, located across Onondaga Lake from the Parkway, were astounded by Melvin’s success in beautifying the east shore, and sought similar rejuvenation for the west side of the lake. The Solvay Chamber of Commerce, supported by many prominent village residents, adopted a resolution stating their representatives should press to improve the Geddes side of the lake, and arguing that the boulevard should circumnavigate the water body. This was in line with Joseph Griffin’s vision for a boulevard around the lake, as well as Crandall Melvin’s desire to continue the parkway to the west shore. Similarly, the state had been studying the possibility of building a highway along the west shore following the route of the abandoned electric railroad right-of-way.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ “Lake Parkway to Be Closed During Fete,” *Syracuse Herald*, August 11, 1933, 7; detailed discussion of the parkway opening ceremonies occurs in Chapter 4.

²⁴⁶ “Supervisors to Replace 2 On Board,” *Syracuse Herald*, August 24, 1933, 6.

²⁴⁷ “West Shore Beauty Urged As Relief Job,” *Syracuse Herald*, August 27, 1933, 6.

Emergency Employment In Onondaga County

On August 27, 1933 a survey report titled *Emergency Employment In Onondaga County*, written by Mary Elizabeth Johnson of the Syracuse University Sociology Department and School of Citizenship (with several other staff and faculty consulting) was published. In March 1933, Crandall Melvin had solicited Johnson, an assistant professor of sociology at Syracuse University, to make a sociological study of work relief in Onondaga County, selecting her own staff and receiving stenographic and clerical assistance from Melvin, but no salary or honorarium.²⁴⁸ Perhaps this was to keep in line with the theme of work without compensation as per TERA rules (though the report was personally commissioned by Melvin, independent of TERA or the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau), but the more likely motivation was Melvin attempting to obtain independent verification of the merits and achievements of the OCEWB, as this report was requested at the same time as the investigations into allegations of impropriety and favoritism by the Bureau.

A letter from Melvin to Johnson was included as a prefatory statement in the report, where Melvin stated he would be pleased if “particular attention” was paid “to determine whether or not any favoritism has been shown to any person or persons connected with the Work Bureau or in the administration of the affairs of the Work Bureau,” and to “make a complete investigation of the entire method of operation of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau, as well as the results from its operations.”²⁴⁹ As Johnson was unpaid, she was more likely to be unbiased, though her report was overflowing with praise of almost every aspect of the OCEWB. Johnson noted in her introduction that the Onondaga County Emergency Work

²⁴⁸ Mary Elizabeth Johnson, *Emergency Employment In Onondaga County* (Syracuse, NY: Onondaga Printing Company), 1933, 5.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

Bureau had “attempted an almost impossible task,” and had succeeded in providing “work on a relief basis, with economic and cultural benefits.”²⁵⁰

Emergency Employment In Onondaga County was comprised of sections devoted to the origin and organization of the Work Bureau; a list of projects with descriptions; quantitative analysis of number of men at work, ages, countries of birth, and former occupations; duration of work, and wages; number of men with households; property ownership; political affiliation; policies of the Work Bureau; discipline; donations; and a final evaluation. Several pictures, graphs and tables were included to illustrate the findings of the study, which was published for the general public using funds provided by a “group of citizens.”²⁵¹

Johnson concluded that it was “apparent in Onondaga County that work relief has *worked* and it has worked with fairness to all concerned, rather than through the devious ways of favoritism and graft.” With regard to the “important public works” that had been constructed and the challenges that had been faced doing so, she noted that

In a day when many and various enthusiastically initiated emergency employment schemes, both public and private, have collapsed, it is a matter of consequence that the bureau has functioned to provide twenty months of continuous employment during one of the most troublous periods of American economic history. While it cannot be said that the bureau has attained perfection the conduct of its complex program, it can be said without reservation that relatively high effectiveness has obtained under circumstances of utmost difficulty.²⁵²

Despite the magnitude of these accomplishments and Johnson’s public appraisal and recognition of the achievements of Melvin (whose “vision and unobtrusive wholehearted service” was singled out by the author) and the OCEWB, the activities of the Work Bureau had been curtailed by lack of funding and political infighting by the time the report was published. Johnson noted

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 7-8.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 5; the citizens who provided funding were not identified.

²⁵² Ibid, 93.

that, as a result of this inactivity, “large numbers of men were deprived of the security which has been maintained, often at great effort, throughout the existence of the bureau.”²⁵³

Ley Creek Sewer Project

By comparison, the contentious Ley Creek sewer project proved to be one of the factors contributing to Crandall Melvin’s disillusionment and eventual resignation from the Onondaga County Work Bureau. A work relief project had been suggested by Melvin in early 1932, but action was postponed by the board of supervisors until “more through investigation” could be made of the proposed construction of a \$1.75 million sanitary sewer with a new highway and landscaped parkway extending northeast to the city of Syracuse-town of Dewitt border at Thompson Road. The board cited a report by the ways and means committee suggesting that the 2,000 men employed on the Onondaga Lake Parkway would be better served at that project’s completion by working on building gravel roads for the county and the proposed elevation of railroad rights-of-way at grade crossings. The state had indicated its willingness to pay the entire labor charge of \$1 million for the Ley Creek project, but this did not sway the board. Melvin stressed that the Ley Creek sewer was “in no sense of the word ‘made work,’ but “a much needed improvement serving thirty square miles and 18,000, designed to eliminate ‘a serious menace to public health.’”²⁵⁴

No further specific proposal was made regarding Ley Creek until January 1933, when the announcement came that sewer reconstruction for the creek at the cost of \$1.5 million, hinging on the approval of the state TERA. If approved, this project would keep 2,500 men at work for one year. Engineers estimated that labor alone on the ten-mile sewer from East

²⁵³ Ibid, 3.

²⁵⁴ “Work Relief At Ley Creek Is Undecided,” *Syracuse Herald*, June 6, 1932.

Genesee Street through East Syracuse, Eastwood, the Court Street section and Mattydale would cost \$750,000.²⁵⁵

Owing to the prospect of continued work relief, Melvin set engineers to work preparing plans and surveys for the potential Ley Creek project. This work employed over two-dozen men, and was conducted from February 1, 1933 to July 1, 1933, consisting of topographic and right-of-way surveys, location studies for the sewer and disposal plant, study of sources of pollution and quantities of sewage, sewer design, and cost estimates.²⁵⁶ With this due diligence performed, it was only a matter of the county sending the project to the state TERA to obtain funding for the work, which the county would match and begin the project.

In late March 1933, Syracuse Senator George R. Fearon and Assemblyman Horace M. Stone introduced bills seeking to create a public works commission primarily to oversee the Ley Creek project. Similar to the emergency work bureaus, commission members would serve without pay, and duties of the commissioners would include preparation of maps for the creation of sanitary drainage districts, whose administration would rest with the Board of Supervisors. The commission would let contracts, but the OCEWB would have a major voice in supervising construction of the project.²⁵⁷ Upon the bill's passage in the Legislature, State Health Commissioner Parran wrote Governor Herbert Lehman giving his support to the "Ley Creek intercepting sanitary sewer," as it was known, noting the "serious public nuisance" created by the sewer.²⁵⁸

Once Lehman had signed the bill into law, work did not commence immediately, much to the consternation of everyone involved. Parran wrote Melvin in June 1933 to urge

²⁵⁵ "300 More to Get Work On Relief Jobs," *Syracuse Herald*, January 15, 1933.

²⁵⁶ Johnson, 29.

²⁵⁷ "Ley Creek Sewer Bills In Legislature," *Syracuse Herald*, March 30, 1933.

²⁵⁸ "Parran Backs Plans For Ley Creek," *Syracuse Herald*, April 18, 1933.

construction at the earliest possible date. Melvin agreed and noted that it was up to the Board of Supervisors to instruct the OCEWB to proceed with the project.²⁵⁹ In response to a report from the ways and means committee stating that reports about the sewer project “have dealt with generalities instead of known facts,” and claiming action at that time by the Board of Supervisors would be “inexcusable carelessness,” Melvin wrote a scathing letter to the committee, stating that he only sought the appointment of three commissioners in line in accordance with the provisions of the Onondaga Sanitary Sewer and Public Works Act. He went on to note that the committee had not adequately considered that the county’s unemployment required a large project where they lived, in the area adjacent to Ley Creek.²⁶⁰

A map published in the *Syracuse Herald* on October 19, 1933 showed the proposed route of the sewer improvement, from the town of Dewitt on the east, arcing over the boundaries of the city of Syracuse before ending at Onondaga Lake on the west, with a new parkway suggested by Melvin and the EWB to be built atop the creek between Dewitt and the newly completed Onondaga Lake Parkway. State health and sanitary authorities had advocated the proposition for Ley Creek for more than ten years to address its unhealthy condition.²⁶¹

Under the auspices of the newly created Civil Works Administration (CWA), new funding would be needed for the creek project, delaying it even longer. The sewer commission had received an approved loan in late November 1933 for a large concrete sewer main paralleling the old creek, with a pumping station and treatment plant for the lake. These were part of the original plans for the sewer, conceived as far back as 1929. But ultimately, no

²⁵⁹ “Health Head Urges Sewer For Ley Creek,” *Syracuse Herald*, June 1, 1933.

²⁶⁰ “Supervisors Blamed For Creek Delay,” *Syracuse Herald*, June 9, 1933.

²⁶¹ “Route of Proposed New Ley Creek Sewer,” *Syracuse Herald*, October 19, 1933.

provisions or plans were made for Melvin's proposed parkway over Ley Creek, and it was never built.²⁶²

Conflict between city and county work bureaus

In early September 1933, executive secretary of TERA Frederick L. Daniels issued a letter stating his approval of the proposal by mayor Marvin and other city officials to consolidate city and county emergency work bureaus. He stated that there was a "real opportunity to promote efficiency and economy in administration of home and work relief through such a combination," adding his encouragement that the mayor work with county officials to such an end.²⁶³ Such news was assuredly a relief to Marvin, given the rejection of previous proposals to TERA for a city work relief project to transport ashes and rubbish from residents' homes to the curb, because "the Administration (did) not feel that it was one that would reflect credit to the local Emergency Work Bureau and the TERA." Even though a similar proposal had been approved by TERA in late 1932, the city had never acted on it as a work relief project, despite having eliminated ash and rubbish removal as a city service in order to save money.²⁶⁴

While the Ley Creek sewer project continued to stall, the proposal for the continuation of the parkway extension around the west shore of Onondaga Lake was revived by the Syracuse Area Leisure Time (SALT) Plan, drafted by "seven organizations of men" concerned with the civic and recreational activities of the city. They suggested the development of a parkway along the lake between the State Fairgrounds in Geddes and Long Branch Park in Liverpool, as a work relief measure. The state TERA was said to look upon the project favorable

²⁶² James R. Vedder, "The Ley Creek Project and What It Means to Syracuse," *Syracuse Herald*. December 10, 1933.

²⁶³ "Approves Merger of City and County Relief," *Syracuse Herald*, September 2, 1933, 3.

²⁶⁴ "Ash Carrying As Job Relief to Be Pushed," *Syracuse Herald*, October 1, 1933, 2.

as an “employment plan affording permanent benefit,” and local advocates of the plan maintained a “west shore parkway would do more than anything else possible to restore Onondaga Lake to widespread public use.” The west shore was a popular resort destination for city and county residents prior to the proliferation of the Solvay Process Company ash beds that fouled the waters and shore of that side of lake. Crandall Melvin had already obtained an option at \$500-an-acre on the former railway property that contained a road running the length of the shore, anticipating its eventual conversion to recreational land. The deed contained a reversion clause that the property would return to its original owners if the parkway were not constructed. The cost of the west shore parkway extension was estimated at \$330,000, and State reimbursement was expected to exceed the usual forty percent, since the New York State Fairgrounds were immediately adjacent and would benefit from the project.²⁶⁵

As September drew to a close, the board of supervisors was taking no action toward the west shore parkway extension, and the Ley Creek project was still just a proposal with no work started. Crandall Melvin was frustrated with the turn work relief had taken in Onondaga County, and made his feelings publicly known. In a letter sent to the board of supervisors and published in the *Syracuse Herald*, Melvin stated his belief that the board was “in error in making an immense work relief program devoted exclusively to improvement of highways.” He noted that while he had always been a strong advocate of highway improvement, “there is a point at which such highway construction becomes out of balance with other more necessary, important and essential improvements.” The county had committed to spend \$1.25 million on highway improvements alone in the coming months.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ “Seven SALT Organizations Favor New Onondaga Lake Parkway Relief Building Project For County,” *Syracuse Herald*, September 27, 1933, 4.

²⁶⁶ “Melvin Urges New Program of Job Relief,” *Syracuse Herald*, October 1, 1933, 3.

In addition to the improvement of the west shore of Onondaga Lake, Melvin advocated for the construction of parks in the town of Manlius, Onondaga Hill, and at Skaneateles Lake, and building sewers in four villages and water systems in six others as substitutions for the road building program. Additionally, Melvin hoped to acquire land for park purposes upon Oneida Lake and at Otisco Falls; his primary concern was the matter of transportation for men employed on projects in the coming winter. He appealed to the board that transportation for unemployed men without automobiles is far more problematic in the winter than summer, and that it would be important to have the projects carried on where the unemployment was the greatest during the winter. He went onto suggest that the communities in question would be responsible for providing materials and donation of land and right-of-ways, while the county would provide the labor, and requested the board's response as soon as possible.²⁶⁷ His plea, however, did not stir the board to action.

Additionally, road-widening projects for major thoroughfares were undertaken as joint city-county relief projects, much to the chagrin of Melvin. Citing the problems with transporting city men to do work to which they were not accustomed, Melvin stated bluntly that "city men have been carried at a tremendous loss" to the county, and "the cost of placing city men at work on highways outside of the city was far out of proportion to the results obtained." To this end, the county only bore the labor costs for these projects, with the city covering the expense of materials and engineering service. Melvin noted that as long as he was chairman, the county EWB would "continue to function as in the past, quietly, efficiently and effectively, with no ballyhoo, but with full regard to the taxpayer, the public and the unemployed men and women."²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ "County to Do Widening of S. Crouse Ave.," *Syracuse Herald*, October 10, 1933, 2.

In yet another obstacle to Melvin's proven successful method of administering work relief, State Public Welfare Commissioner Elwood P. Boyle announced in mid-October that work relief for all men in Onondaga County would be abolished if the EWB did not adopt his new wage plan. Instead of the \$12-per-week system Melvin was employing, a budget system designed to provide each family with a fixed amount based on their needs, and the "breadwinner" (presumably the male head of household) would be allowed to work until that amount is earned. Melvin's wage plan, for which he advocated remaining for over a year, was a few dollars more per week than what was considered the absolute minimum, which is all that the budget plan would permit. Additionally, town supervisors and welfare officers, who had intimate knowledge of family needs in their own communities, were to be disallowed from certifying men in need of work relief, with social workers appointed to this task in their place.²⁶⁹ Melvin, staunch in his convictions of what made for successful and adequate work relief, defied Boyle's proclamation, and kept Onondaga County relief workers on the \$12-per-week wage plan. Melvin also refused to dismiss supervisors from the role they were ordered to relinquish. His justification was that the OCEWB had operated efficiently and effectively under the system that had been employed for the preceding two years, and he proposed to continue operating it in that manner.²⁷⁰

Melvin received vindication for his hard stance on his wage plan when Harry Hopkins (now the Federal Relief Administrator) declared that not only did he oppose the budget system, but that under the Civil Works Administration, federal aid would only be given where straight wages were paid, without the budget limitations favored by commissioner Boyle and mayor Marvin. With this newfound support, Melvin touted the major projects he hoped would

²⁶⁹ "Welfare Head Will Abolish \$12 Wage Plan," *Syracuse Herald*, October 13, 1933, 3.

²⁷⁰ "Melvin Policy On Relief Pay Defies Boyle," *Syracuse Herald*, October 18, 1933, 8.

be carried out as a federally backed public works project, including the west shore beautification.²⁷¹ Under the CWA, Hopkins promised President Roosevelt that 4,000,000 jobs would be created within a month, and 400,000 of those were to be in New York State.

