

# Employment & Training Institute

**Jobs for Workers on Relief  
in Milwaukee County, 1930-1994**



# **Jobs for Workers on Relief in Milwaukee County, 1930-1994**

by

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*Cover Page: Milwaukee County Civilian Conservation Corps workers build revetments along the banks of Honey Creek to reduce flooding problems. Photograph courtesy of the Milwaukee Journal*

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#### Abbreviations

CCC	Civilian Conservation Corps
CETA	Comprehensive Employment and Training Act
CWA	Civil Works Administration
CWETP	County Work Experience and Training Program (Milwaukee County)
FERA	Federal Emergency Relief Administration
FERA-WD	Federal Emergency Relief Administration-Work Division
GA	General Assistance
JOBS	Job Opportunities in the Business Sector
JTPA	Job Training Partnership Act
MDTA	Manpower Development and Training Act
NYA	National Youth Administration
PEP	Public Employment Program
PWA	Public Works Administration
RA	Resettlement Administration
TERA	Temporary Emergency Relief Administration
USES	United States Employment Service
WAP	Work Assistance Program (Milwaukee County)
WERA	Wisconsin Emergency Relief Administration
WPA	Works Progress (Work Projects) Administration

## **Jobs for Workers on Relief in Milwaukee County: 1930-1994**

### **Executive Summary**

From 1930 to the present Milwaukee city and county governments have created thousands of jobs for families who could not find unsubsidized employment and who sought county relief. Milwaukee created jobs for 26,000 men to help their families through the winter of 1933-34. In 1936 the city government alone created 12,000 year-round WPA jobs in construction, education, health and office work for men and women heading families hardest hit by the Depression. Women working in shifts of three to four hundred operated a sewing center which made nearly a million articles of clothing for needy families and children in the community. And by 1940 Milwaukee County "relief workers" had helped build one of the finest park systems in the nation.

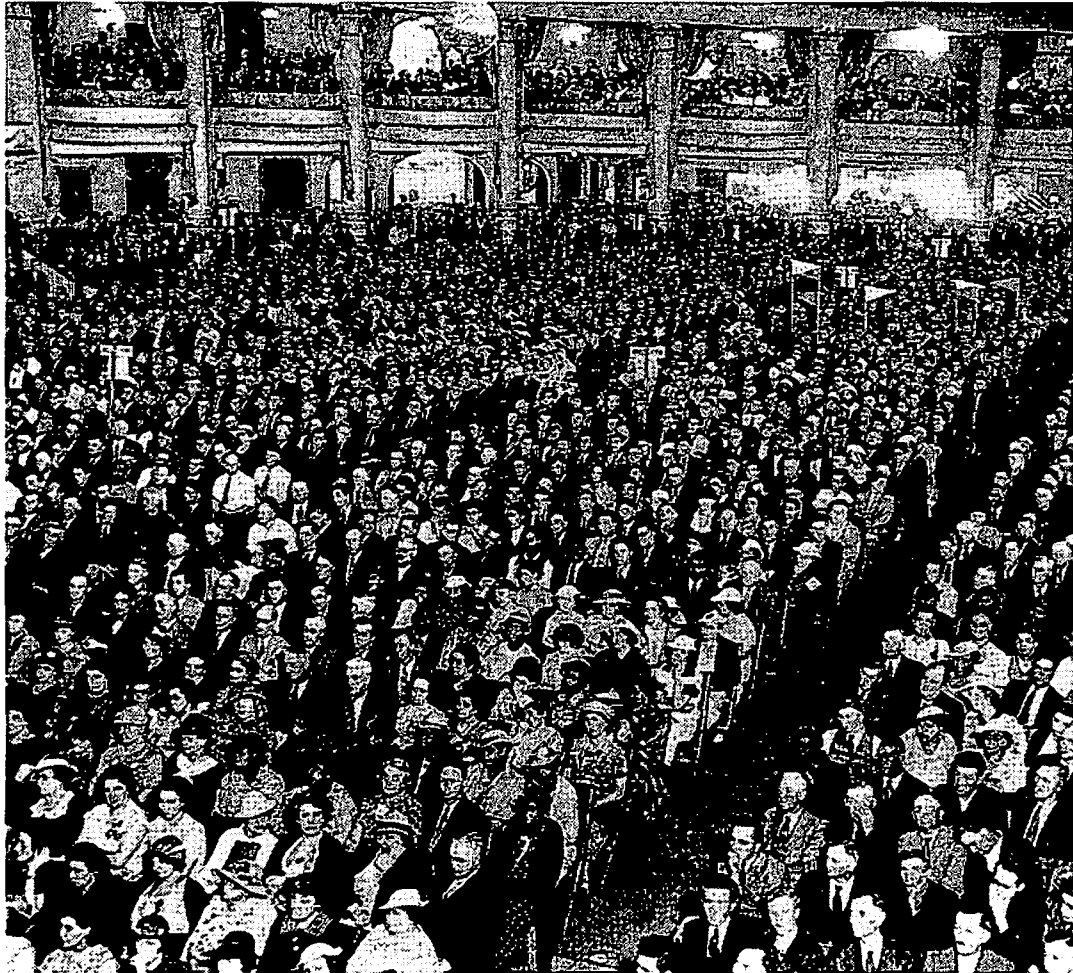
For over sixty years Milwaukee County has operated work programs as part of its local provision of relief to individuals and families. County relief efforts have consistently included a work requirement to ensure that local taxpayers receive some return for relief dollars expended, to preserve the dignity of persons out of work, and to test the willingness of able adults to provide labor for their relief. Milwaukee's long history of work relief programs demonstrates that adults respond in large numbers to employment opportunities, that meaningful public service jobs can make important and lasting contributions to the community, and that local governments can provide effective leadership in developing jobs for individuals and families out of work.