The state was in a unique position with several public works projects in progress and relief rolls containing thousands of names. Therefore new jobs would be filled from the existing relief rolls and as well as with those already employed on work relief projects. Over 300,000 people would be employed by state authorities working through designated work bureaus (the state TERA had been taken over by the CWA, but still existed to facilitate these changes), with 100,000 directly employed by Washington, D.C. administrators on federal projects. Though the federal government was bearing all costs of labor, materials were to be paid for by communities, and any project that could not be completed by the initial CWA end date of February 15th would not be approved. If approved projects were not completed by that date, any subsequent work would be at local expense.²⁷²

At the conclusion of the second year of activities, the expenditures for the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau amounted to \$1,927,121.47, with \$775,000 in refunds from the state TERA, leaving a net cost to the county of approximately \$1.15 million. The Onondaga Lake Parkway alone accounted for \$1,153,245.85 at a net cost of \$738,378.60 to the county. Additionally, Melvin noted in this report to the board of supervisors, city men were now employed at county expense on road projects overseen by the county EWB. With the bureau singularly focused on its program of highway improvements, Melvin noted that no provision was being made for pedestrian cinder paths alongside the roads. Ever concerned with the promotion of citizen well being through work relief projects, Melvin asked of the board: “do

²⁷¹ “Melvin Sees Vindication of Wage Paid Aid,” *Syracuse Herald*, November 14, 1933, 4.

²⁷² “U.S. to Fill Relief Jobs Next Week,” *Syracuse Herald*, November 18, 1933, 6.

we want 100 miles of improved road with no cinder paths at the side and no landscaping effects, or do we, for the same cost, want 99 miles of road paralleled by a cinder path and elimination of right-of-way?" He elaborated that cinder paths could be built in the winter months when highway work was not possible, providing work for men while creating something of benefit to citizens.²⁷³

With the announcement of President Franklin Roosevelt's Civil Works Administration (CWA), Melvin and the men looking for stable work could hope for the best. Set to take effect on November 20th, 1933 the CWA also presented an opportunity for city, county and state officials to confer on a proposed consolidation of city and county work bureaus, for which mayor Marvin had been advocating for months. Proposed work bureau administrators would include the head of the city engineering department, county superintendent of highways, and other administrators. Initial state allocation of funds for work projects was set at \$25 to \$27 million a month, with Onondaga County expected to receive an estimated \$700,000 that would be disbursed by federal agents to civil works employees.²⁷⁴

With a strong work bureau apparatus in place, it would be likely that Syracuse and Onondaga County were positioned to receive the maximum benefits from the federal plan and suffer the least disadvantage. Crandall Melvin claimed that he could engage the 7,340 men eligible for work relief in Onondaga County on projects within twenty-four hours. Leading up to the official establishment of the CWA, it had been announced that at least 5,200 city relief workers and approximately 2,500 county relief workers would qualify under the Federal civil works rules within twenty four hours of the CWA assuming control of work relief. Wages would be fifty cents-an-hour for common labor and \$1.20-an-hour for skilled labor for thirty

²⁷³ "County Work Aid Expenses Are Reported," *Syracuse Herald*, November 12, 1933, 3.

²⁷⁴ "U.S. Cuts Relief Rolls By Million New Jobs," *Syracuse Herald*, November 20, 1933.

hours a week. The employment services of the TERA would be coordinated with the federal re-employment service, which had been provided master lists of workers, both on welfare aid rolls and work relief projects, by the state.²⁷⁵

The ultimate intent of this transition from state to federal control of work relief was to eliminate labor relief and welfare allowances to all but the most dependent and give employment and thus purchasing power to those engaged in industry. Yet within twenty-four hours, an event of greater significance occurred that forecast a grim future for Onondaga County work relief.

Conclusion

The success of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau was directly linked to the ability of its leadership to remain organized in the face of political and economic adversity, maintain control of its available financial and labor resources and put them to good use, and find large and publicly beneficial projects to employ men in Onondaga County. The ability of TERA to be extended past its initial six-month mandate enabled the OCEWB to flourish, but it was the guidance and determination of Crandall Melvin that allowed the bureau to successfully complete the transformation of the Oswego Canal into Onondaga Lake Parkway, enable the construction of the numerous features at Onondaga Lake Park, the conversion of a portion of the Erie Canal to Jordan Canal Park, and the successful completion of over a dozen other projects throughout Onondaga County in a mere two years. Only the ongoing political machinations of Syracuse mayor Rolland Marvin, coupled with a shift in the tide of federal work relief funding (with the establishment of the Civil Works Administration) brought about an end to his exceedingly productive tenure as OCEWB chairman.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4: THE END OF THE ONONDAGA COUNTY EMERGENCY WORK BUREAU

On November 21, 1933, the headlines of the *Syracuse Herald* boldly proclaimed “CITY-COUNTY JOB AID MERGED; MELVIN RESIGNS,” announcing both a new path of work relief for the City of Syracuse and Onondaga County via the Civil Works Administration, and the considerable loss of what had arguably been the most dedicated and successful administrator of work relief in the State of New York. Mayor Rolland B. Marvin was said to have “swiftly cut” federal and state red tape surrounding the “haze of misunderstanding and doubt raised” since the implementation of the CWA was announced five days earlier. Marvin’s plan to consolidate city and county relief work agencies (controlled by a three-man civil works board) had been approved by federal and state officials, fulfilling his goal of merged relief efforts between the previously separate city and county bureau. All relief work was transferred to this civil works body named by the mayor on November 20th, with Marvin promising increased wages, as well as an increased number of men to be employed. About 6,000 jobs would be awarded the following morning, with half going to those already employed and the other half to those on existing work rolls.²⁷⁶

While the pronouncements from Marvin were ostensibly good news, November 21, 1933 saw the resignation of Crandall Melvin as chairman of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau. Always the diplomat and dedicated public servant, now he lashed out at the forces he perceived to have brought about the demise of his role in local work relief. Stating in a letter to the public that he had intended to resign September 1 but had been persuaded by the TERA field representative to complete a two-year term, Melvin declared his

²⁷⁶ “Many Will Go to Work On New Jobs Tomorrow,” *Syracuse Herald*, November 21, 1933, 1, 3.

hope that “the death knell has now been sounded to the prying, spying, cataloguing, pauperizing, and budgeting system of work relief” resorted to by the city of Syracuse during the previous two years, which he believed had proven “most expensive, inefficient and un-American.” Melvin also noted that several individuals sent from Washington by Harry Hopkins had interviewed him concerning the policies and accomplishments of the Emergency Work Bureau, and indicated, “all of the major policies of the County Work Bureau have been drafted into the federal Civil Works Act.”²⁷⁷ Though this claim of a direct influence and impact on the course of federal work relief is unsubstantiated elsewhere, it is easy to believe that it is the truth, considering the success Melvin engendered as chairman of the OCEWB.

While chairman of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau, Crandall Melvin oversaw the conversion of an abandoned canal into a community asset, merging history, transportation, and recreation. This distinction was not limited to the Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway project, though that is obviously the most significant achievement of the OCEWB. The Jordan Erie Canal Park also stands out for its conversion from a stagnant portion of the dormant Erie Canal into a beautiful park, connecting a nearby school to the center thoroughfare in town. Perhaps less recognized for its relatively remote location in the western part of the county, the Erie Canal Park is included in the Village of Jordan Historic District, a distinction not yet awarded to Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway.

Under Melvin, the OCEWB was also responsible for the construction of Highland Forest, a county park in the Town of Fabius, in the southern part of Onondaga County. This continues as a year-round recreation site, though it was merely converted from forest and farmland, and not reclaimed from abandoned waterways as were the previous examples. The

²⁷⁷ “Melvin Quits County Work Bureau; Attacks ‘Ballyhoo’ In ‘Ineffcient’ City Relief,” *Syracuse Herald*, November 21, 1933, 1, 13.

contributions of the thousands of men employed at all levels of the OCEWB would not have been possible without the effort, perseverance and vision of Crandall Melvin, whose absence from local work relief was a harbinger for its decline in the completion of any projects comparable to those undertaken from November 1931 to November 1933.

Despite the unceremonious end of Melvin's tenure in local work relief, he still made a point to gather all relevant data and figures to aid in the transfer of authority from his bureau to the new Consolidated Work Bureau by the start of its work on the first day of CWA work. He noted that the new local civil works commission was afforded a "rare opportunity" of providing immediate and continuous employment for all of the unemployed men and women in Onondaga County.²⁷⁸

He continued: "It has been my observation that the disease of most politicians is neglecting to weed their own fields and busying themselves trying to find weeds in the field of those who are not seeking political office." Melvin stated that the "duties of the chairman of the Work Bureau have been most difficult and exacting." It had been necessary to devote all of his time and energy to ensure work was carried on "fairly and efficiently, and with due regard to all the inhabitants" of Onondaga County. Melvin and his brother's law firm lent their own staff to assist in work bureau duties as needed (likely free of compensation for the additional work, as per the stipulations of TERA). In relinquishing control and oversight of the work bureau, Crandall Melvin indicated to the board of supervisors, that "there is now at your disposal an exceedingly able, loyal and efficient administrative, engineering and clerical staff which will compare favorably with that of any business organization in the country," also passing on his system for tracking the amount of money spent (and how it was spent) and the various projects undertaken by this staff. This was important, as Melvin stated in his letter, since even though

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

the federal CWA program was going to swing into action immediately, the distribution and monitoring of work at the local level would be the responsibility of the Consolidated Work Bureau.²⁷⁹

He expressed his hope that his policies in conducting the OCEWB, which “withstood the storm of criticism and proven to be fundamentally sound,” were consistent with policies adopted by the federal government through the CWA. These were characterized as: effectively providing “continuous work of a constructive nature”; “absolute and total elimination of political favoritism” in the selection of employees; reduction of overhead and administrative expenses through cooperation of all persons involved; carrying on work projects with “reasonable efficiency and dispatch”; fitting each man to the proper job (“so that an unemployed bookkeeper is not places at ditch digging with a former pick-and-shovel-man keeps the books”); and locating work projects as near as possible to the centers of employment.²⁸⁰

Always thankful, Melvin closed his resignation letter with acknowledgment of the untiring efforts of town supervisors and welfare officers, as well as the many individuals and organizations not associated with the work bureau in anyway, but gave “much time, energy and skill in order that the county work bureau might function quietly, effectively and purposefully.” Of course, a separate letter was addressed to the army of relief workers who had been under Melvin’s direction for two years, in which he announced the relinquishing of his duties with regrets, expressing his “deep appreciation of the courtesy, cooperation, loyalty and devotion” shown by the workers.²⁸¹

The Beginning and End of the Consolidated Work Bureau

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

Under the initial CWA plan, 297,000 jobs were to be made available in New York State in the first three months at a cost of \$25,740,000. In Onondaga County in those three months, with a \$700,000 wage quota, 4,000 jobs were likely to be made available for the city-county work bureau, which had 3,250 men enrolled for work relief in the city and 3,100 men enrolled at the county level.²⁸² Projects submitted for CWA approval for Syracuse alone included: repair of municipal buildings, grading and widening of numerous city roads, pruning and removal of hazardous trees, playground improvement and supervision, and creek and sewer repair and cleaning. None of these were major construction projects, and none had been started or approved, partially due to the work stoppages that had curtailed Crandall Melvin's plan for Ley Creek and the west shore extension of the Onondaga Lake Parkway.²⁸³ Though the Ley Creek sewer project had been approved by the Public Works Administration (PWA) for funding on November 4th, funds still had not been dispersed. It did not qualify as a CWA project, as it was expected to take much longer than the four months allowed under CWA rules, and also due to it already having been approved for PWA funding.²⁸⁴

The CWA lasted just four months, drawing to a close March 30, 1934. For the nation, it was a quick and ambitious effort at addressing widespread unemployment. Average employment from the beginning of the CWA on December 1, 1933 to the end date was three million people, with four million being the highest number at any one time, and a payroll of a little over \$60 million a week. The high cost of labor and materials under the CWA, expending approximately \$1 billion in only four months, was one of the lightning rods for criticism of the program, and federal work relief endeavors in general.²⁸⁵ Other controversies, such as equal pay

²⁸² "Figure Story Of What Federal Job Plan Means For Syracuse," *Syracuse Herald*, November 21, 1933, 3.

²⁸³ "City Has Work For Hundreds More Waiting," *Syracuse Herald*, November 21, 1933, 3.

²⁸⁴ "Washington Word Awaited On Ley Creek," *Syracuse Herald*, November 21, 1933, 3.

²⁸⁵ "CWA Comes to An End; 'Success' Says Hopkins," *Syracuse Herald*, March 30, 1934.

between black and white laborers, had President Roosevelt concerned he would lose Democratic seats in upcoming midterm congressional elections, and he ordered Hopkins to shut the CWA down after the winter had passed.²⁸⁶

Work relief activities by the consolidated Syracuse and Onondaga Work Bureau were suspended in early 1934, resuming on April 2, 1934, though with 2,900 less workers. Work bureau officials were optimistic that 8,000 could be employed on relief projects within a week.²⁸⁷ In the wake of the dissolution of the CWA, the consolidated Syracuse and Onondaga County work bureau assumed responsibility for providing jobs for the 8,000 men and women that would be left unemployed. As control of state relief shifted back solely to the TERA, quotas were established for counties, with funds only available to cover 6,500 jobs, leaving 1,500 men and women out of a job immediately. A lack of complete and definite instructions from TERA on projects and administration led the central New York TERA field representative to advise the work bureau to continue along lines followed by the CWA, though long-term funding was uncertain.²⁸⁸

In going out of existence, the CWA left unpaid payrolls and purchases amounting to over \$2.6 million. Proposals for funding relief in the absence of this money suggested the county pay all costs of work relief, leading to a disagreement echoing the city and county clash over shared work relief just prior to the creation of the CWA, where the city claimed it paid for eighty percent of the cost of county government, and county officials responding that 5,500 of the workers allowed under the new program were to be from Syracuse, with only 1,000 coming from the rest of the towns in the county. Maximum TERA funds for the city were set at

²⁸⁶ Charles Peters and Timothy Noah, "Wrong Harry," *Slate.com*, January 26, 2009. <http://www.slate.com/id/2209781> (accessed October 10, 2010).

²⁸⁷ "CWA's End Costs 2,900 Their Jobs," *Syracuse Herald*, April 2, 1934, 3.

²⁸⁸ "Work Relief Forces 1,500 Under Quota," *Syracuse Herald*, April 2, 1934, 3.

\$550,000, and \$200,000 for the county. Factoring in the seventy-five percent reimbursement allowed under new TERA rules, the city could only expect to see \$412,500, and the county \$150,000. TERA chairman Albert Schoellkopf indicated those figures would decrease monthly thereafter.²⁸⁹

With the CWA out of the picture, the state TERA attempted to coordinate provisions for work relief with the consolidated work bureau, with interest focused on “measures for the building arts and industries, including engineering, designing, architecture and structural handicraft.” Unlike the original reimbursement plan under TERA, monies were to be allocated on a much stricter basis, with municipalities not expected to exceed budgets, unless they were prepared to shoulder the costs without reimbursement.²⁹⁰ The consolidated work bureau continued many of the projects that had been occurring under the CWA, which were similar in type to those carried out from the start of TERA, including work at Green Lake State Park and Onondaga Sanatorium; various road, creek, park, and school improvements; clerical work; and an historic building survey, possibly in conjunction with the Historic American Building Survey then underway.²⁹¹

However, within three weeks, CWB work relief projects employed 5,000 fewer men and women that they had at the peak of CWA activities, with one hundred additional administrative personnel dismissed. For those still employed, confusion and lack of organization led to men being assigned to jobs in inconvenient locations. In one instance, men were pulled off of work at Green Lake State Park and reassigned to Onondaga Lake Parkway, but since they resided closer to the state park, they had no method of transportation to the parkway, so that only twenty-two of one hundred men reported to work. Additionally, towns had begun to withdraw

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ “Remodeling And Repair of Houses Urged,” *Syracuse Herald*, April 4, 1934, 1.

²⁹¹ “Work Program Mapped By Consolidated Bureau,” *Syracuse Herald*, April 2, 1934, 3.

from work relief activities and participation in the Consolidated Work Bureau, with Salina and Pompey the first to cease operation, and Dewitt and Onondaga threatening to follow. The county board of supervisors began to consider complete abandonment of work relief. With the Syracuse Common Council failing to appropriate sufficient funds, the CWB did not even have money for adequate telephone services or office supplies.²⁹²

On April 21, 1934, Mayor Marvin ordered “drastic and immediate curtailment of Syracuse participation in work relief,” bring all work projects in Onondaga County to an end by May 15. This effectively threw 7,000 men and women back on the “dole” system of relief, and spelled the end of the era of work relief that had been in place in one form another since the creation of TERA in November 1931. Citing that a record number of Syracuse families comprised the welfare load, Marvin stated that there was “no practical and common sense alternative except to save in every way that is reasonable,” and expressed his hope that federal loans to various industries would provide a way out of the “awesome situation created by widespread unemployment.” Under the new policy of “nothing but home relief,” the city and county would pay twenty-five percent of the cost of relief, with federal and state government covering the remaining seventy-five percent, and the costs of materials and supplies eliminated entirely. Marvin specifically decried the failure of work relief programs to provide for “maintenance of benefits created by the CWA or Consolidated Work Bureau.”²⁹³ By May 1934, all towns within the county had abandoned work relief entirely, and TERA allocations had shrunk considerably due to the almost total elimination of projects, as only a few remained to be completed in the city.²⁹⁴

OCEWB Personnel

²⁹² “Consolidated Work Bureau Forces Cut, Wages Sliced,” *Syracuse Herald*, April 20, 1934, 3.