Given an employment situation in the Milwaukee area where total openings for full-time and part-time jobs make up only half to sixty percent of the jobs needed for unemployed workers and adults on welfare in the Milwaukee area, community service jobs along with improved labor exchange programs and transportation systems may be needed to insure adequate employment of Milwaukee area residents. This history of Milwaukee's community service employment programs for relief workers is presented in order to stimulate public discussion regarding the role of community service employment in assisting unemployed families today and the types of jobs which could most appropriately serve the Milwaukee area at this time.

#### **Study Highlights**

- In the late 1920's, the City of Milwaukee aggressively sought employment for residents who were hard hit by the Depression. To avoid laying off city workers, Milwaukee initiated a 10 percent monthly pay cut for city employees with a corresponding 10 percent reduction in working time, and used rotating schedules for city laborers and roadmen to reduce the number of complete layoffs. The city established a residency rule requiring companies working on city contracts to hire Milwaukee residents.
- To increase non-municipal jobs for residents, the city established an employment office in the basement of city hall to register and find jobs for unemployed workers, and distributed work order forms through local dairy routes to encourage city residents to employ local workers performing odd jobs for their households. In the winter of 1930-31 the City of Milwaukee spent \$600,000 for relief work projects, including street sanitation, ash collection, road grading, new playgrounds, and work extending underground conduit for the fire and police alarm system.

- When federal funds became available under the Civil Works Administration, with only three weeks of planning time Milwaukee city and county officials developed projects to employ 26,000 workers in the winter of 1933-34 doing landscaping, road grading, street repair and painting. One of the largest projects employed almost 2,000 men straightening out an S-curve in the Milwaukee River and constructing a lagoon and islands in Lincoln Park in order to reduce flooding on the north side of Milwaukee. County park projects included construction of a quarry at Currie Park, construction of two swimming pools, and extending electrical and telephone wiring to county parks and golf courses.
- In the first year that the Works Progress Administration (WPA) supported local projects for workers on county relief, the City of Milwaukee developed projects for 12,000 workers constructing and improving city streets, sewer and water mains, city playgrounds, and bridges and public buildings; modernizing city real estate tax files and city records; building exhibits and classifying specimens at the Milwaukee Public Museum; and helping immunize school children.



A capacity WPA crowd came to the Eagles Ballroom and six other Milwaukee County sites on June 20, 1936, to hear a radio address from Washington outlining WPA plans for the next year.

Photograph courtesy of the Milwaukee Journal

- The Milwaukee County Department of Outdoor Relief certified relief workers for referral to WPA employment, with one employable member (usually the male parent) identified for each case. In 1936 the county reported that about 19,000 relief cases had a worker placed on the WPA, with only about 3,200 of these families requiring supplementary county relief payments.
- Six Civilian Conservation Corps camps were established in Milwaukee County to employ single, unemployed young men, ages 17 through 28. Milwaukee camps, unlike those in northern Wisconsin, were open to African American as well as Caucasian men. The CCC crews laid jetties into Lake Michigan to control erosion at Sheridan Park, excavated rock and dirt and built dams on the Milwaukee River to control flooding, landscaped miles of parkway, and developed large sections of Whitnall Park.



Milwaukee County youth apply at the Outdoor Relief Department for Civilian Conservation Corps jobs in June 1935. Photograph courtesy of the Milwaukee Journal



Milwaukee County Civilian Conservation Corps workers build revetments along the banks of Honey Creek in July 1933.  
Photograph courtesy of the Milwaukee Journal

- The most visible legacy of WPA projects in Milwaukee County was the parks system, which had more construction and landscaping during the WPA period than any other time in its history. WPA construction included six swimming pools, pavilions at Red Arrow and Brown Deer Parks, service buildings at Jacobus, Jackson and Whitnall Parks, the Botanical Garden administration building and golf club house at Whitnall Park, a bathhouse at Doctor's Park, a recreation center at Smith Park, new roads in nearly every park, and parkways throughout the county.

The Park Commission's success in using unemployed workers was due to visionary plans the Commission had already developed for a county system of parks and parkways, state legislation allowing land acquisition for parkways, availability of land parcels because of tax delinquency, and the zeal with which county and city park technicians produced detailed plans for landscaping and park lands.



WPA workers clear land for the Village of Greendale using horses, wheelbarrows, and shovels.