²⁹³ “Mayor to Curtail Relief Work, 7,000 to Go On ‘Dole,’” *Syracuse Herald*, April 22, 1934.

²⁹⁴ “County Relief Fund Slashed to \$490,000,” *Syracuse Herald*, June 2, 1934, 6.

The Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau was alleged to be among the most productive and successful work bureaus in the state, with nearly twenty percent of the population of the county public welfare district in some way been assisted by work relief. The bureau also boasted a significant number of men benefitted by work relief in this time period, with a total of 3882 men worked for longer or shorter periods, on all projects from November 1931 up to and including April 15, 1933.²⁹⁵ Considering this was a county work bureau, it stands to reason the laborers were from the area, and the location of a project such as the parkway this area made employment easily available to residents of the two largest townships, Geddes and Salina. In 1933, the year the park opened, 2,056 men were employed on the parkway project, or 94.2% of all men working on county work relief projects. To this date, expenditures totaled \$745,744.07.²⁹⁶

It is important to note that aside from certain “white collar” office positions, men did all work relief labor, while 18.8% of County Work Bureau laborers had a country of birth other than the United States, with zero percent being Negro or Native American. With eighty-one of the labor force being predominantly white male the Emergency Work Bureau, and likely TERA as a whole, varied from later Roosevelt initiatives that had banned racial discrimination.²⁹⁷ Fortunately, as Johnson’s study of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau mentioned, “there is report of little, if any, friction between native-born and foreign-born workers. Statistics indicate no discrimination along lines of nationality.”²⁹⁸

As there was no discrimination based on class distinction, there was no wage-based discrimination either. A breakdown of wages paid shows that the average wage paid over

²⁹⁵ Johnson, 36.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, 17.

²⁹⁷ TERA, 18.

²⁹⁸ Johnson, 57.

a two-year period was between \$8.51 and \$9.50, with the wages ranging from under fifty cents per week to over \$24.51 per week. As noted in the final report of TERA in 1936, “people on relief have not been an economically homogenous group...they have been a fair cross-section of the population.” The playing field was leveled by TERA, however, such that laborers came from a wide variety of backgrounds to do a great number of types of work.²⁹⁹ Similarly, men of all ages, from ages fifteen to seventy-five were employed throughout the county on all projects. TERA, in its program of public works construction through emergency work bureaus, “offered employment to a multitude of men in every walk of life and of every variety of training,” and provided a program “oriented to human welfare rather than financial profit or dividends to stockholders.”³⁰⁰ A 1933 article in the *Syracuse Herald* called Onondaga Lake Park “the most pretentious park in Central New York,” remarking “the new playground will provide many forms of recreation, and more than 2,000 men can look with pride upon the development which gave them much needed work and furnished Syracuse and Onondaga County with a play spot on land abounding with historical interest.”³⁰¹

An obvious local success in terms of use of large-scale work relief to create functional infrastructure, augmented with interpretive historical sites, the Emergency Work Bureau efforts in creating Onondaga Lake Parkway also came to the attention of the federal relief effort. Lorena Hickok traveled across the country as a clandestine investigator for Harry Hopkins, former director of TERA and then director of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), observing various relief projects and reporting back to Hopkins by

²⁹⁹ Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, “Five Million People, One Billion Dollars: Final Report of The Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, November 1, 1931—June, 30, 1937” (Albany, New York: The Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, 1937), 9.

³⁰⁰ Johnson, 73.

³⁰¹ “Onondaga Lake Parkway, Which Provided 2,000 Jobs In Making, Ready to Open to Public About June 1,” *Syracuse Herald*, April 28, 1933; the tone of the article implies “pretentious” is used as a term of praise.

letter. On a September 1933 tour of Onondaga County sites with Crandall Melvin, she remarked that, “standards in Syracuse are higher than in any other city in the state.”³⁰² She lavished particular praise on the Onondaga Lake Parkway, writing to Hopkins

This is the most ambitious work project I’ve seen anywhere, and it’s a dandy. It includes a public swimming pool, built at a fairly low cost and used by over 100,000 people at the end of the summer, a reproduction of an old French fort, a salt museum and an athletic field to be used by all the schools in the county. It provided for all sorts of skilled labor the kind of work they knew how to do. There were jobs for draughtsmen, stone masons—they’ve laid miles of some of the nicest stone walls I ever saw—carpenters, and so on.³⁰³

Unfortunately, the efforts of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau under Crandall Melvin had already come to an end by that point.³⁰⁴ Melvin was noted by Hickok as being “thoroughly disgusted” by the turn of events that had led to his ambitious plan for the Ley Creek sewer as a subsequent work relief project being turned over to a local contractor as an act of political favoritism.³⁰⁵

Nevertheless, the impact and positive effects of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau were immediately observable upon their completion. One need only cursorily glance at a series of before and after photographs depicting the changes enacted by the Work Bureau, reclaiming marshy lands for roads that are still highly traveled, and locally and regionally important, almost eighty years after their construction. (See Illustration 4.1 and 4.2) The largely hidden or forgotten history of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau and its effects on the construction of Onondaga Lake Parkway and beautification of Onondaga Lake are an immense contribution worthy of attention and even further examination.

³⁰² Lorena A. Hickok, *One Third Of A Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports On The Great Depression*, (Urbana, IL: University Of Illinois Press, 1981), 32.

³⁰³ Ibid, 33.

³⁰⁴ Johnson, 3.

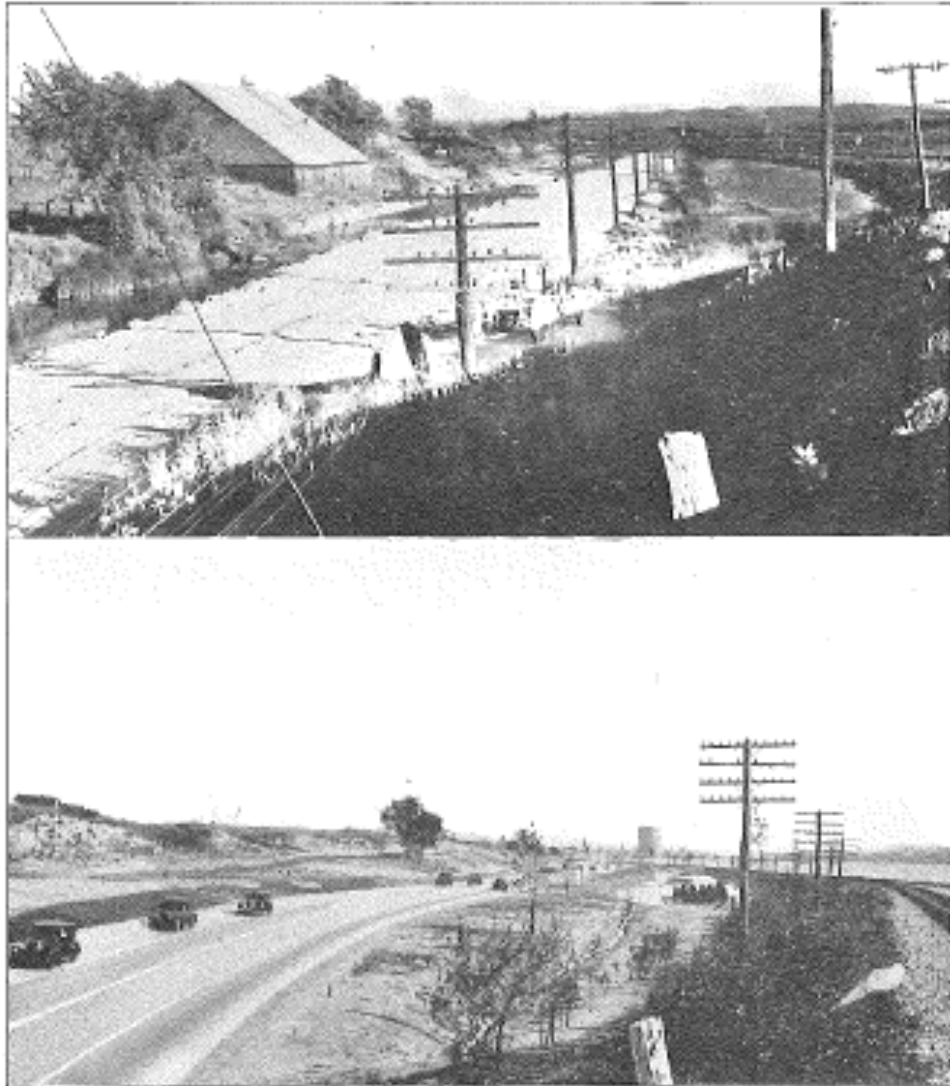
³⁰⁵ Ibid.

The accomplishments of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau were successful in an immediate and measurable way, with “some 15,000 men and women in Onondaga County at work between 1931 and 1933,” the peak years of the Great Depression,” with the results of their efforts observable throughout the region.³⁰⁶ Remarking on the fulfillment of first Syracuse mayor Harvey Baldwin’s “hanging garden” vision of Onondaga Lake, Michael Alexander correctly asserts that “Joseph Griffin, the park’s designer, and Crandall Melvin, the man responsible for the implementation of Griffin’s plan, should be celebrated for their efforts to reclaim Onondaga Lake for a more appropriate and civilized use.”³⁰⁷

Griffin and Melvin are just two of the many important and high profile individuals involved in the planning, administration and execution of the projects of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau, but they are also perhaps the most significant. Griffin’s contribution to the area is immortalized through his name adorning the Griffin Memorial Field and administration building at Onondaga Lake Park, though it is difficult to know if there is a local recognition or understanding of who he was or why he was important. The same can be said for Crandall Melvin, project landscape architect Laurie D. Cox, project

³⁰⁶ Crandall Melvin, Sr., *A History of The Merchants National Bank and Trust Company of Syracuse, New York* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, 1969), 83.

³⁰⁷ Alexander, 51.



Looking South from Railway Bridge—Onondaga Lake Parkway

Illustration 4.1. Before and after view of Onondaga Lake Parkway, 1933. From *Emergency Employment In Onondaga County* – collection of the author.



Development of Onondaga Lake Parkway: French Fort on the Hill in Upper Picture

Illustration 4.2. Before and after view of Onondaga Lake Parkway, 1933. From *Emergency Employment In Onondaga County* – collection of the author.

engineer and later Syracuse City Planning Commission member Sergei Grimm, and the membership of the Onondaga County Park and Regional Planning Board, for their contributions to local history, and urban development in a variety of ways. However it is the efforts of Melvin and Cox, among the dozens of other contributors to this phase of TERA in Onondaga County, which should be examined closer for particular significance.

Conclusion

Despite the abrupt end of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau and subsequent resignation of chairman Crandall Melvin, it appeared that plenty of projects were available to sustain work relief activities under the newly enacted Civil Works Administration of November 1933. While the CWA was of great importance in the employment of men throughout the nation in states that did not yet have work relief programs, its policies actually limited the work able to be done in Onondaga County, which was a direct result of interference by city of Syracuse mayor Rolland B. Marvin in work planned for the OCEWB by Crandall Melvin. Without this roadblock, the work done by the OCEWB could have continued the parkway around all of Onondaga Lake as originally envisioned, as well as included the construction of another proposed parkway atop Ley Creek, connecting Onondaga Lake Parkway to Thompson Road, a major road at the eastern border of the City of Syracuse. Despite the full potential of the OCEWB not being realized due to local political conflict, its triumphs greatly overshadow any drawbacks, and are deserving of further exploration.

CHAPTER 5: ONONDAGA LAKE PARK AND PARKWAY & JORDAN ERIE CANAL PARK

Introduction

To fully illustrate the success of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau from 1931 to 1933, one must examine its projects. Of the thirty-two projects by the OCEWB, those undertaken to reclaim abandoned and underused infrastructure to enhance public enjoyment are the most noteworthy. Parks, parkways, road and infrastructure improvements, and commemorative structures were all undertaken with the desire to improve the county landscape in the most efficient way possible given the constraints of TERA funding, as well as the continuing economic and social conditions caused by the Great Depression.

Most notable among the projects completed by the Onondaga County EWB is its largest effort: the Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway, spanning from the western city line of Syracuse to its eastern terminus at Cold Spring Brook in the village of Liverpool. Constructed between 1932 and 1933, the Park and Parkway transformed the previously abandoned Oswego Canal and surrounding marshlands into a four-mile highway, allowing quicker passage between the city and its northwestern suburbs, while providing recreational and educational opportunities for thousands of county residents who had been unable to experience or enjoy the eastern shore of Onondaga Lake for decades.

While not as grand in scale, the Erie Canal Park in the Village of Jordan at the western edge of the County was a project started under the OCEWB in 1933 and finished under the Civil Works Administration in 1934. (See Illustration 5.1) Despite its completion falling outside the time frame being examined here, the Erie Canal Park is a rare and outstanding example of the conversion of a portion of the Erie Canal into a unique sunken public park and



Illustration 5.1. Village of Jordan Erie Canal Park, June 2013. Photo by author.

garden. Though it has undergone several alterations to its landscape in the intervening eight decades, it is still a centerpiece of the village, whose story is not as well-known as the Onondaga Lake Parkway. However, it is noteworthy for the similar conversion of an abandoned portion of the Erie Canal into a park using OCEWB labor. It also has the distinction of being included in the Jordan Village Historic District, whereas the Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway do not currently have any historic designation, despite their importance to the region for transportation as well as recreation, as well as retaining several of its 1932-33 features and buildings.

Among the projects undertaken by the work bureau between November 1931 and April 1933, Onondaga Lake Park and Jordan Erie Canal Park were among the most significant for the immediate impact to their local communities. The majority of EWB work focused on road repairs, with a few projects dedicated to cemetery cleaning, or landscaping improvements, such as those performed at the Onondaga Sanatorium. The only other large project of note was the acquisition and clearing of land, and construction of shelters and benches at Onondaga Highlands Park (now known as Highland Forest) in Fabius, NY. The transition of this park into a recreational destination was more gradual than the canal projects, and did not affect the surrounding population or village as directly, nor was it received with as much public fanfare. Therefore, only the canal parks will be examined as case studies of OCEWB work under TERA.

Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway

Joseph Griffin's 1928 *Proposed Parkway Around Onondaga Lake* called for a number of commemorative structures and improvements to be built along the east shore, and the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau realized several of these. Of those constructed by the OCEWB, several of these buildings and landscape features still exist today, though some in significantly different form. This is most notable in the current incarnation of the French mission

reconstruction of Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois, originally known as Fort Sainte Marie de Gannetaha.³⁰⁸ Long used as an educational tool for local schools and the curious public, the current building is actually the second version, as the original “French fort” built in 1933 was inaccurate in its materials and form. The mission buildings sit upon a hill to the east of the parkway. While the 1988 reconstruction is less visually striking, the original commemorative structure was once hyperbolically referred to as the “most picturesque building in the State.”³⁰⁹

In November 1932, it was announced that a reproduction of “the first French fort in the United States” would be built on a bluff along the parkway. In addition to rebuilding the fort near the site believed to be the location of the original seventeenth-century building, historic research was undertaken by work bureau engineer Sergei Grimm and his wife to ensure the accurate reconstruction of the fort. A *Syracuse Herald* article noted “public interest in the early history of Onondaga County has climbed with announcement of plans for commemorating many of the historical events which had their setting on the shores of that lake, and sponsors of the parkway development have appealed to the public for help in their efforts for correct reproductions.” In addition, noted local historian and archeologist Reverend William Beauchamp believed the original bell from the fort to be located in Canada, and was to make inquiries as to its location. Joseph Griffin suggested a “historical pageant” to commemorate the opening of the fort upon its completion.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ The site and buildings have recently (2013) been re-named the Ska-Nonh Great Law Center of Peace, and are being transformed into a new interpretive center related to the Onondaga Nation and its history around Onondaga Lake. For the purposes of this thesis, the mission reconstruction will be referred to as Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois due since this was its common name following its reconstruction.

³⁰⁹ William E. McLusky ed, *Dedication of Jesuit Well and Reproduction of French Chapel and Fort of Ste. Marie of Ganentaa (Onondaga Lake)* (Syracuse, NY: Catholic Sun Press), 1933, 12.

³¹⁰ “First French Fort In the Area Now the U.S. Will Be Reproduced On Original Site Overlooking Onondaga Lake,” *Syracuse Herald*, November 13, 1932, 4; despite the Grimms’ research, they likely did not uncover any evidence as to the original appearance of Sainte Marie, hence its original “wild west” stockade construction. In addition, the 1933 construction was not built atop the original site, which was believed to be beneath an existing building on the old Liverpool Road.

It was not until the following summer that Crandall Melvin would announce the beginning of construction of the French fort, “as much like the original as eight months of research by interested persons” could make it. Architectural drawings showed that in addition to an eighty-five-foot-by-one-hundred-five-foot stockade, two bastions, a watch tower, store house, quarters for the priests and colonists, forge shop, kitchen bake shop, courtyard, and saw pit would be included in the fort reconstruction. Approximately sixty volumes of Jesuit records were consulted for information on the original fort to make the reconstruction as accurate as could be determined from historical records. It was estimated the fort would open in June 1933.³¹¹ Due to work stoppages and other conflicts detailed in the previous chapter, Sainte Marie de Gannetaha did not open until August 1933, and was wildly popular upon its initial opening, with 11,942 visitors in its first month.³¹²

In addition to wood furnishings (speculatively built to be of the mid-seventeenth century), the buildings originally housed Native American artifacts, though many were stolen or destroyed by vandals. The fort suffered considerably in its first few decades from deterioration to the untreated wood structures due to exposure to the elements. In 1965, members of six local Kiwanis clubs refurbished the building interiors at the fort, installed plaques and arranged for electricity at the site. In 1974, the county attempted to maintain the distressed fort and increase attendance by adding costumed staff members. Despite these changes, visitor numbers decreased, with complaints that the fort was crumbling and decrepit. Native American groups and historians criticized the bias inherent in the exhibits towards the French and non-Indian settlers.³¹³

³¹¹ “French Fort to Be Built On Lakeshore,” *Syracuse Herald*, May 7, 1933, 7.

³¹² “Salt Museum, Fort Popular, Report Shows,” *Syracuse Herald*, September 28, 1933, 15.

³¹³ Elizabeth Metz, *Guide and History: Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois* (Syracuse, NY: Midgley Printing), 6-7.

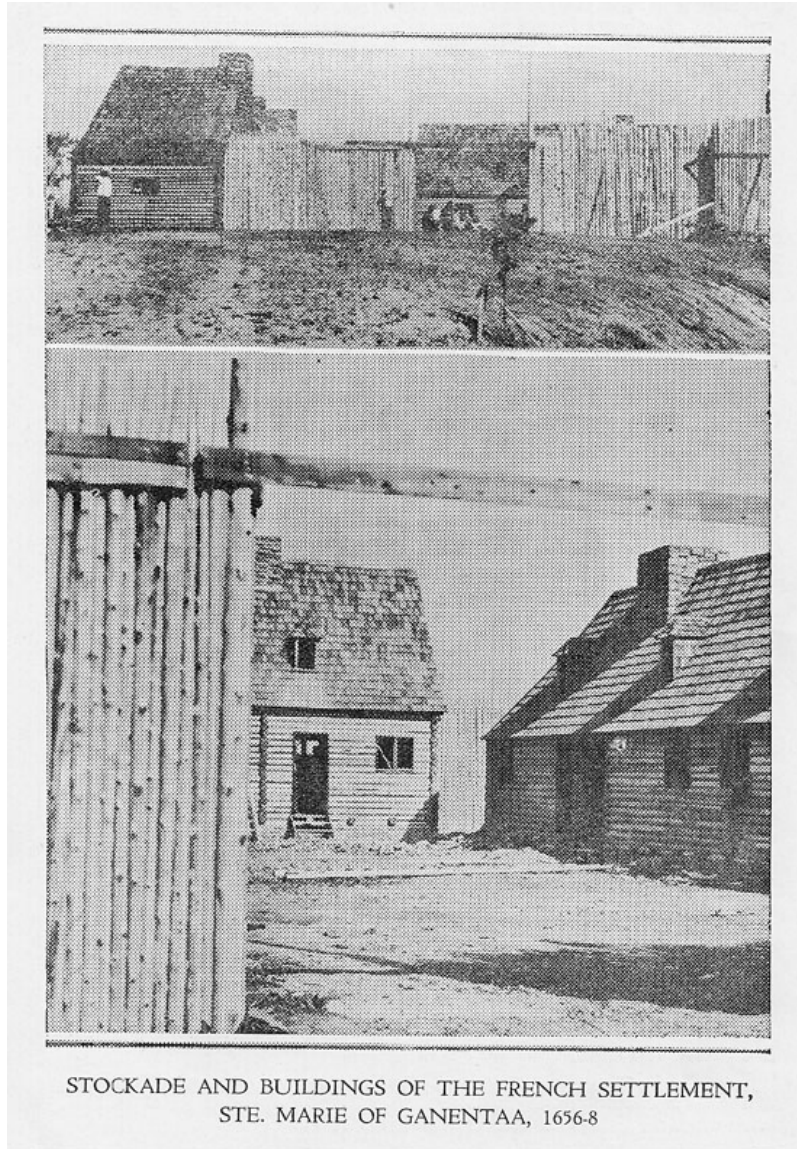


Illustration 5.2. Views of original Sainte Marie of Ganentaa, 1933. From *Dedication of Jesuit Well* by Rev. William McClusky – collection of the author.

The “wild west” stockade and buildings of the 1933 fort was also problematic, as it did not reflect the likely appearance or construction methods of a Jesuit settlement in the mid-seventeenth century. Archeological excavations at a similar site in Ontario (Sainte Marie Among the Hurons, a French settlement from 1639-1649) revealed a more likely configuration for a French mission of the time, and reconstructions of the Ontario buildings provided some influence for a new Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois along Onondaga Lake.³¹⁴

County officials began discussion of building a new version of Sainte Marie in 1981. Work on a master plan had already begun when a \$20,000 grant was awarded from the federal Institute of Museum Services in late 1982 to help with planning the new facility. Still, the project languished for five years, and the Onondaga County legislature did not authorize the “Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois” project until spring 1987, contingent upon half the funds being raised by private gifts and state and federal grants.³¹⁵

The official closing of the original Sainte Marie de Gannetaha occurred on October 30, 1988, after fifty-five years of operation.³¹⁶ The site languished for two years before a \$2.3 million renovation was undertaken in 1990 as part of ongoing attempts by the county government to “convert Onondaga Lake from an overgrown cesspool into a recreational attraction.” Completion of construction was expected by July 1991. The purpose of the new Sainte Marie de Gannetaha Living History Site was to enhance the lakefront as a recreational site with a structure resembling the original French mission more than the 1933 reconstruction (which the *Herald-Journal* article announcing the renovation misidentified as a WPA project).³¹⁷

³¹⁴ Ibid, 9-10.

³¹⁵ Margaret LeBrun, “Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois,” *Syracuse Herald-American*, August 4, 1991, AA5.

³¹⁶ “Rec Notes,” *The Post-Standard*, *Neighbors* section, October 20, 1988, 13.

³¹⁷ Don Cazentre, “New, Old Rise on Onondaga Lake Parkway,” *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, July 6, 1990, B3.

Before the new museum had even opened, county budget cuts led to reductions of over \$200,000 to full-time, part-time and seasonal salaries in county parks, reducing the staff at Sainte Marie by fourteen jobs.³¹⁸ The revamped museum was “at the center of a storm,” with annual operating costs estimated at \$424,000 instead of \$185,000, as previously claimed.³¹⁹ In order to combat the expected increase in costs, the new museum planned to charge an admission fee, whereas the previous attraction had been free to the public.³²⁰

The new complex, commonly referred to as Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois, opened to the public on August 10, 1991. The reconstructed mission compound contained a kitchen hall, chapel, mission dwelling, blacksmith and carpentry shop, and places for pigs and chickens inside its stockade walls, which were a “far cry from the old fort of the Works Projects Administration (sic) built in 1933, with its crumbling buildings, lopsided history and lack of conveniences.” Three full pages of the Syracuse *Herald-American* Sunday newspaper celebrated the reopening of Sainte Marie, which in addition to updating the story of the Jesuits displayed a new emphasis on celebrating the “exotic culture of the Iroquois,” which “can be seen almost everywhere at Sainte Marie—especially in artwork.” This same feature helped perpetuate the misunderstanding of just who built Sainte Marie, crediting the Works Projects Administration on one page and the Works Progress Administration (the same agency under different names and existing in different years, well after the construction of the original Sainte Marie) on the next, and no mention of TERA or the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau at all.³²¹ Eight hundred and fourteen visitors passed through the gates on the August 10th opening day.³²²

³¹⁸ Don Cazentre, “Lawmakers Trim Tax Hike to 5 Percent,” *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, September 29, 1990, A5.

³¹⁹ Cazentre, Don. “County Budget.” *Syracuse Herald-Journal*. October 3, 1990, A4.

³²⁰ Don Cazentre, “New Museum Will Fortify Onondaga County Coffers,” *Syracuse Herald-Journal*. October 16, 1990, B3.

³²¹ Margaret LeBrun, “Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois,” *Syracuse Herald-American*, August 4, 1991, AA4.

³²² Jon Craig, “814 Tour New French Fort,” *Syracuse Herald-American*, August 11, 1991, C3.

Discussions by the county of closing Sainte Marie first surfaced in October 2002. The facility had been projected to draw 100,000 visitors a year, but never reached that number, attracting only 58,000 in its first year, with lower numbers in subsequent years.³²³ The museum eventually closed on December 30, 2002, saving the county \$250,000 a year in operating costs. Within two years, an all-volunteer non-profit group, the Friends of Historic Onondaga Lake, was poised to re-open the museum with strictly volunteer staff.³²⁴ The museum reopened on July 10, 2004, through the work of more than 150 volunteers who took on the task of renovating and reopening the mission. Contributions from private sources as well as Onondaga County Parks helped provide funding towards maintaining the physical structure, while volunteers staffed the various exhibits and parts of the site.³²⁵

The building operated on a volunteer basis for several years, eventually reducing visitor hours to an appointment-only basis until November 2011. The Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District moved its offices into the building in January 2012 and the museum was effectively closed.³²⁶ In January 2013 it was announced that the Onondaga Historical Association had taken over management of Sainte Marie, and in collaboration with the Onondaga Nation, Syracuse University and other local organizations would be repurposing the facility into the Ska-nonh Great Law Center of Peace. The purpose of the facility would be shifted toward developing an interactive Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) heritage center with new interpretation of the site and its relationship to the lake and region.³²⁷

³²³ Frederic Pierce, "Ste. Marie Museum, DARE On County's Cutting Block," *The Post-Standard*, October 1, 2002, 1-2.

³²⁴ BoNhia Lee, "Volunteer Committee Looks to Open Museum," *The Post-Standard*, *Neighbors City* section, February 12, 2004, 12.

³²⁵ Leslie Snyder, "Historic Comeback: Ste. Marie Reopens," *The Post-Standard*, July 11, 2004.

³²⁶ Sarah Hall, "Volunteers Shunted Aside," *The Eagle*, January 11, 2012.

³²⁷ Ska-Nonh Center website. Accessed April 20, 2014. <http://www.skanonhcenter.org>.

Another historic commemorative building at Onondaga Lake Park is the Salt Museum, among the oldest, most known and utilized historical sites at Onondaga Lake Park. Built in 1933 using TERA funds and Emergency Work Bureau labor, Joseph Griffin had proposed to rebuild a salt block using remains of a boiling block chimney from the Sampson Jaqueth Salt Manufactory that still stood on the east shore of the lake.³²⁸ Approximately two-thirds of the brick chimney was gone or not salvageable, and had to be rebuilt with contemporary brick. The finished building was built to evoke an early salt block building, with a monitor-style roof and vertical wood exterior cladding. (See Illustration 5.3)

The Salt Museum opened on August 19th, 1933, welcoming over 400 visitors, nearly half of which were estimated to be from outside Onondaga County. Crandall Melvin attributed the large percentage of visitors from outside the county to the publicity from the pageant commemorating the opening of Onondaga Lake Parkway the previous week. Though the original plans for the parkway featured two museums for the two salt manufacturing processes employed by the 316 salt blocks that once lined the lake, the Salt Museum instead offered visitors one wing showing the solar process, and another to demonstrate the block or boiling system. The block wing was constructed around the sole remaining salt chimney, and iron kettles, tools and photographs were donated to round out the collection.³²⁹ In its first month of operation, 12,226 people visited the Salt Museum.³³⁰ The museum remains in operation today, and is one of the few features built by the OCEWB that is actively maintained, though visitation has dropped considerably over the years. The interior includes a replica boiling block as well as interpretive displays regarding the history of salt manufacturing in Syracuse.

³²⁸ Sewell Chan. "On the Road: A Proud Salty Reputation," *New York Times*, December 31, 2009.

³²⁹ "Salt Museum Opens as 400 Visit Exhibit," *Syracuse Herald*, August 20, 1933, 3.

³³⁰ "Salt Museum, Fort Popular, Report Shows," *Syracuse Herald*, September 28, 1933, 15.



The Salt Museum

Illustration 5.3. View of the Salt Museum upon its completion in 1933. From *Emergency Employment In Onondaga County* – collection of author.

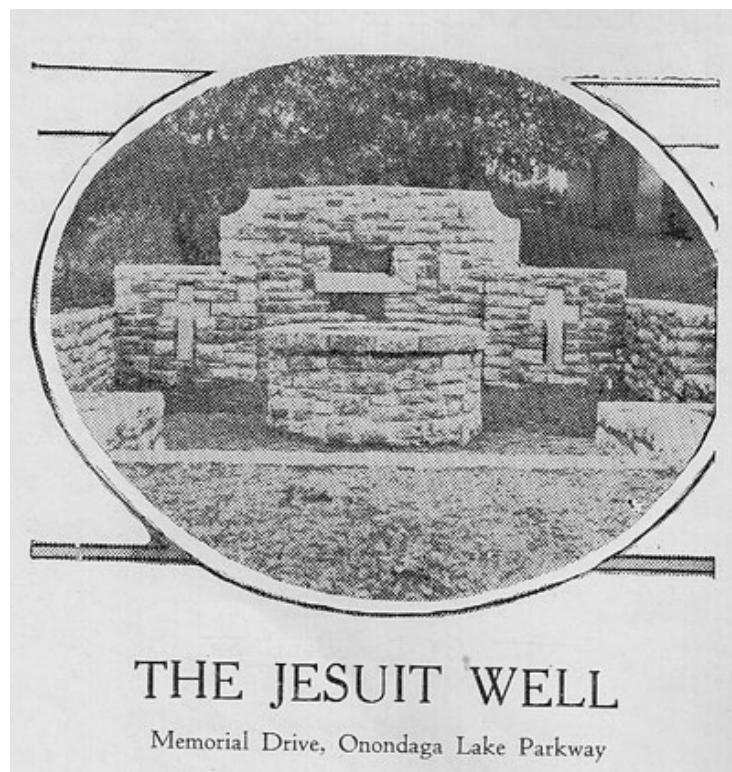


Illustration 5.3. View of the Jesuit Well upon its completion in 1932. From *Dedication of Jesuit Well* by Rev. William McClusky – collection of author.

Also related to the use of salt near Onondaga Lake, the OCEWB constructed a stone “Jesuit Well” directly south of the fort, purported to be the location of the original salt spring that Father Simon LeMoyne discovered with the assistance of the Onondaga Indians in 1656.³³¹ (See Illustration 5.4) A monument was proposed for the site as early as 1887. At that point, the Onondaga Historical Society held the deed to three quarters of an acre of land on which the Jesuit Well was thought to be located. The society proposed to erect “a piece of statuary representing a Jesuit priest baptizing an Indian woman” to commemorate the settlement of the area by Jesuits.³³² Mention of a “Jesuit Well Committee” was noted in an 1894 article about the Onondaga Historical Association, though no further action seems to have been taken towards establishing a monument at this time.³³³

The Jesuit Well did not garner much mention in local press until 1930, when it was noted that the site of the original spring was now unknown and only an approximation could be made of its location. The well was believed to be on the farm of a local woman whose grandfather sealed it with a large stone after farm stock became sick from drinking the water. By 1930 the site was “lost to view” with only “a trickling rivulet amid a cluster of rocks” to indication the possible location of the spring. However, the location of the Jesuit Well was scheduled to be marked by the State Commission on Historic Places in the Sullivan-Clinton expedition in tandem with the planned construction of a road built atop the Oswego Canal (the future Onondaga Lake Parkway).³³⁴ However, due to funding difficulties specified in chapter 3, no road was built until 1932. By the time the parkway was under construction, the Knights of

³³¹ Alexander, 49-50.