Photograph courtesy of the Milwaukee Journal

- **WPA workers leveled sites for 750 homes in the Village of Greendale, an experimental "garden" community built from 1935 to 1938. The WPA's labor intensive work using horses, carts and plows contrasted with the modern technology used by skilled craftsmen employed under the Resettlement Administration. The RA built an electric rail line to bring skilled Milwaukee tradesmen to the Greendale site.**

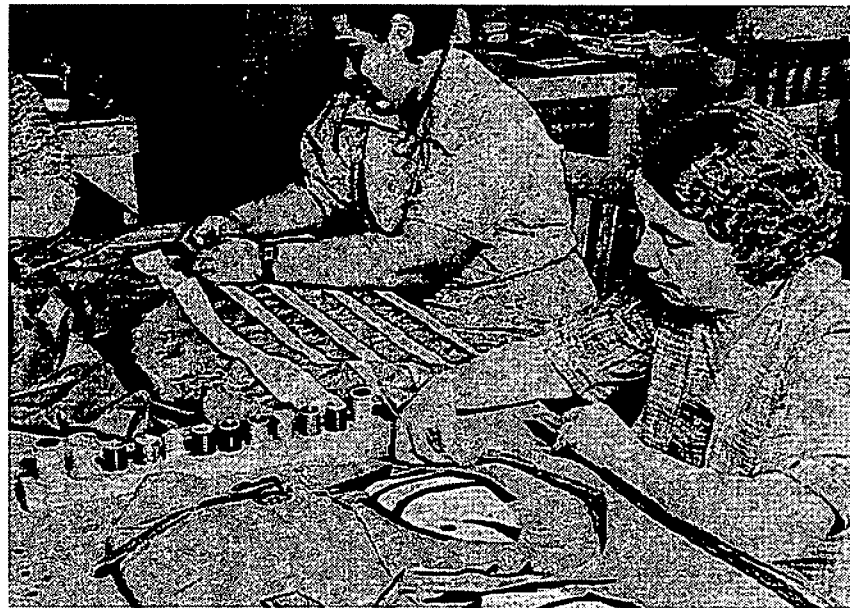
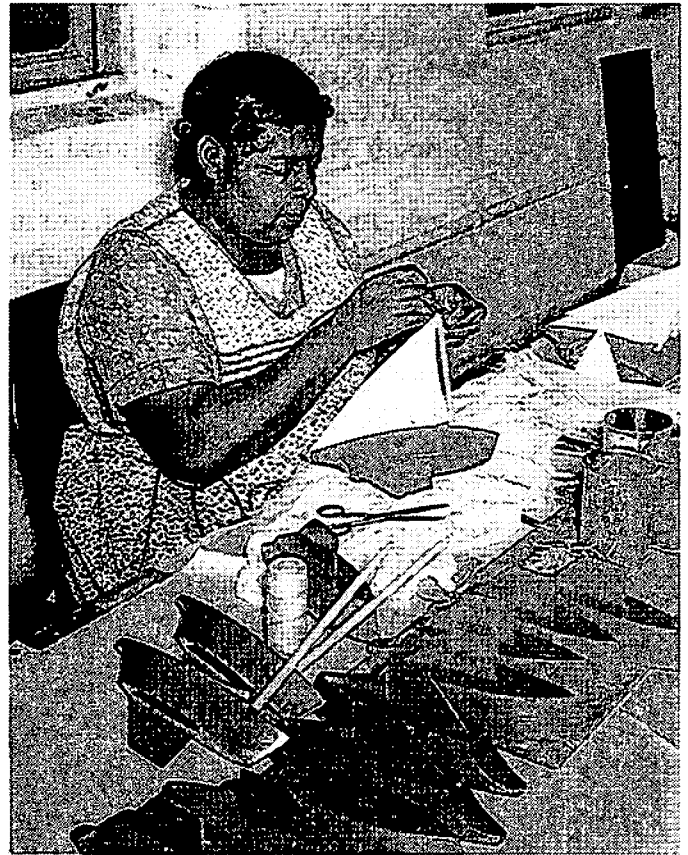


**WPA and Resettlement Administration workers building the Village of Greendale in 1937.**

**Photograph courtesy of the Milwaukee Journal**

- **The Milwaukee County Department of Outdoor Relief sponsored a National Youth Administration sewing project which employed young women (ages 18 to 25) in three 70 worker shifts to sew clothes for families on relief and persons in county institutions. Young men were employed in the parks cultivating shrub beds and newly planted trees, mowing lawns, raking leaves and weeding, helping with planting, and erecting fireplaces for picnic areas. The NYA crews erected and operated camps at Holler Park for handicapped children and in the Root River Parkway for children from needy families.**

- One of the most successful and highly publicized WPA projects in Milwaukee provided light manufacturing work for unskilled workers, mainly women, in production of dolls, toys, quilts, draperies, furniture, book binding, weaving, and textile printing under the supervision of designer-technicians from the Milwaukee State Teachers College art department. New dolls and toys were tested in local kindergartens and nurseries before beginning mass production, and an elected workers' council set many of the administrative policies, handled most disciplinary problems, and organized social functions for the workers. At its peak, the project employed 1,350 workers in three floors of a factory building at 1215 N. Market Street and sold its products to governments, schools, nurseries and hospitals throughout the country.



- In 1940, many WPA projects in Milwaukee supported the nation's defense needs. Relief workers constructed airport runways, a hanger-administration building and a combined airport passenger and mail terminal. The WPA also built an addition to the Wisconsin National Guard Armory in Whitefish Bay, an armory on the South Side and additions to the South Milwaukee vocational school.
- To help train workers for defense industries, in Fall of 1940 the Milwaukee Vocational School added courses Monday through Friday nights, with one six-hour shift starting at 9 p.m. and a second shift starting at 3 a.m. Here, unemployed workers in WPA training attended 10-week, 300-hour refresher courses in mechanics, welding, metalwork, automotive repair, foundry work, engines and other industrial skills. In addition, vocational school instructors provided in-house training to new workers at 27 war production plants in the county.
- After World War II, Milwaukee County continued to operate modest work programs for general assistance recipients, although the county's primary emphasis was on recipients seeking private sector employment. In 1969 a Milwaukee County ordinance required that all general assistance applicants be referred to the County Work Experience and Training (or Pay for Work) Program. After municipal employees unions raised concerns about GA workers displacing regular county employees, the types of jobs provided shifted from wide range of county and city maintenance work to nonclassified civil service positions at the county, city and Veterans Administration.
- In the 1970s and early 1980s Milwaukee County operated public service employment programs under the federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) which was developed as a counter cyclical response to increasing unemployment rates. Participants in CETA employment programs in Milwaukee County reached 2,700 in Fiscal Year 1979 and included work for local governments, community-based organizations and non-profit agencies in literacy instruction, health and nutrition education, blood pressure screening, security aides and escort services, home repair and weatherization projects, art classes and clerical support.
- Currently, most Milwaukee County general assistance recipients are required to work at one of the county's approved work sites, which include individual job placements, labor crews performing trash pick-up for less motivated workers, and sheltered workshops for less able workers. Over 80 local agencies, organizations and governments provide one to 100 work positions for laborers, janitors, maintenance helpers, security aides, clerical staff, stockroom clerks, administrative aides, tutors, housekeepers and other positions. In October 1994, 1,587 GA recipients were in work programs for 10 hours per week at \$4.35 per hour minimum wage and another 941 clients were in education, training and placement programs.

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## I. Local Employment Initiatives at the Beginning of the Depression

After the Depression hit Milwaukee in 1929, the city and the county responded with programs to find increased employment for local residents as well as provisions of public financial assistance. Milwaukee County, which had responsibility for "outdoor relief" to indigent individuals and families, appropriated large sums not only for direct relief to needy families but also for paid work. Milwaukee Mayor Daniel W. Hoan described the magnitude of the community's relief effort in his book City Government: The Record of the Milwaukee Experiment. Hoan wrote, "*Milwaukee was the first large community to provide made work for those on relief who volunteered for it, and to pay cash wages therefor. Our county, moreover, paid cash wages for relief work and to those wholly dependent on relief, furnished cash, food, fuel, light, gas, and rent.*"<sup>1</sup>

The county Department of Outdoor Relief paid fifty cents an hour for unskilled labor and the union minimum wage rate for skilled labor, with the number of hours of work dependent upon the amount of relief the family was receiving from the county. Workers continued to receive county aid supplements if their pay did not meet their family budgetary needs. Municipalities paid for costs of supervision, materials and tools, and workmen's compensation. Mayor Hoan explained the county's rationale for the voluntary nature of the work relief program:

*No client was required to work. The plan was voluntary in every respect. Since there were at no time jobs enough to go around, it would have been absurd to have made work compulsory. After a man went to work, should he at any time desire to quit, he was free to do so and could automatically return to the ranks of those receiving direct relief. There was, of course, an inducement to work, for these families were paid in cash. . . . A working agreement was made with the local grocers to provide some discount on the presentation of a card which would identify the customer as working on the program. Arrangements were also made with the gas and electric companies to grant the men certain privileges not permitted to their regular customers.*<sup>2</sup>

*"Let it be said that Milwaukee County led every other community in the country not only in the promptness in which it assumed the job, not only in the efficiency and dispatch of its efforts, but in the adequacy and generosity of the relief measures themselves."*<sup>3</sup>

-- Daniel W. Hoan,  
Mayor of Milwaukee

*"The Park Commission operated from 7 to 10 field kitchens, each of which was capable of feeding from 1,000 to 1,500 men. Men from the crews were assigned the job of cooking the daily ration of stew and coffee. The palatability of the meals varied with the ability of the cook."*<sup>4</sup>

*"Outsiders, attracted by the rumor that business was good in Milwaukee, flocked to the city, and even though they could not obtain jobs stayed here during the winter."*<sup>5</sup>

-- Milwaukee Citizens' Committee on Unemployment, 1930

Many of the work programs for persons receiving county outdoor relief payments were in the parks. The Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors appropriated \$100,000 in April 1931, another \$100,000 in June 1931, and \$102,000 in 1932 to employ workers on parks projects. The work was designed to be labor-intensive with limited funds expended for materials and equipment. Employment was targeted to men with large families who were on county relief and long-term unemployed. One month of employment was provided at fifty cents an hour.<sup>6</sup> Projects included grading picnic and athletic areas, constructing trails and walks through wooded areas, constructing lagoons, preparing shrub beds, installing drainage systems, thinning underbrush, and cleaning and thinning in the parks. At Whitnall Park crews graded a mile-long roadway and prepared an 18-hole golf course. Of 7,000 applicants for park work, 5,000 persons were selected. Initially, workers were employed for four eight-hour days, but the number of persons applying for work made it necessary to move to two shifts each working three eight-hour days a week with noon meals provided. Men employed by the projects received part of their pay in cash and part in supplies from the county relief department. Groups of men were employed for thirty days at a wage of fifty cents per hour.<sup>7</sup>