³³² “Two Constitute A Quorum, The Annual Meeting of the Onondaga Historical Society,” *The Syracuse Standard*, January 5, 1887.

³³³ “Prosperous Society, The Onondaga Historical Association In New Quarters,” *The Evening Herald*, October 3, 1894.

³³⁴ “Jesuit Well, First Source Of Salt on Syracuse Site, Lost In Passing of Time,” *Syracuse Herald*, August 3, 1930.

Columbus was the next group to take an interest in commemorating the Jesuit Well.³³⁵ It was ultimately Crandall Melvin and the OCEWB that were responsible for installation of the stone memorial and plaque that exist at the Jesuit Well site today.

Speaking at the dedication of the Jesuit Well in August 1933, Crandall Melvin gave a fitting tribute to the efforts of the work bureau up to that point, and how the work completed, and still under way, corresponded to the historic character of the park site at Onondaga Lake.³³⁶ As part of the festivities, a brief ceremony occurred at the fort where those structures were formally turned over to the county, and the crowd then moved to the Jesuit Well to hear Melvin speak before moving down the parkway to Griffin Field, where Joseph Griffin was the principal speaker at its dedication. Thousands gathered along Memorial Drive (as the Parkway was sometimes called) and at the athletic field witnessed a parade of floats and bands, every town in the county being represented by one or more floats. The program closed at the Salt Museum, where visitors saw how the flourishing industry once thrived on the shores of the lake and how salt was manufactured by the solar and boiling processes. Chairman of TERA Alfred H. Schoellkopf was one of the guests of honor at Parkway ceremonies. Council of State Parks chairman Robert Moses “wired his regrets at not being able to attend the dedication,” closing his telegram with congratulations to Crandall Melvin for all that he had done.³³⁷

In 1970, the Salina town board approved a proposal for a new \$5 million historical museum along Onondaga Lake. Town supervisors claimed fifty percent of the construction costs would be paid by the state, twenty-five by the Federal government, and twenty-five percent by the county, whose share would be covered by providing the land on

³³⁵ “K of C Takes Up marking of Salt Site,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 28, 1932.

³³⁶ William E. McClusky, ed., *Dedication of Jesuit Well and Reproduction of French Chapel and Fort of Ste. Marie of Ganentaa (Onondaga Lake)* (Syracuse, NY: Catholic Sun Press, 1933), 17.

³³⁷ “25,000 See Onondaga History Re-enacted in Jesuit Well Pageantry,” *Syracuse Herald*, August 16, 1933.

which the museum would sit, north of the railroad bridge, at the point closest to both the Jesuit Well and original French fort.³³⁸ This plan never came to fruition, and over the years the well has deteriorated due to the weather and lack of maintenance.

A clumsy attempt at restoration in 1993 led to confusion over the ownership and stewardship of the site. An employee of the motel adjacent to the well was found “slapping mortar between the well’s old rocks.” He had spent two weeks re-assembling the site when told by a planner from the county parks department to stop. The mortar he was using did not match the building material used in 1933. The motel’s general manager had thought the state owned the site, and asked the Department of Transportation, which approved work on the monument, for permission though the Onondaga Historical Association was the actual owner. Though the “French Fort” was closed and then reopened in 1991 by the county with a more historically accurate encampment, the Jesuit Well has remained untouched, save for many of its large stones being loose and scattered around the site.³³⁹

Today, the Jesuit Well lays tucked away from the road behind a railroad overpass, adjacent to a residential motel. (See Illustration 5.5) Active promotion and interpretation are nonexistent, with the county responsible for maintenance of the stone construction. A sign mentioning the “Onondaga Salt Spring” is set back from the road several yards, and not easily legible from passing cars. A small gravel lot along the parkway is not well maintained and does not encourage engagement with the Jesuit Well.

³³⁸ “Sheriff’s Substation, Museum Bids OK’d,” *The Post-Standard*, January 20, 1970.

³³⁹ Frank Brieady, “Well’s Restoration Stalled,” *The Post-Standard*, July 9, 1993.



Illustration 5.5. Jesuit Well, October 2013. Photo by author.



Illustration 5.6. Gale Salt Well, October 2013. Photo by author.

South of the Jesuit Well, along the north side of the parkway, a series of low stone walls arranged in a symmetrical pattern around a central well marks the location of the Thomas K. Gale Salt Spring, in honor of one of the most successful salt magnates of the mid-to-late nineteenth century. The walls and well sit at the approximate location of one of the Gale salt wells that were finally closed in 1926. Gale donated a considerable portion of the land to enable the construction of the park, parkway and landscape features such as the salt well.³⁴⁰ Like the Jesuit Well, continued maintenance of the Gale Salt Spring today is the responsibility of Onondaga County Parks. Though it sits directly next to the parkway, it displays very noticeable deterioration and seems to attract few visitors due to its location along a heavily traveled state highway. (See Illustration 5.6) There is no dedicated parking area for the Gale Salt Spring.

Griffin Field was also a part of the original Onondaga Lake Park. Its dedication ceremony was August 16, 1933, and it closed in June 2002. Referred to by one article as the “signature structure” of the park, the field hosted high school and youth league baseball and football games, as well as track events in its almost seventy years of existence. The field was removed as part of a \$4 million plan for Onondaga Lake Park that called for a skateboard park, playground, two softball fields, volleyball court, shuffleboard, croquet and bocce ball courts, and a visitor’s center named after Joseph A. Griffin (dedicated in 2003). Many of the limestone pillars that circled the original field were kept as a memorial to Griffin.³⁴¹ A large portion of the Field was replaced by a large parking lot to supplement the expansion of park facilities.³⁴² The remaining stone pillars were repaired in 2012 and 2013. Though no modern interpretation of the history of the field occurs onsite, interpretive signage inside the visitor’s center notes the role of the OCEWB in the construction of Onondaga Lake Parkway.

³⁴⁰ Alexander, 50.

³⁴¹ Matt Michael, “Field of Dreams,” *The Post-Standard*, June 2nd, 2002, C1.

³⁴² Jemeli Tanui, “Park Improvements In the Works,” *The Post-Standard*, October 31, 2002.

A July 28, 1932 *Syracuse Herald* article proclaimed, “Salt water bathing facilities in fresh water country will be the latest feat of Onondaga County park engineers.”³⁴³ The subject of the article was the Danforth Swimming Lake, to be located near the Syracuse entrance to Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway, and just north of the lakeshore. The new “ocean bath” was to be 700 feet long and 150 feet wide, with plans for a beach, sun-bathing lawn, dock, bath house, parking area, and island. The salt content of the lake was said to be greater than that of seawater. As with other OCEWB projects at Onondaga Lake, landscaping was to be designed by Laurie D. Cox.³⁴⁴ Danforth Swimming Lake opened May 28, 1933, and reported an official attendance of over 52,000 in its first six weeks.³⁴⁵

Though it is unknown precisely when the swimming lake ceased operation, a clue is provided in an October 1936 article in the *Syracuse Herald*, which reports that “the end of salt water bathing in Syracuse appeared likely,” as the Gale Salt Well, the last of the area salt springs, had dried up. The drying up of the well was believed to be because of work on the Ley Creek sewer project that likely lead to the diverting of the underground stream which fed the Gale Salt Well as well as the Danforth Swimming Lake.³⁴⁶ Today, there is no indication that there ever was such an amenity present at Onondaga Lake Park, as there are no extant structures, and the area around the former swimming lake is overgrown with reeds. The on-ramp to Interstate 81 North is located adjacent to the Danforth Lake, which is easy to miss as one drives by without any signage or other way to know it was once a popular summer attraction.

South of the Gale Spring is a large lagoon bisected by a stone bridge. The “wedding bridge,” as it is known for its use in wedding photos, is another feature built by the

³⁴³ “Salt Water Bathing Pool Being Built On Shore of Onondaga by County Crew,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 28, 1932.

³⁴⁴ “Summer ‘Sea’ Bathing In Onondaga Lake to Result From Idle Aid Project,” *Syracuse Herald*, January 15, 1933.

³⁴⁵ “Million Visit Parks and Play Centers,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 23, 1933, 3.

³⁴⁶ “Lake Shore Salt Well Is Dried Up By Sewer Drainage,” *Syracuse Herald*, October 23, 1936.

Work Bureau. The lagoon was present at the site before the construction of Onondaga Lake Parkway, and was transformed into an amenity for public enjoyment, supplemented by the wedding bridge. These are the first examples of OCEWB work one experiences when driving along the parkway from east to west leaving the city of Syracuse. The fountain that used to mark the entrance to the parkway was removed upon the building of Interstate 81.

The north end of Onondaga Lake Park extends all the way to the Seneca River, and also experienced the construction of some commemorative structures during this initial phase of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau. The “Mud Lock” is located adjacent to Long Branch Park, on the eastern banks of the Seneca River and directly next to the site of the Oswego Canal. The Mud Lock was rebuilt, complete with the wood locks, as a tribute to the Oswego Canal. The work bureau also replanted the area around the Mud Lock with hundreds of trees, and cut walking trails and bike paths still utilized today. This helps bring attention, though not necessarily understanding (due to signs identifying the work as by the WPA) to the Mud Lock and canal in the present day.³⁴⁷

While this is not an exhaustive profile of all features that exist or have existed along Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway since 1933, it highlights the most significant examples that were built as a result of Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau labor. Fortunately, most remain in a relatively unaltered state, while others have been removed (such as the original French fort). It is important that original parkway features remarkably intact despite the passage of eighty years. Restoration and promotion of the various historic assets of the park and parkway will help remind the public of their importance to the development of this connection between Syracuse and Liverpool, as well as the contribution of the OCEWB to the recreational history of Onondaga Lake and Onondaga County.

³⁴⁷ Ibid, 49.

Village of Jordan Erie Canal Park

The Village of Jordan was already a bustling community when work began on the Erie Canal in 1817. Once the waterway was completed, grain elevators, grist and sawmills, a paper mill, foundries, and wheelbarrow plants, flourished. The last boat ran on the canal in 1913, and the portion running through the village was drained in 1917.³⁴⁸

In July 1929 it was announced that a new Jordan High School would be built to replace the previous building that had been destroyed by fire on lands known as the Thompson estate lying along the abandoned portion of the Erie Canal running through the village. Permission was obtained from the state “to construct a highway over the old canal lands from Mechanic Street and entrance to the school grounds will be effected this way.”³⁴⁹ As of January 1930, however, only a portion of the canal bed had been filled in order to construct a crossing to the new school building, with a *Syracuse Herald* article noting “the remainder of the distance through the village it lies cluttered with reeds and stagnant water, the graveyard of old automobiles, piles of tin cans, and other rubbish.” The Citizens Unity Club said it would ask the state to fill in the canal bed its entire length. They felt the state should bear the expense, in case it refused to make increased financial aid in building the new school possible.³⁵⁰

In spring of 1932, Jordan village attorney John C. McLaughlin requested OCEWB chairman Crandall Melvin visit to discuss a plan to fill the abandoned bed of the Erie Canal, which ran generally east and west through the village and approximately 200 feet north, and parallel to Route 31 as it then existed. The village board and the mayor had approved this

³⁴⁸ “Jordan Plans to Celebrate Its Centennial,” *Syracuse Herald*, September 2, 1934.

³⁴⁹ Roy E. Fairman, “Jordan School To Be Built By May 1930,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 1, 1929.

³⁵⁰ Roy E. Fairman, “Jordan Seeks State Aid For New School,” *Syracuse Herald*, January 17, 1930.

original plan, which included the destruction of part of the canal walls, built between 1845 and 1850, as well as some other stonework and arches.³⁵¹

The canal bed could be purchased outright for \$1,800 but an alternate scenario was worked out. The state legislature amended the public land law to direct that deeds to abandoned canal land be conveyed for one dollar to any municipality using the land for park purposes. This saved a great amount of money for the project, which was subject to the strict budget regulations of TERA upon its approval by that agency.³⁵²

Under the new plan to be built using TERA labor, a sewer was laid in the bed of the canal, and a sunken park was created with beds of flowers and shrubbery in its eastern portion leading to the Jordan High School property. Fortunately, the stonework was to be saved without cost to the village of Jordan or compromise to the park design. On June 21st, 1933 Crandall Melvin delivered a deed conveying title to the Erie Canal bed passing through the village in a public ceremony including McLaughlin, Jordan mayor L.J.F. Craner, and several local businessman and members of local government.³⁵³ Work began immediately, and similar to the construction of the Onondaga Lake Parkway, the Jordan Erie Canal Park was partially filled in with “refuse and junk of all descriptions,” then covered with topsoil and seeded.³⁵⁴

Less than two weeks later, work was shut down July 1st due to a resolution passed by the Onondaga County Board of Supervisors, which strictly limited funds to Jordan to \$15,000, though its original estimated cost was \$16,000. Of additional concern was the sixty percent increase in wages from twenty-five cents an hour to forty cents an hour, which increased the estimated cost of the project to \$25,600. Melvin was warned that unless the county absorbed

³⁵¹ Crandall Melvin, Sr., *A History*, 119.

³⁵² *Ibid*, 120.

³⁵³ “Old Erie Canal Bed In Village of Jordan Will Be Converted Into Sunken Garden Relief Project,” *Syracuse Herald*, June 22, 1933.

³⁵⁴ Information from various clippings in the archives of the Town of Elbridge Historical Society.

the almost \$10,000 difference, sufficient funds would not be available “to relieve the Jordan health menace and eyesore.” Seeking to resolve this matter with a minimum of time and potential wages lost on the project, Melvin recalled men to start work again on July 25th, 1933.³⁵⁵

In the meantime, plans were being revamped to make do with limited funds if more could not be obtained. Fifty men were employed on the canal bed project, and an early August meeting was going to determine whether or not work relief forces would be sufficiently increased to meet the needs of the county’s unemployed at all sites where work had ceased as of July 1st. A surge in the manufacturing industry was hoped to reduce the need of work relief employment, so that the suggested \$1,000,000 bond issue might be the last relief measure that the county would be forced to take.³⁵⁶

An October 1933 article reported the filling and grading of the abandoned Erie Canal in Jordan was “virtually completed,” and that where there had been an eyesore for years, now was “an attractive parkway.” Accompanying photos depicted the conditions before construction, a ditch wild with brush and stagnant water, and after, a unique park with landscaped paths and plantings the length of the bed, creating a “sunken garden” between the village’s downtown, and the newly completed Jordan High School at its eastern end. The article describes how the village installed a sewer at the bottom of the ditch to carry out water from a creek that flowed into the canal. Village attorney John C. McLaughlin was recognized for having diligently worked for ten years toward obtaining the deed to the canal bed to enable its conversion into a public amenity. The town of Elbridge is noted to have contributed a small share of the expense toward the project, while the county and state by way of work relief funds had covered the majority. Men from the town of Elbridge were also employed on the project,

³⁵⁵ “Lack Of Cash Fails to Halt Jordan Work,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 21, 1933.

³⁵⁶ “130 More Men Join Parkway Work Crew,” *Syracuse Herald*, July 24, 1933.

which took the whole summer, before work was halted until the spring, “when shrubs will be set out, flower beds planted, and the parkway otherwise beautified by vegetation.”³⁵⁷ Glenn Blanchard and L.A. Blankman were listed in a January 1934 article as the landscape engineers responsible for beautifying the parkway.³⁵⁸

As part of a celebration observing the hundredth anniversary of the village and hosting the County Volunteer Firemen’s Association, the Erie Canal Park was dedicated in July of 1934.³⁵⁹ The west portion of the park, located across Main Street, was dedicated to war veterans, with a bronze memorial plaque placed in their honor, leading to its nickname of “Memorial Park” despite being part of the same recreational area.³⁶⁰ The park project was fully completed on December 1, 1934, when thirty-two men remaining from the height of the work force of one hundred were transferred to the construction of a reservoir for Jordan under the purview of the CWA. The final cost of the Canal Park amounted to an estimated \$35,000.³⁶¹

The Jordan Erie Canal Park was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Jordan Village Historic District in 1983. The nomination forms misattribute the construction of the Canal Park to a WPA project, and the two included pictures of it do not even include the full expanse, only the west entry and the aqueduct at the intersection with Skaneateles Creek.³⁶²

Celebrated in local media as “the best known preservation of canal property,”³⁶³ “the pride of Jordan,” and “the prettiest site along the canal,”³⁶⁴ the Canal Park at Jordan was the

³⁵⁷ “Old Erie Canal Bed Transformed Into Parkway After Years As Eyesore,” *Syracuse Herald*, October 22, 1933.