The full impact of the Depression of 1929 hit Milwaukee later than many other cities, and local unemployment problems were compounded by the addition of unemployed workers migrating to the city in the early months of the depression. According to the City of Milwaukee Citizens' Committee on Unemployment, *"The superintendent of the public employment office reported in March [1930] that 51 per cent of unskilled and 15 per cent of skilled laborers applying for work were from outside the city. . . . it was found that about 20 per cent of those who registered during the summer were transients."*<sup>8</sup>

In Fall of 1930 the Milwaukee Common Council appropriated \$149,000 for public work and the Committee on Unemployment placed about 3,000 men on the city list for work, with preference going to men with the largest families. The committee established an office in city hall to register unemployed residents. As part of its community-wide effort to find temporary work for residents, the city prepared work order request forms which the dairy companies distributed to all city households urging them to identify odd jobs to employ local workers.

By the second year of the depression, the City of Milwaukee was taking aggressive actions to increase employment of city residents. In addition to a residency requirement for city employees, companies working on city contracts were required to hire local workers. The City Service Commission reported, *"During the summer of 1931 it was discovered that more than one-fourth of the crews of certain contractors were non-residents. The immediate discharges of these men, and their replacement by Milwaukee citizens, was secured."*<sup>9</sup> The City of Milwaukee also initiated an unemployment relief program of labor intensive jobs during the winter months when work was in shortest supply. The work consisted of one ten day shift, and a possible second ten-day shift for men with large families. In all, the City of Milwaukee spent \$600,000 in the winter of 1930-31 for work relief projects. This included about \$483,000 for street sanitation, ash collection and other public workers, \$50,000 for grading and other work on new playgrounds, \$45,000 to extend the underground conduit system for fire and police alarm cables, \$15,000 for Park Board projects, and \$7,000 for painting of election booths and at the Public Museum.<sup>10</sup> Men were selected based on the urgency of their needs and their family responsibilities.

In 1931 the city received about 15,000 applicants for work and hired 11,000 men for short-shift projects. In 1932 the commission received 28,470 applicants for work, and about 20,500 workers were employed sometime during the year.<sup>11</sup> To avoid laying off city workers, Milwaukee initiated a 10 percent monthly pay cut for city employees with a corresponding 10 percent reduction in working time and used rotating schedules for other workers to reduce the number of complete layoffs.<sup>12</sup> The seriousness of labor conditions was evident in the 1931-1932 annual report of the Milwaukee Public Employment Office, that *"ordinarily, not less than 1,500 individual persons call daily."*<sup>13</sup> The report noted, *"Not infrequently the office had a large number of applicants, all of whom were very much in need of employment and about equally well qualified for a given opening or position. In such cases, many applicants were keenly disappointed because they were not chosen for the job or position in question."*<sup>14</sup>

By 1933 the City found it necessary to use the ten percent pay fund for general city operating costs and reduced additional city employees to rotating work schedules or part-time work. Some city departments used shortened work days, while others placed workers (particularly roadmen, laborers and civil engineers) on month-long furloughs without pay. Major relief came temporarily in the winter of 1933-34 when the federal government initiated a massive jobs program.<sup>15</sup>

*"The work furnished to these men is for the most part pick-and-shovel work, and is largely concerned with the development of new parks and playgrounds. While some of this work could be more economically done by machinery than by hand, the great majority of the men have taken their employment seriously and have striven to give real value for their wages."*<sup>16</sup>

--1931 Municipal Report

*"Our former practice of placing applicants on the basis of fitness for the job or position had to be modified by giving consideration to the applicants' economic necessities. . . . Ordinarily, not less than 1,500 individual persons call daily."*<sup>17</sup>

--Milwaukee Public Employment Office, 1931-32

## II. Temporary City and County Jobs for 26,000 Workers in the Winter of 1933-34

Nationally, as the Depression wore on, it became evident that municipal and county governments could not handle the immense expenses of relief and unemployment in their communities, and that even with reductions in public services, a growing number of localities were facing bankruptcy. At the time the federal government aggressively entered the business of relief payments and job creation in 1933, over 14 million American workers, or 29 percent of the total labor force, were estimated to be unemployed.<sup>19</sup> In March Congress authorized creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps and in May provided direct federal grants for unemployment relief through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). In June, Congress appropriated funds for a Public Works Administration (PWA) under the National Industrial Recovery Act and established a federal system of employment offices under the Wagner-Peyser Act.<sup>20</sup> The massive jobs program anticipated under PWA was slow to get off the ground, however, and in November 1933 FERA administrator Harry Hopkins convinced the president to divert \$400 million of PWA funds for a temporary Civil Works Administration (CWA) program during the winter of 1933-34.<sup>21</sup>

In order to meet CWA's economic aim to *"to inject a vast quantity of purchasing power into the system in a short period of time,"*<sup>22</sup> projects were expected to start immediately and be completed in a few months. The primary objective of the program was to *"provide regular work on public works at regular wages to unemployed persons able and willing to work."*<sup>23</sup> Hopkins anticipated immediately employing 2 million persons from local relief rolls and another 2 million unemployed workers not on relief, who would be identified by the U.S. employment service offices.<sup>24</sup>

The CWA established federal offices in each state to approve project applications. Most projects were planned by municipalities and counties, which were required to finance a portion of the costs. Under CWA the federal government provided 100 percent of wages and up to 25 percent of materials costs for CWA projects. In Wisconsin the federal CWA director appointed a county committee and a deputy director for each county, responsible for reviewing projects submitted to the Wisconsin CWA for approval, certifying and assigning workers for the projects, and maintaining records. Funds were distributed through the U.S. Veterans' Administration with CWA workers paid as federal employees.<sup>25</sup>

*"The CWA as a program lasted only eight months but the accomplishments are comparable to those resulting from programs which followed and last much longer."<sup>18</sup>*

--Milwaukee County Park Commission

Rather than using the public relief model where work relief wages were paid based on each family's "budgetary deficiency," CWA paid the higher of prevailing or union wage rates. However, in order to provide sufficiently high wages for family survival while maintaining an incentive for workers to seek private employment, total hours of CWA work were limited to thirty per week (thirty-nine hours for clerical and professional employees).<sup>26</sup> In Wisconsin CWA wage rates were established by the state Industrial Commission initially at 65 cents per hour for unskilled workers, 80 cents an hour for semi-skilled workers, and \$1.20 an hour for skilled workers.<sup>27</sup>

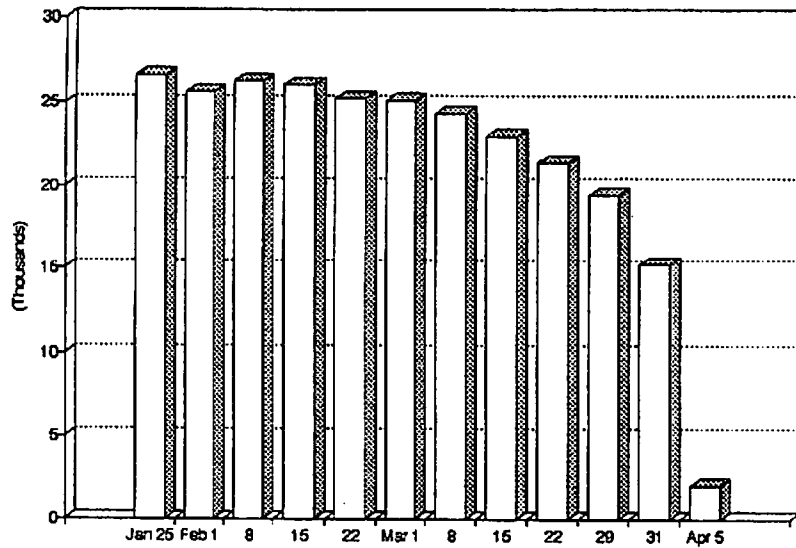
The City of Milwaukee implemented its CWA projects within three weeks of President Roosevelt's November 9, 1933 announcement of the program. By the end of November, city departments started work on projects which would total \$6.2 million over the next four months. Since CWA officials would not approve major capital improvements that could be supported by future PWA projects, Milwaukee projects focused on landscaping, road grading, street repair and painting buildings.<sup>28</sup> The Milwaukee Public Employment Office expanded to handle the work load of identifying able-bodied unemployed workers for city and county projects. It reported, "*The CWA Work Program threw a tremendous load on the Office. Geared to a normal load of between four and five thousand applicants a month, we were suddenly confronted with the problem of registering all of Milwaukee County's unemployed.*"<sup>29</sup> To process the large number of applicants, the employment office opened temporary registration centers in the basement of City Hall and in suburban communities. In one case, 4,000 men were put to work with less than 48 hours' notice. As described later by the Park Commission, "*One of the largest projects, which involved the services of almost 2,000 men and many pieces of equipment was located at Lincoln Park. The Milwaukee River at this point originally made a complete S-turn which caused ice jams and floods every spring. As a result of the program, the river was relocated, a large lagoon developed, and four islands constructed. The largest of the islands was connected to the mainland by two stone faced reinforced concrete bridges, to become part of the Milwaukee River parkway drive extending from Lincoln Park to Kletzsch Park.*"<sup>30</sup>

In Milwaukee 138 projects were supported at a total cost of \$6,286,475 including \$5,899,117 million in federal funds.<sup>31</sup> At the Milwaukee Public Library, workers were employed to paint the rotunda lobby; the museum hired artists under CWA to paint murals for the exhibit halls.<sup>32</sup>

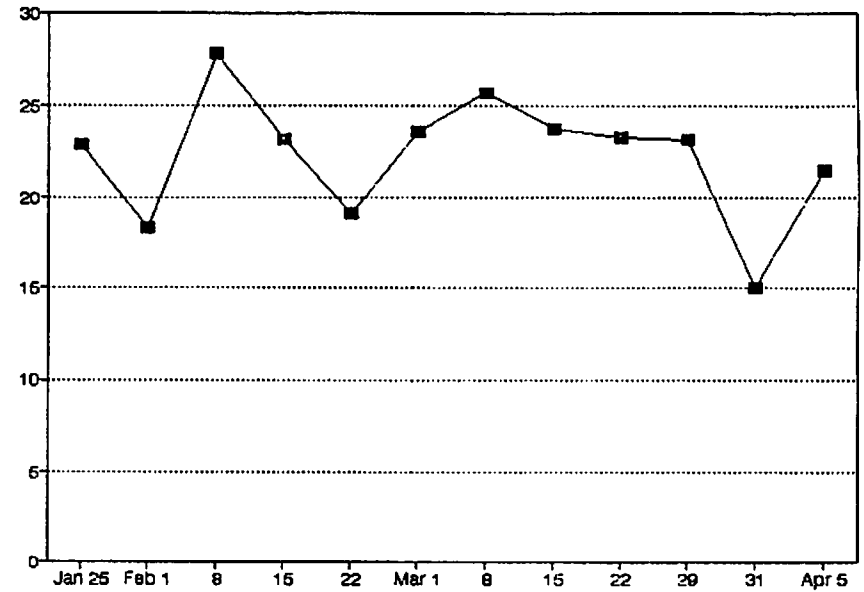
*"In spite of inclement weather conditions, restrictive federal and state rules and regulations, hastily improvised state and local administrative organizations, some political jobbery and the initiation of a few projects of questionable value, the average number of people employed under CWA in Wisconsin over the period of twenty weeks was 89,000."*<sup>33</sup>