³⁵⁸ “Jordan Garden Club Aids In Canal Bed Improvement,” *Syracuse Herald*, January 29, 1934.

³⁵⁹ “Jordan Plans to Celebrate Its Centennial,” *Syracuse Herald*, September 2, 1934.

³⁶⁰ Melvin, 120.

³⁶¹ “Work Begun On Reservoir For Jordan,” *Syracuse Herald*, December 2, 1934.

³⁶² “Jordan Village Historic District,” National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form, National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, August 1983.

³⁶³ “Jordan—From the Past,” *Jordan Leader*, May 13, 1960.

³⁶⁴ “Erie Canal Park—The Pride of Jordan,” *The Advocate*, September 21, 1983.

first such conversion of a portion of the Erie Canal in New York.³⁶⁵ Like other TERA sites the park is often misidentified in newspaper articles as a WPA project.³⁶⁶ The canal park has undergone many landscaping changes that have been documented in local media through articles and photographs. Young elms, evergreens, hawthorns, and spice bushes also noted among the trees part of the original landscaping, as well as “dwarf bedding roses, hybrid perpetuals and varieties of other climbing roses.” The Jordan Garden Club is noted as contributors of fifty peonies and two hundred spirea. A 1930s *Jordan Home Paper* article mentions “all kinds of flowers and perennials” one would find in the “quaint and unusual park.” The accompanying photograph shows evergreen trees lining the walkway along on both sides of the creek.

Another photograph in a 1930s article displays the original layout of the park landscaping, with footpaths crossing at the center of the lawn, which is lined with low shrubs along its border, with footpaths that span the length of the park adjacent to the shrubs. (See Illustration 5.7) A different piece makes mention of Memorial Park, noting its “smooth well kept lawn and walks.” A 1956 article mentions the inability to cross the creek at that time, as the original wood bridge had rotted and been removed. It was later replaced with a sturdier wood bridge with wrought iron railings. Similar to Onondaga Lake Park and its “wedding bridge,” the bridge over Skaneateles Creek is referred by Jordan resident as the “kissing bridge.”

Photographs in local paper *The Advocate* from 1974, 1983, and 1990 show little change in the landscaping of the park, with low, evenly spaced rows of shrubs and flowers parallel to the original stone walls of the canal, with a centrally located flower bed, and small trees near the aqueduct where the Skaneateles Creek bisects the park.³⁶⁷ (See Illustration 5.8)

³⁶⁵ Brittney Fiorini, “Canal Society Comes to Camillus, Jordan,” *The Advocate*, October 6, 1999.

³⁶⁶ “Erie Canal Park—The Pride of Jordan,” *The Advocate*, September 21, 1983; several articles in the Town of Elbridge Historical Society files on the Canal Park contain this error.

³⁶⁷ Information from various clippings in the archives of the Town of Elbridge Historical Society.

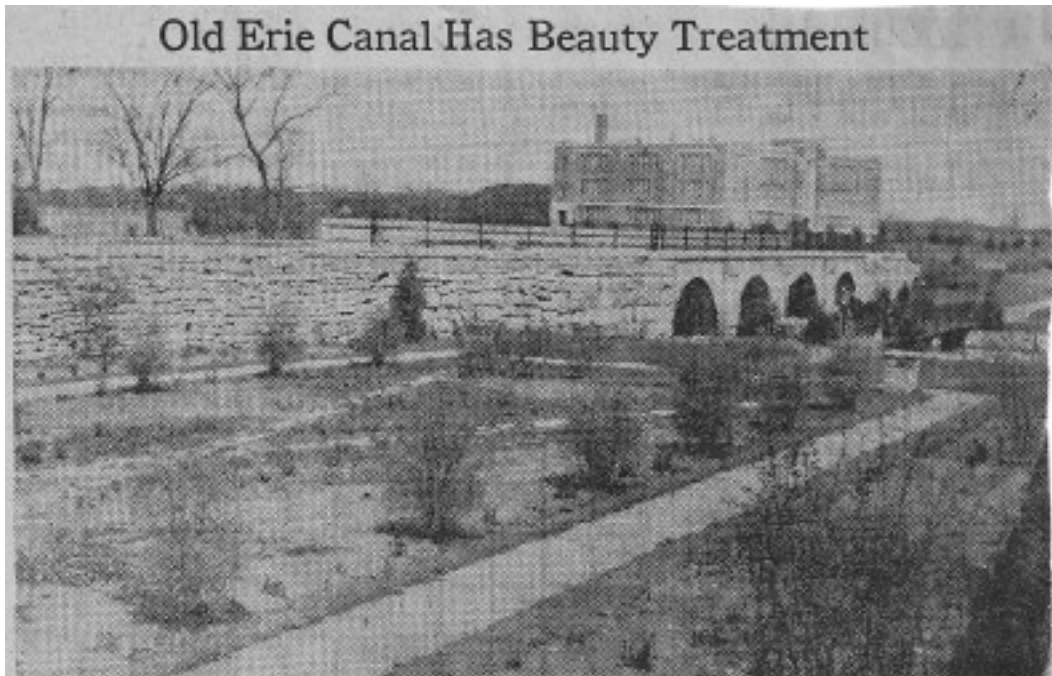


Illustration 5.7. 1930s view of Village of Jordan Erie Canal Park. From archives of Town of Elbridge Historical Society.

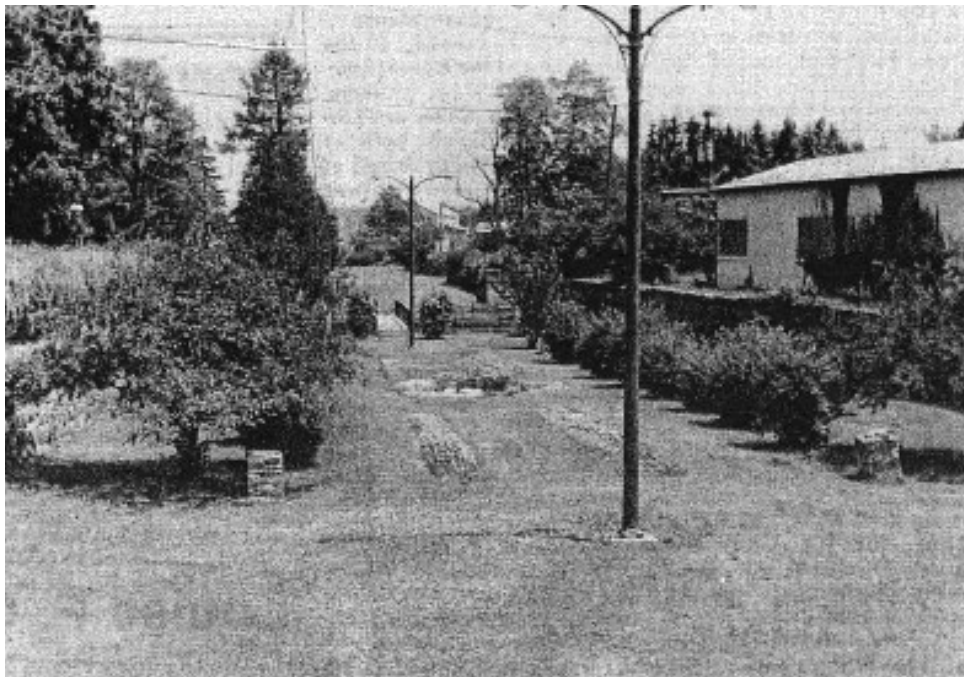


Illustration 5.8. 1990 view of Village of Jordan Erie Canal Park. From archives of Town of Elbridge Historical Society.

In 1992, a forty-foot section of the wall was in danger of collapse, and village officials were unsure if they could afford to repair their “most precious landmark.”³⁶⁸ The section of the wall in danger of collapse later grew to one hundred sixty feet, with a small section collapsing in the late 1990s. A bidding process to repair the wall was undertaken in 2002 and again the following year, with bids exceeding the village budget for rehabilitation by seventy-three to one hundred thirty-six percent. Due to the location of the Canal Park in the Jordan Village Historic District, any repair using federal or state monies would need to meet SHPO requirements.³⁶⁹ The wall was eventually repaired in the fall of 2003, and the park landscaping torn up. A 2006 picture in the *New York Canal Times* shows an entirely different landscaping pattern from that displayed in the past, now with S-shaped flower beds on either side of a winding grass path, and no trees, shrubs or lighting present. A mural was installed on an exterior wall of the Bennett Conservatory for the Arts building, formerly a hotel, located along the western portion of the park. It is part of the Jordan Outdoor Historical Gallery, and depicts images of nineteenth-century canal travel, to remind park visitors of the historic origins of the Erie Canal Park.³⁷⁰

Conclusion

In his 1933 book *Looking Forward*, newly-elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt observed that “modern society moves at such an intense pace that greater recreation periods are necessary, and at the same time our efficiency, state and national, in production is such that more time can be used for recreation.”³⁷¹ It was in this spirit that TERA and its emergency work bureaus

³⁶⁸ Suzanne M. Jackson, “Buckled Wall Threatens Canal Park,” *The Herald-Journal*, June 3, 1992.

³⁶⁹ Jerry Rosen, “Walls Tumbling, Bids Aren’t,” *The Post-Standard*, Neighbors West section, April 24, 2003, 3.

³⁷⁰ Ami Olson, “Mural A Picture of Past,” *The Advocate*, June 25, 2008.

³⁷¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Looking Forward* (New York: The John Day Company, 1933), 64.

conducted many work projects. This was certainly manifested in Onondaga County with the work done at Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway, and the Erie Canal Park in Jordan.

The Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau excelled at the creation of new recreational amenities from the remnants of past industries. The transformation of the Oswego Canal along Onondaga Lake into a parkway served a dual purpose in providing a new road along the shore, and a method to directly access the new attractions constructed there. The conversion of the Erie Canal created a centerpiece for the Village of Jordan, connecting its main street to a newly constructed school. The reclamation of abandoned canal beds and construction of parks and historical attractions is especially noteworthy for the similarity to more recent work done under the Rails-to-Trails program, where old railroad infrastructure is converted into biking and walking trails for public use, including prominent examples such as the High Line park in New York City. While the projects completed under TERA did not have the same motivations as those under Rails-to-Trails (nor was the work done in the 1930s likely to have influenced more current transformations of old infrastructure into recreational amenities), it is a striking parallel in terms of seizing upon unused industrial property for a new use to benefit the public.

CONCLUSION

Introduction

In 1847, soon-to-be-elected mayor of Syracuse Harvey Baldwin gave a speech at a meeting regarding the proposed incorporation of the villages of Salina and Syracuse into the city of Syracuse, now infamous and oft quoted with regard to local history. In the “hanging gardens” speech, as it is known, Baldwin remarked on his desire that

All bordering territory will have been brought into a high and perfect state of cultivation, and our beautiful lake, on all its beautiful shores and borders, will present a view of one continuous villa, ornamented with its shady groves and hanging gardens and connected by a wide and splendid avenue that encircle its entire waters, and furnish a delightful drive to the gay and prosperous citizens of the town, who will, towards the close of each summer’s day, throng it for pleasure, relaxation, or the improvement of health.³⁷²

While is certainly true that the “bordering territory” of the city has been developed into some sort of “state of cultivation,” it is not likely corresponding to Baldwin’s vision of hanging gardens, nor could the citizens necessarily be characterized as “prosperous,” economically speaking. However, there is some truth to be found in his prophecy for Onondaga Lake, despite some considerable variation from his utopian vision. If Onondaga Lake Park is examined as a case study for the success of recreational development around the lake corresponding to Baldwin’s prophecy, while its “splendid avenue” does not fully encircle the Lake, it is certainly a destination for recreational programming such as Parkway Sundays and Lights on the Lake.³⁷³

More importantly, its success as a lasting example of a continuously utilized project of the Onondaga County Work Bureau reflects the triumph of that agency in its first two years, as the main entity of the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration. Though the

³⁷² Alexander, 6.

³⁷³ Onondaga County Parks. “OLP.” Onondaga County Parks. <http://onondagacountyparks.com/olp> (accessed Nov. 8, 2009).

projects of the OCEWB and their observable effects may be known to some in the city and region, it still remains a chapter of local, state and national history related to work relief that has largely been unexplored. The contribution of county work bureaus under TERA may be known on a case-by-case basis, but there has been little to no wholesale exploration of the variety of projects and their impact or longevity. The Onondaga Lake Parkway was the first, largest and most significant project of the OCEWB, and, as stated, representatives of TERA cited the work bureau as one of the most successful in the state. Its successes as a state work relief program were well documented in local newspapers in the time period covered by this thesis, though the program was not without criticism and skepticism by some citizens and politicians.

The struggles between Crandall Melvin and Rolland B. Marvin described in Chapter 3 were ostensibly related to the employment of city men on county work projects, which was forbidden by the rules of TERA. However, an undocumented reason for their dispute could be related to the complicated political landscape of Syracuse and Onondaga County in the 1930s. Both men were Republicans in what was then a Republican-dominated city and county. Marvin was mayor of Syracuse from 1929 to 1941 in what has been described as a “monolithic” reign, where he drastically increased city indebtedness during and after the Depression. While Melvin was a great benefactor of the city through philanthropic work, he maintained a residence in Liverpool, and was born in a more rural part of the county, so he may have been beholden to county interests beyond his legal obligations.

Among the most important issues to consider are TERA and the Emergency Work Bureaus as an experiment in work relief whose successes encouraged Franklin Delano Roosevelt to create a series of other agencies to handle issues of work relief on the national level. Though some of these agencies, such as the Civil Works Administration, lasted only a couple of years,

others like the Works Progress Administration (later known as the Work Projects Administration) and Civilian Conservation Corps lasted for almost a decade before ending because of the need to mobilize young men and women in the war effort. The WPA and CCC are well known for their efforts in infrastructure and park construction improvements, to the point of being included in high school history textbooks, as well as listed as architects and contributing factors to various properties nominated to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The similarities and even direct relationship of some TERA projects to those completed by the WPA and CCC merits their re-examination for the purpose of adding them to the New York State Register of Historic Places as well as the NRHP, helping to illuminate their contribution to the historic landscapes and built environment of the Empire State.

The timeline of Roosevelt's New Deal in the popular imagination tends to begin with his presidency, with some writers and biographers briefly mentioning TERA. However, there has not been a thorough examination of this five-year program, or its direct effects on the built environment through the work bureaus, particularly in the pre-New Deal period of 1931-1933. Though not necessarily the first work relief program in the country, it was the first work relief initiative by a governor, and certainly ambitious enough in scope and depth to warrant further exploration. Looking into the construction and longstanding effects and legacy of TERA projects like Onondaga Lake Parkway and Jordan Erie Canal Park is crucial to understanding the magnitude these endeavors had on a local and regional level. And while this may now be known in this instance, there are probably dozens of roads and structures throughout New York State built through the efforts of emergency work bureaus that have yet to be researched, understood, and recognized for their local and regional significance.

Perhaps the nature of TERA and its projects and the subsequent lack of exploration of their origins reflect a broader attitude toward the importance of things such as public works and infrastructure, which are generally thought to be mundane and ordinary, or things that are required for the function of an orderly town, county or society, and thus will automatically be created, altered and maintained by municipalities. The origins, evolution and integral nature of such things would likely be of questionable significance to many within the architecture or history fields, or to the general public that takes for granted that which they see or utilize everyday. However, an important history lurks beneath the surface of the state route, county park, or public school the same way it does the ostentatious skyscraper or luxurious private residence designed by a specific and significant architect. The more anonymous structures and features of our collective public landscapes are worth the consideration and investigation, to add a thread to the discussion and understanding of local and regional history that remains largely hidden in plain sight.

Recommendations for Preservation of Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau Sites

A number of strategies can be employed to increase the profile of TERA and Emergency Work Bureau sites throughout Onondaga County as well as New York State. Several tools common to historic preservation planning for purposes of ensuring the future of historic resources can be employed to increase awareness of TERA projects while taking steps to maintain and protect the sites from further degradation. Many of these measures can be taken simultaneously to maximize the efficiency of research and yield greater results, though some (such as the desired outcomes of grant-writing endeavors) are dependent on a lengthy process. It is important to be prepared to spend a considerable amount of time in order to achieve the desired outcome and effectively promote the long-term preservation of TERA sites.

Identification, inventory and assessment

The first step in uncovering TERA sites is figuring out what and where the sites are located. Identification of TERA and emergency work bureau projects and sites relies on a couple of primary factors: geographic boundaries, and period of significance. For example, this thesis is concerned with resources located in Onondaga County, during the years 1931 to 1933. Though TERA was an active program until 1937, the shift in funding altered the distribution and focus of projects in the county and state. In the course of researching the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau, no records concerning the work bureau beyond the period of focus were uncovered, implying that the administration of projects was significantly altered, with documentation for the later years of TERA in Onondaga County being stored elsewhere (the records may also be lost or destroyed). To obtain the complete picture of TERA work relief projects in the county, it would be necessary to acquire this information. Given the difficulty in finding out about the early years of the program, it is possible the rest of the story may not be easy to uncover.

One of the major challenges in TERA research is the lack of primary source documentation for its earliest months. Because it was intended to be a temporary measure, standards may not have existed for record-keeping past the initial six months specified by the legislation. Reports by the administration do not mention individual projects in the cities and counties of New York, nor break them down by quantity, but only by total cost.³⁷⁴ Therefore, necessary documentation must be located in individual county offices (possibly county courthouses), historical societies, or other repositories. Though a great deal of information was obtained for this thesis through the former archives of the Onondaga County of Museums and

³⁷⁴ As seen in the figures mentioned in Chapter 3 regarding total expenditures in Syracuse and Onondaga County for the full duration of TERA.

Historic Sites (now held by the Onondaga Historical Association), it is believed that a considerable number of documents may be located elsewhere, possibly in the possession of the family of work bureau chairman Crandall Melvin. Similarly, inquiries to the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry regarding the papers of former work bureau landscape architect Laurie D. Cox (who was an instructor and later dean of the school) were fruitless.

Identification of personnel can be an avenue of discovery for TERA and EWB documentation, as can local historical societies in the communities where projects were undertaken. For the Erie Canal Park in the Village of Jordan, the office of the Town of Elbridge historian provided a wealth of articles and photographs regarding the project, though no primary source documents related to the work bureau or TERA were found. The archives of local newspapers can also provide insight into both the scope of work performed as well as the way it was portrayed to the public, and even the public perception of the projects. Some newspaper archives are available online and searchable for free or a small fee, but often times, historical societies may be a better source for these articles if they already have them sorted by subject or they are well cared for and easier to read, as was the case with the Jordan Erie Canal Park.³⁷⁵ The original appearance of projects and sites may have changed over time, so pictures in these articles or archives may provide important insight into the evolution of sites over time.

Once sites have been identified, it is crucial to inventory them in their current condition to compare to historical information about their construction, materials, design, setting, or other important features. A preliminary form (Appendix C) has been designed, modeled after New York State Historic Resource Inventory forms for NRHP nominations, as well as the CCC-

³⁷⁵ The archives of the *Syracuse Post-Standard* were also helpful in locating articles covering the Emergency Work Bureau, though there were limitations, in that similar to microfiche research you can only search by pages of newspapers from that era, not individual articles.

site inventory form designed by a team of cultural anthropologists and historians for the United States Forest Service. *The Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933-42* by Alison T. Otis, et al. (1986) sought to provide a history of forest service involvement with the CCC, and provide strategies and guidelines for that agency to inventory and potentially nominate all of the corps projects extant on their lands throughout the United States to the NRHP. Though this book is over a quarter-century old, it provides the only known strategy potentially applicable to documenting TERA sites.

In the introduction to Appendix E (entitled “Evaluation of CCC-era Structures”) of this book, the authors advise those endeavoring to document these structures to familiarize themselves with the CCC design philosophy prior to any field investigation.³⁷⁶ The forest service published at least two style guides for CCC projects, *Acceptable Building Plans*, and *Recreational Plans Handbook*. The National Park Service also published a series of guidebooks for recommended building styles, which varied from one region to another based on the type of country and style of architecture prevalent in that area (e.g. adobe or pueblo architecture for the desert and semi-desert climates of the American southwest).³⁷⁷ Unfortunately, no such guidebooks exist for TERA sites, nor have any printed guidelines for the construction of Emergency Work Bureau projects been discovered, as projects were likely to be varied from one county to the next with no design unity or theme. However, it is possible that similarities may exist between work bureau sites that imply specific use of materials, form or style in their design, due to different counties employing their own staffs of architects and landscape architects who developed or utilized specific concepts.

³⁷⁶ Alison T. Otis, William D. Honey, Thomas C. Hogg, and Kimberly K. Lakin, *The Forest Service and The Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933-42* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1986), 209.

³⁷⁷ Ibid; the National Park Service books were entitled *Park & Recreation Structures* by Albert H. Good.

The use of polychromatic finished stone by Laurie D. Cox in the design and construction of the administration building at Green Lakes State Park (for which he was the architect), and similar polychromatic stonework in the Gale Salt Well and Jesuit Well (for which he was the landscape architect) suggest that this was a character-defining feature of Cox's work in parks during this period, but this information has not been directly confirmed by documentation, only observation and inference. Other similar stonework is present at the abandoned gates of the former Onondaga Sanatorium in St. Agnes Cemetery near the southern edge of Syracuse.³⁷⁸ The Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau is known to have performed work at the sanatorium, though no evidence has been located to suggest the gates were constructed using their labor. An alternate possibility is that the type of stones used in these structures are or were common to the region during their period of construction, which can also be instructive in identifying TERA and work bureau structures. Of course, the possibility also exists that there may be no unifying architectural feature between projects, if no architect or landscape architect was employed by a work bureau, or if they were, they may not have sought to utilize such character-defining features.

Another step taken by Otis et al. in their recommendations is suggesting three categories of CCC resources: camp, recreational, and administrative sites.³⁷⁹ Generally speaking, the projects undertaken by the various county Emergency Work Bureaus fell into one or more classifications: highways, sanitation, water supply, parks and playgrounds, utilities and structures, clerical and professional, general public improvements, and miscellaneous jobs.³⁸⁰ Therefore, the following categories have been employed in the TERA survey inventory designed

³⁷⁸ Sean Kirst, "Onondaga Sanatorium," *The Post-Standard*, http://www.syracuse.com/kirst/index.ssf/2008/11/onondaga_sanatorium.html (accessed November 14, 2009).

³⁷⁹ Otis, et al., *Forest Service*, 209.

³⁸⁰ Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, *Report 1932*, 35.

and included here: public works and infrastructure, recreational structures and sites, commemorative architecture, and miscellaneous projects. Of course, sites may qualify for more than one of these categories, and there are those that may fall outside of these classifications, but based on research conducted in Onondaga County, these were the most prevalent types of sites identified.

The authors of the *Forest Service* book also suggest the following methods of documentation when conducting an inventory that can be employed when documenting TERA sites: sketch a site plan and floor plan, take several photographs and keep a photographic log, and if time permits, create measured drawings.³⁸¹ Additional, more detailed instructions are included in the TERA inventory form to reference in the field. Those endeavoring to inventory TERA projects and sites should seek to be as thorough as possible in their documentation to avoid repeat visits, as well as provide sufficient evidence to help prove the significance of the work performed by the work bureaus, and create a record of their existing conditions should they be deteriorated or threatened with destruction.

Otis, et al. noted at the time of their book that some CCC structures were less than fifty years old, which made them ineligible for the National Register unless they were of “exceptional importance to a community, region, State, or nation,” adding, “the social, political, and economic impact of the Great Depression gives these sites an exceptional status.”³⁸² As the existence of TERA was a direct response to the circumstances of the Great Depression, with lasting social, political and economic impacts at the city, county, and state level, whose success impelled Franklin Roosevelt to implement similar programs at the national level, it is suggested

³⁸¹ Otis, 210, 214.

³⁸² Ibid, 215.

that the work performed by Emergency Work Bureaus in the early years of TERA is significant enough to warrant eligibility for and nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

An additional consideration not mentioned in the CCC form, and of particular concern in Onondaga County, is the issue of archaeological resources that could be uncovered at TERA sites. Archaeological excavation was not a concern of the OCEWB, though their awareness of the Native American and industrial history associated with sites such as Onondaga Lake Parkway was acute, as evidenced by Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois, the Jesuit Well, and Gale Salt Well. It is highly likely that considerable archaeological evidence is located along the shores of Onondaga Lake, due to the significance of the lake to the nearby Onondaga Nation. The same is true throughout New York State, whose history is intertwined with a number of Native American tribes and nations. So potential for archaeological resources is an additional consideration in the significance of TERA and EWB sites, as well as an avenue of future investigation for preservationists and archaeologists.

The case for nomination of TERA sites to the NRHP should rely heavily on the information collected in these forms. Once TERA sites in the desired geographic location (village, city, county, etc.) are identified and inventoried, they should be assessed as to the present condition of the resources, as well as how they have evolved over time (if historical photographs or other documentation indicates any change). Have they gained any additional significance through usage, or association with another historic feature of their location or setting? Are remnants all that remain to convey the story of TERA and the work that was done? Does anything remain at all that could indicate the former existence of a TERA resource? All resources, extant or otherwise, should be entered in a database or spreadsheet for reference and guidance, so a hierarchy of sites can be established to determine a course of action. Once the

sites with the most integrity have been identified, if appropriate, those may be pursued for State or National Register designation. At the very least, they should be suggested for local protection and recognition in some manner.

Such a course of action is dependent on a Determination of Eligibility (DOE) from the New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for TERA sites. Since the SHPO has thirty staff members covering the sixty-two counties of New York State, it may be a challenge to convince all of them of the eligibility of these resources in their respective regions, as the type, quality and quantity of work performed likely varied from county to county, and it is difficult to know what would be easily identifiable or significant to the history of the communities in question. However, if the extant resources and the accompanying historical research are strong enough to convey the significance of the TERA projects (once they located and inventoried), then hopefully the respective SHPO staff will be compelled to issue a DOE, and set a precedent for acknowledgment of the importance of the story being told by what remains of the work done by emergency work bureaus across New York State.

Three additional challenges to consider in this process are: funding, finding individuals willing to gather all of this information, and engaging municipalities where TERA resources are located in allowing the inventory and potential nomination to the state register and NRHP. Historical societies and college students in search of research projects or interested in volunteering for such an endeavor, are two possible groups that could be employed in the information gathering and inventorying suggested here. Whoever is involved needs to ensure the property owners of the sites being investigated are interested in historic designation, if the information being gathered is sufficient to meet that goal. As most of the sites encountered in Onondaga County were parks or other public places, permission to observe and record is not

necessarily needed, but any action towards recognition or landmarking would require the assent and compliance of the municipality or whoever owns the sites being examined.

If the process of gathering information does lead to a nomination, it would be instructive to seek out the forms used to successfully nominate CCC and WPA structures already listed on the NRHP. The criteria and themes used to evaluate and prove the significance of these structures could be applicable to TERA resources. This is another reason the CCC inventory form used in gathering information for nomination of those sites should be used. In her book *Building the National Parks*, Linda Flint McClelland notes that “local parks, including metropolitan and county parks, may also qualify for listing under this context if they possess naturalistic characteristics and natural components and if they were partially or entirely developed under the direction of the National Park Service through the CCC or WPA.”³⁸³ A thematic, multiple-property nomination of TERA sites could be realized in a similar fashion to other related historic resources located in regional proximity to one another, as McClelland has suggested with CCC and WPA sites.

Collaboration with Existing Agencies and Institutions

Valuable partnerships can be created that can assist in the quest to gain recognition and appreciation for the products of TERA and emergency work bureau labor. Historical societies, though they do not often have the membership, funding or capacity to manage their existing collections and facilities, are a potential ally in communities where TERA work has been performed. As previously noted, they may also possess materials in their archives, or be able to direct persons conducting TERA research to additional sources of information. In that respect, their partnership is valued; however, they may also have the ability

³⁸³ Linda Flint McClelland, *Building the National Parks* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 512.

to gather volunteers, or provide a workspace and temporary storage for any new materials and inventory documentation. The Town of Elbridge Historical Society and Friends of Historic Onondaga Lake have been indispensable to this end in the research conducted for this project.

The Friends of Historic Onondaga Lake (FOHOL) also serve as an excellent example of an existing entity with whom a partnership may be advantageous. FOHOL was founded in 1984, envisioned by local history enthusiasts seeking to tell the wealth of stories associated with Onondaga Lake. Once the new Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois site was constructed, a program geared towards reenactment and “living history” was implemented, with the museum becoming a regular destination for area primary schools. However, programming did not change for over a decade, which led to decreasing attendance and activity, and in 2002 the museum and accompanying Office of Museums and Historic Sites were closed.

In 2004, some of the more determined members of FOHOL developed a proposal to operate the Sainte Marie as volunteers, with Onondaga County retaining ownership. A recruitment drive exceeded their expectation, with over 280 members pledging their service through donation of twenty dollars, or volunteering twenty hours of their time. Their desire was to develop a mission that went beyond the “mission” walls to engage the community. After running the site for almost a decade, FOHOL are no longer actively involved in interpretive efforts at the former Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois facility, but could potentially be engaged for their fundraising, management and interpretive experience and expertise related to the site.

In addition, partnerships with local and regional educational institutions like Lemoyne College and the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF), arts and corporate entities such as Honeywell (who are currently engaged in cleanup activities at the lake) could be beneficial. Relationships have been established with

numerous educational institutions and cultural groups, including the Onondaga Nation Native Americans, whose territory is located just south of the city of Syracuse, and whose story is inextricably linked to the history of the shores of Onondaga Lake. Promotion of the evolution of local history will target educational institutions at all age groups throughout the region to enhance the profile of local history, tying it to the ongoing evolution of the lake, and its relationship to significant industries, infrastructure improvements and Native peoples whose stories are not always accorded the respect they deserve. Increased knowledge and interest will lead to additional opportunities for new programming to involve the community on an perpetual basis in the history of Onondaga County. Steps have already been taken by SUNY-ESF students and faculty to become more involved in commemoration of the natural landscape of the Onondaga Lake Parkway and its history.

In June of 2009, a doctoral student helped complete the replanting of an inland salt marsh at the Gale Salt Spring, to demonstrate the reintroduction of native plants that thrive in salt conditions and show more ideal roadside plantings in the urban landscape, and serve as a guide in its restoration.³⁸⁴ Given the university's direct connection to the parkway and its creation via the involvement of former professor and dean of landscape architecture Laurie D. Cox, and now current efforts, it seems possible to create an ongoing relationship between the county and the university to use the parkway, and perhaps other TERA projects in county parks, as a teaching tool for students. Sites such as Onondaga Lake Parkway and Erie Canal Park in Jordan serve as excellent examples of designed landscapes whose evolution over the past eighty years is certainly worthy of further study.

³⁸⁴ State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, "A Snapshot of Central New York Wetlands In The 1800s," <http://www.esf.edu/communications/view.asp?newsID=220> (accessed October 31, 2009).

It will be crucial to attract support from Onondaga County on future plans, as they are the owners of the land on which Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway and all of its historic resources are located. It will be incumbent upon OHA, FOHOL, or other non-profit entities, and any partnered institutions, to craft a rich, illustrative, and flexible program that can generate excitement throughout the region and attract attention to the story of the OCEWB. To demonstrate commitment to historic sites and transmission and promotion of history, the county should establish a regular maintenance schedule for all of its emergency work bureau assets that extends beyond lawn-mowing and standard landscape maintenance. Historic masonry specialists will be required for repair of historic masonry at the Gale Salt Well, Jesuit Well, and Wedding Bridge. They will be accountable to the Onondaga County Parks Department for work performed. The Parks Department will approve alterations to land, and be requested to provide staff to assist in land improvements as needed. In lieu of that, they would need to approve outside contractors in any labor performed on their property, as well as collaborate with Friends of Historic Onondaga Lake board of directors on strategies for implementation and continued site maintenance and successful programming with other Park sites.

Grant-writing

A history trail at Onondaga Lake Parkway is one example of a project that could be funded through a grant. One purpose of a grant could be to expand the programming focus of the museum at the Ska-Nonh Great Law Center of Peace (formerly Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois). A history trail could be constructed along the north side of Onondaga Lake Parkway connecting historic sites and markers, with additional interpretation by trained personnel, linking the Native American origins of the lake and region to the salt industry, and highlighting forgotten Depression-era work relief projects constructed by the Onondaga County Emergency Work

Bureau. A guidebook and corresponding exhibition inside Ska-Nonh could be created as a supplement to further enhance the new programming and promote opportunities beyond the site itself.