-- Wisconsin Public Welfare Department

**CWA Workers Employed in Milw. County**  
January 19 - April 5, 1934

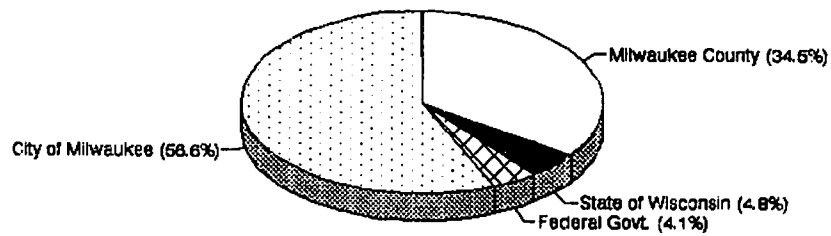


**CWA Workers in Milwaukee County: 1934**  
Average Hours Worked Per Week



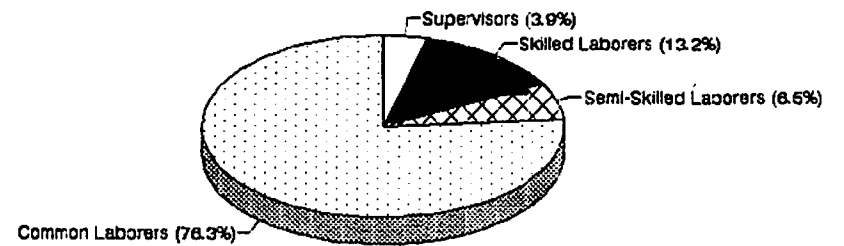
**Governments Employing CWA Workers: Jan. 1934**

**Milwaukee County**



**Skill Levels of CWA Workers in Milwaukee County**

**April 1, 1934**



## CWA Milwaukee County Park Projects: 1933-1934<sup>34</sup>

- establishment of a county-owned quarry at Currie Park.
- completion of concrete swimming pools at Greenfield and McGovern parks.
- construction of the Lincoln Park lagoon and islands.
- installation of primary electric distribution systems for seven parks and golf courses.
- removal of overhead telephone wires and poles from 9 parks and installation of underground facilities.
- installation of sprinkler systems in the larger parks.
- installation of sewers for drainage in picnic areas and under baseball diamonds.

All CWA projects in Milwaukee County totaled \$9,531,000.<sup>35</sup> Parks projects included construction of a quarry at Currie Park, two swimming pools, and electrical and telephone wiring for parks and golf courses. The Milwaukee County CWA Commission reported a total of 26,187 workers employed on projects, including City projects, as of February 15, 1934. These included 25,731 men and 456 women. About 40 percent of the workers came from the county relief rolls, and 60 percent from the public employment office. African Americans made up 626 of the workers (2.4 percent), and ex-servicemen comprised 5,112 workers. An analysis of the 22,155 CWA workers as of April 1, 1934, showed 872 supervisors, 2931 skilled laborers, 1,439 semi-skilled laborers, and 16,913 common laborers.<sup>36</sup>

The CWA officials in Wisconsin worked aggressively to fill the state's quota of CWA workers, and three times they succeeded in getting the state's quota increased.<sup>37</sup> Possibly due to over-enrollment of workers in the state, federal funding for local CWA projects was terminated unexpectedly on March 30, 1934. City officials reported, *"The City spent considerable money completing some of these hazardous projects and also provided barricades and lanterns on many others during the three month intermission between the closing of CWA and the starting of WERA. The CWA program closed abruptly one month before the contemplated closing date, which left many City projects incomplete and in a hazardous condition."*<sup>38</sup>

*Costs of administering Wisconsin CWA projects never exceeded 10.5 percent of the weekly payrolls.<sup>39</sup>*

-- Wisconsin Public Welfare Department

*In 1924 the Milwaukee River flooded to the stage where residents had to use rowboats to reach their homes. Flooding control projects were started under CWA, continued under FERA, and finished under the CCC to reduce problems in the area.*

Given the short duration of the CWA program, some approved projects were never started and many were not completed. Statewide, more than half of approved CWA projects were not completed under CWA; some were finished under the Wisconsin Emergency Relief Administration, while others were scrapped. The state Department of Public Welfare attributed the reasons these projects were not completed to overall limitations of the CWA program.