There are numerous opportunities for promotion and commemoration of TERA and the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau that could be addressed by grants, targeted toward specific grant-giving organizations. One such organization is the Preservation League of New York State (PLNYS), and their Preserve New York grant program. The PLNYS Preserve New York Grant program “provides support for three types of projects: cultural resource surveys, historic structure reports, and historic landscape reports.”³⁸⁵ The grants, awarded annually, range from \$3,000 to \$10,000, with a May application deadline and September award date. The *PNY* grant could most be beneficial for TERA resources in any of these categories. A cultural resource survey or historic landscape report could be particularly useful as part of a full inventory of TERA projects and landscapes, whose findings could potentially be incorporated into a National Register of Historic Places nomination, or other preservation projects. This grant should also be kept in mind for future application if a historic structure report is ever desired by Onondaga County for the Salt Museum, built in 1933 by the Emergency Work Bureau. Once TERA structures have been identified in other counties in New York, they should also consider employing this strategy for obtaining grants to fully survey their resources, and maximize the potential for their recognition. Additional activities that could be supported by a grant are a management plan, and restoration of stone features throughout the park.

Conclusion

³⁸⁵ Preservation League of New York State, “Preserve New York,” Preservation League of New York, http://www.preservenys.org/01_what_grants_presny.html (accessed April 22, 2009).

Though the full scope of extant resources constructed in New York State under TERA is currently unknown, there are several strategies that can be employed to obtain this information and effectively promote their long-term preservation. Inventory and evaluation, leading to nomination to historic registers, and interpretive programming by municipalities, non-profits and historical societies, are the primary steps that can be taken, with adjustments made based on the response, to most effectively highlight the efforts of emergency work bureaus in creating historic landscapes and commemorative structures that can be discovered and showcased as forgotten successes of Roosevelt's work relief vision for New York State.

APPENDIX A: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF CRANDALL MELVIN

The Melvin family is known in Syracuse and the suburb of Liverpool for their family legal practice of several decades. Crandall Melvin, Sr. was also a president of an important local bank for twenty-five years, and wrote a history of its first one hundred years, *A History of The Merchants National Bank and Trust Company of Syracuse, New York* in 1969. His son, Crandall Melvin, Jr., was also a prominent lawyer in the family practice, and was the subject of a local public access television show and video series by the Liverpool Public Library entitled *Liverpool Legends*, in which he discusses his father's life, success, and efforts as the chairman of the Onondaga County Work Bureau (though the focus of the program was more on Melvin, Jr. and his contribution to local history).

Crandall Melvin, Sr. was born April 6, 1889 in Euclid, a hamlet in the Town of Clay in Onondaga County, before the family moved to what was then a dairy farm in Liverpool, where members of his family still reside today. He graduated from Syracuse University in 1911, and obtained his law degree from the same university in 1913. He began practicing law that same year and continued until entering the army in 1917, where he served as second lieutenant of the Field Artillery until his discharge at the end of World War I. He formed a partnership with local lawyer Jerome Cheney and Judge Nathan L. Miller, and after those two were appointed to higher positions within the state (Miller becoming governor of New York, and Cheney a Supreme Court justice), Melvin formed a partnership with his brother Myron and the firm of Melvin and Melvin was born in 1921.³⁸⁶

During this same time period, Crandall Melvin taught torts law at Syracuse University, from 1915 to 1917, and again from 1919 to 1926. In addition to this important

³⁸⁶ All information in this paragraph from Melvin, *A History*, 88.

educational association (which led to his appointment as a trustee of the university from 1934 until his death), Melvin achieved the position of president of the Onondaga County Bar Association. He was also involved in numerous social, honorary and professional organizations such as the Grange, Rotary and Masonic Lodge, as well as director of the Syracuse Lighting Company and Central New York Power Corporation. Beyond his tenure as chairman in the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau, Melvin's commitment to the historic fabric of the county was cultivated during his tenure as president and director of the Onondaga Historical Association.³⁸⁷

As noted, from 1938 to 1963 he served as president of the Merchants Bank. Successive bank president Thomas Higgins commented on Melvin that "during his presidency, the bank saw its greatest growth and development...he fathered every major banking innovation for nearly thirty years, despite having no technical knowledge of banking, (though) he did have an understanding of people, and extensive farming, business and legal background."³⁸⁸ Also noteworthy, his involvement with Onondaga Lake did not end with the dissolution of his position as chairman of the OCEWB, as he was also a co-founder of the Onondaga Lake Reclamation Association, in direct response to the infamous Allied Chemical Company waste spill on Thanksgiving Day of 1943 in Solway, NY, and continued to focus on the well-being and redevelopment of the Lake for the balance of his life.³⁸⁹

The lasting impact of Crandall Melvin Sr.'s commitment and contributions to the city of Syracuse, Onondaga Lake, the surrounding area, and to local history as a whole, is limited in terms of public awareness. Given the magnitude of his dedication over decades to the city,

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ John R. Short, *The Urban Order: An Introduction to Cities, Culture and Power* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell), 449.

county and region, greater attention should be paid to the life, career, and perseverance of Melvin in his crusade to continuously improve and celebrate Onondaga County, its history, natural resources, and economic development and potential for future generations. For the success and continued use of the Onondaga Lake Park and Parkway alone, Melvin should be recognized for his achievements. This does not take into account the numerous countywide projects that were completed in the two years of the Onondaga County EWB, some of which endure in a similar form to their original construction, and some which have been lost or compromised over time due to neglect, poor maintenance or destruction.

Crandall Melvin was known for giving “hundreds” of speeches, on everything from the settlement of Onondaga County, or the efforts of the emergency work bureau, to law and money. A 1964 profile on Melvin and his brother Myron noted that, “as far back as anyone can remember, Crandall Melvin has been a moving figure in the Onondaga Historical Association.” This was but one of the local organizations to which Crandall Melvin belonged, and he threw his support into many efforts at promoting local history, conservation, and civic pride.³⁹⁰ Melvin passed away on April 20th, 1980 at the age of 91. Syracuse University Chancellor Melvin Eggers spoke at Melvin’s memorial service, characterizing him as “a giant of a man...he talked as a sage and a saint, but walked with the common people.” Eggers did not forget to remind the attendees that Melvin reclaimed the wasteland along Onondaga Lake,” noting, “today, that park which he planned and which gave hundreds of men during the Depression work is now a living memorial to him.”³⁹¹ As observed in a 1982 profile of Onondaga Lake Parkway, and still true thirty years later, “every weekday, thousands of commuters travel to and from work over the Onondaga Lake Parkway, oblivious to the fact that

³⁹⁰ “The Brothers Melvin,” *Syracuse Post-Standard Magazine*, April 5, 1964, 4-5.

³⁹¹ Ramona A. Bowden, “Service Cites Melvin As ‘Giant of a Man,’” *Syracuse Post-Standard*, May 2, 1980, D-2.

the three-mile boulevard, built on the old Oswego Canal, was one of the most ambitious ‘make-work’ projects of the 1930s.”³⁹²

Melvin’s legacy was marked at the parkway with a plaque affixed to concrete monument, near a similar plaque for Joseph Griffin, which is attached to a boulder. In 1992, Melvin’s son Crandall Melvin Jr. decried the lack of maintenance for these monuments and their insensitive placement where they could not be seen. Calling his father’s monument and its placement inappropriate, Melvin Jr. remarked that he had “hoped someone with a backhoe would actually knock the monument down.”³⁹³ A May 2008 advertising supplement promoting the seventy-fifth anniversary of Onondaga Lake Park encourages the reader to “explore five centuries of Syracuse history on the shores of Onondaga Lake,” including “the history of the salt industry, a 17th century French mission, and recreational use at one of America’s top ten heritage parks,” but made no mention of Crandall Melvin, or the Onondaga Emergency Work Bureau that was responsible for the preservation of those centuries of history, or the amenities which allow area residents to experience them.³⁹⁴

³⁹² Richard Palmer, “The Changing Face of Syracuse: Onondaga Lake Parkway,” *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, March 20, 1982, B-10.

³⁹³ Charley Hannagan, “The Parkway’s Plaques,” *The Post-Standard, Neighbors Magazine*. August 20, 1992, 3.

³⁹⁴ “History Happens Here...Daily!” *The Post-Standard, Neighbors East* section, May 22, 2008, 21.

APPENDIX B: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF LAURIE D. COX

One of the defining characteristics of many of the landscape features constructed by the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau and mentioned by Lorena Hickok in her correspondence with Harry Hopkins is well-laid and often dramatic masonry. This masonry is clearly evident in the Gale Salt Spring at Onondaga Lake Parkway, the remains of walkways and walls at the Onondaga Sanatorium, and the administration building Green Lakes State Park. The administration building at Green Lakes was constructed prior to TERA in 1929, and was a bold statement in park architecture by its architect, Laurie D. Cox, who was to become the project architect of the OCEWB. One of its most striking features even today, over eighty years after its construction, is the polychromatic stonework that comprises the walls of the building, as well as the exterior walls to the front porch, and stonewalls of the stairways leading to the lake. Similar stonework is found in the gate to the Onondaga Sanatorium, as well as the Gale Salt Well at Onondaga Lake Parkway. This character-defining feature is a hallmark of Cox's landscape designs for this era that up to this point has gone unexamined.

Born in Nova Scotia, Canada, received bachelor's degrees from Acadia University in Nova Scotia, as well as Harvard, before landing a job as an assistant city engineer in Boulder, Colorado in 1909. After a brief stint with a landscape architect in Detroit, Cox was a landscape engineer with the Los Angeles Park Commission from 1910-1914, where he designed and landscaped grounds for Lincoln and Griffith Parks. Appointed assistant professor of landscape engineering at the New York State College of Forestry in late 1914, Cox was promoted to the head of that department the following year, and served in that position until 1930, when he was appointed the permanent head. Additional positions of note include resident

town planner for the U.S. Shipping Board (1918), consulting landscape architect for the Central New York State Park Commission (1926 to 1946), and resident landscape architect for a reconnaissance survey of Green Mountain Parkway in Vermont for the National Park Service (1934).³⁹⁵

Cox founded the Syracuse University lacrosse team in 1916, and was of great importance to the popularization of the sport in America. In 1920, Laurie Cox analyzed Syracuse parks and suggested ways the city could preserve its historic trees, as part of one of the earliest documented urban studies at the New York State College of Forestry.³⁹⁶ This was similar to work he had conducted as part of a survey of street trees in New York City in 1915, published the following year as *A Street Tree System for New York City, Borough of Manhattan*, which was intended to “be applied to somewhat more definite problems of caring for street trees and evolving a suggestive system of street planting and culture for the entire city.”³⁹⁷

Between 1926 and 1930, Cox did major design work for buildings and grounds at five state parks in New York: Selkirk Shores in Oswego County, Green Lakes in Onondaga County, Chittenango Falls in Madison County, Gilbert Lake in Otsego County, and Chenango Valley in Broome County.³⁹⁸ Cox, along with Syracuse park commissioner Frank M. Westcott and New York State College of Forestry chairman Nelson Brown and members of the city planning department and local business community, was part of the Municipal Tree Commission,

³⁹⁵ Laurie D. Cox and Raymond J. Hoyle, ed., *The New York State College of Forestry at Syracuse University: A History of Its First Twenty-Five Years, 1911-1936* (Syracuse, NY: New York State College of Forestry), 1936, 56.

³⁹⁶ State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, “Syracuse: A Living Laboratory,” *The Post-Standard*. September 4, 2001.

³⁹⁷ Laurie D. Cox, *A Street Tree System for New York City, Borough of Manhattan* (Syracuse, NY: New York State College of Forestry), 1916, 12.

³⁹⁸ Frank Herron, “Building Green Lakes State Park,” *The Post-Standard*. June 27, 2004.

which vigorously opposed the destruction of elm trees in the widening of major city thoroughfares such as West Genesee Street and West Onondaga Street.³⁹⁹

At the eighth National Shade Tree Conference in Rochester, NY, Cox told the delegates to the conference that the planting problem of the city streets is one of the major municipal issues and increasing attention must be given to it.

Until we get some worthwhile efforts at good design in our street and highway planting, we will not get the American people to realize that the art is a serious one and worthy of adequate financial and moral support. In this country we have neglected the matter of design in our street tree planting notwithstanding that it is very obviously a division of city planning, which is an art primarily of design.⁴⁰⁰

Cox planted the first tree as part of the shore beautification scheme in November 1932. Niagara Hudson Power Company donated most of the trees, which were largely red pine and white cedar, and were “placed with a view to improving appearance of the new park as well as the cost of maintaining the lawns when the development is completed.”⁴⁰¹

Soon after the formation of the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau, for which he was the consulting landscape architect, Cox resigned as coach of the Syracuse University lacrosse team he had coached for fifteen years. Though no reason is cited in any articles on the resignation, it is possible the promise of increased work on Work Bureau projects could have precipitated his decision, but it is difficult to be certain.⁴⁰²

In June 1946, Cox retired after 32 years of “distinguished and brilliant service” to “fish, write and enjoy life” on his farm at Bradford, NH.⁴⁰³ He was occasionally mentioned in the Syracuse newspapers with such praise as “a pioneer in the training of men for park

³⁹⁹ “Tree Board Acts to Preserve Genesee Elms,” *Syracuse Herald*, May 2, 1929.

⁴⁰⁰ “Dr. Cox Urges Design For Tree Planting,” *Syracuse Herald*, August 26, 1932.

⁴⁰¹ “2,000 Trees Being Planted On Shore of Onondaga Lake As A Job Relief Project,” *Syracuse Herald*, November 27, 1932.

⁴⁰² “Laurie Cox Quits; Simmons Gets Post As Lacrosse Coach,” *Syracuse Herald*, December 15, 1931.

⁴⁰³ “Good Fishing, Laurie!” *Syracuse Herald*, June 18, 1946.

administration,” and that he “has accomplished great things for the college and the city...(and) developed the first comprehensive training program for work in the parks field, one that has been of outstanding value to the nation.”⁴⁰⁴ Cox died October 23, 1968, and was remembered with a two-column obituary mentioning his accomplishments in the state and nationwide, but with no mention of his efforts with the Onondaga County Emergency Work Bureau.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ “Dr. Laurie Cox Returns For A Visit,” *Syracuse Herald*, January 24, 1953.

⁴⁰⁵ “Laurie Cox Dies; Was Forestry Prof,” *The Post-Standard*, October 24, 1968.

APPENDIX C: INVENTORY FORM FOR EVALUATING TERA STRUCTURES

RECORDING DATE: _____ RECORDER NAME: _____

SITE NAME: _____

SITE ADDRESS/LOCATION: _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP: _____ COUNTY: _____

TYPE OF RESOURCE (e.g. building, road or other infrastructure): _____

STYLE: _____ DOMINANT MATERIAL(S): _____

BUILDER (e.g. work bureau or significant persons, if known): _____

RESOURCE STATUS: ___ Extant/In Use ___ Extant/Vacant ___ Partial/Ruins

ORIGINAL USE: _____ PRESENT USE: _____

DATE(S) OF CONSTRUCTION: _____ ALTERATIONS: ___ Yes ___ No

DATE(S) OF ALTERATIONS (if known): _____

HISTORICAL DESIGNATIONS:

___ Local Designation; Describe: _____

___ State or National Register of Historic Places; Date Listed: _____

___ Potential for Inclusion – TERA Multiple Properties Nomination

___ Not Eligible/Not Significant – Reason(s): _____

LOCATED IN OR NEAR EXISTING HISTORIC DISTRICT: Yes___ No___

IDENTIFYING SIGNAGE: Yes___ No___

OTHER SIGNAGE: Yes___ No___ IF YES, DESCRIBE: _____

IS ORIGINAL SITE PLAN EVIDENT? ___ Yes ___ No

DESCRIBES CHANGES TO SITE PLAN _____

ADDITIONAL NOTES (style, materials, structural system, plan, etc.):

MAP:



PHOTOGRAPHS:

SITE: _____
VIEW: _____
DATE: _____
PHOTOGRAPHER: _____

SITE: _____
VIEW: _____
DATE: _____
PHOTOGRAPHER: _____

SITE: _____
VIEW: _____
DATE: _____
PHOTOGRAPHER: _____

SITE: _____
VIEW: _____
DATE: _____
PHOTOGRAPHER: _____

SITE: _____
VIEW: _____
DATE: _____
PHOTOGRAPHER: _____

HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

DRAWINGS & PLANS

Location(s): _____
Name(s): _____
Date(s): _____

PHOTOGRAPHS

Location(s): _____
Name(s): _____
Date(s): _____

FILES & RECORDS

Location(s): _____
Types of Files/Records: _____
Date(s): _____

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Name(s): _____
Date(s) and Page Numbers: _____
Comments: _____

OTHER SOURCES OF HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

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