*Although federal regulations required that [CWA] projects be socially and economically desirable, they also required that men be employed at once, that projects be commenced immediately, that work be carried on by day labor and not by contract which necessitated the creation by local governments of a competent supervisory personnel, that a maximum of human labor be used instead of machinery wherever practicable and consistent with sound economic and public advantage, and that only 25% of the cost of material for any project would be furnished the local governments.<sup>40</sup>*

### III. Federal Grant Programs for County Relief Workers: High of 16,500 Employed

*FERA paid prevailing wage rates, with hours based on each family's budgetary needs, as determined by the county department of outdoor relief.*

While it phased out the Civil Works Administration programs, the federal government utilized the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) to provide grants to state governments for direct relief as well as for work programs for persons on the relief rolls. Nationally, FERA employed 1.1 million relief workers in April 1934, with many of the workers transferred from CWA projects. FERA employment peaked at 2.5 million in January 1935 and continued through December 1935.<sup>41</sup>

The FERA program offered a contrasting model from CWA, which was a top-to-bottom federal program funding work on local government projects for unemployed persons regardless of family need. Under FERA, grants were provided to state governments which then approved state and local work projects as well as payments for direct relief. In essence, FERA anticipated separating the unemployed population into "employables," who would be provided work programs, and "unemployables," who would be provided direct relief.

The FERA work regulations operated on several important principles: 1) work relief was targeted to persons on county relief rather than the total population of unemployed workers, 2) local social service divisions determined each family's income needs and resources based on home visits and testimony regarding rent and other expenses, and 3) prevailing hourly wages were paid to FERA workers with hours employed limited to the number required to earn their family's "budgetary deficiency."<sup>42</sup>

In Milwaukee County eligible workers for WERA (Wisconsin Emergency Relief Administration) projects were identified by the Milwaukee County Department of Outdoor Relief (DOR). The department's Annual Report described the social work orientation of the WERA program:

*This program was based on the theory that it was better for the client and the community if the head of the household were permitted to work and were paid in cash for his efforts. The desire of the clients to work was so great that it became a privilege to work on such a plan. Each family was on a budgetary basis and earned, with the exception of administrative jobs, as close to budget as was possible taking into consideration a maximum number of work hours in a month and a wage rate per hour commensurate with the type of work the man could do. The difference between the money earned and the DOR budget was supplemented by direct grants of aid such as milk, fuel, gas, electric, clothing, shoes, and when necessary, provisions.<sup>43</sup>*

Workers also received medical and dental care as well as car fare to and from work.

Unlike CWA, the WERA program allowed permanent improvement projects, although the local sponsoring governmental unit was required to furnish materials and equipment for the projects. The City of Milwaukee had WERA projects already planned and was prepared to initiate the program at the close of CWA in March 1934. However, state approval for projects was not forthcoming until June.

*The county relief department used "visitors" to make calls at client homes, collaborate their living situation and family expenses, certify eligibility for one employable household member, and determine the level of work relief and special payments to be provided.<sup>44</sup>*

*"The WERA program was better planned by the City than CWA and operated more efficiently in most ways. The WERA officials approved many projects for permanent improvements, such as buildings, sewers, wading pool, etc., but required that the City furnish materials and equipment for all projects."*

--City Report, 1936

A total of \$5.1 million was expended on City of Milwaukee WERA projects from June 1934 through August 1935 (when the WPA began), including \$3.1 million federal funds, \$1.2 million city funds, \$691,000 county money, and \$38,000 state money. The maximum force employed was 7,450 workers on 98 city projects during October 1934, with the largest expenditures for sewer, park and street construction and repair work.<sup>45</sup>

The challenge of providing relief jobs while not competing with private sector employment was seen locally in concerns expressed by the Milwaukee Citizens' Committee on Unemployment in 1935. The Committee reported, *"Local employers, experiencing difficulty in locating and inducing former employees who were working on WERA to return to their old jobs, petitioned this committee for assistance. Arrangements were made with the relief department whereby all of its clients were required to register at the employment office. Several hundred placements in private employment of persons on the relief rolls resulted."*<sup>46</sup> However, in spite of the federal goal of placing all employable family "heads" in work assignments, as of January 1935, only about a fourth (9,561 cases) of the 40,176 county relief cases were employed under WERA. The program reached its highest employment rate in Milwaukee County in October 1934, when 16,500 clients were employed. Fund shortages subsequently reduced the numbers served so that from January to August 1935, a monthly average of 8,000 persons were employed.<sup>47</sup> Expenditures for WERA in Milwaukee County, including the central city, totaled \$8.1 million.<sup>48</sup>

Federal officials later assessed the FERA program and concluded, *"Shortage of funds for materials, lack of skilled relief labor, insufficient supervisory personnel, and fear of possible competition with private industry, were the most important factors militating against the provision of work for all employable workers on the relief rolls. Direct relief was therefore an essential part of the FERA program and was continued under State programs after the cessation of FERA grants at the close of 1935."*<sup>49</sup> In spite of its shortcomings, officials reported, *"The FERA had shown the value of the work method and those who drew up the Federal relief policy in 1935 accepted the proposition that work rather than direct relief should be the keystone of Federal policy with respect to needy employables."*<sup>50</sup>

#### IV. WPA Projects in Milwaukee

In 1935 the President and the Congress established a new set of work and relief programs, providing limited support to local governments for unemployable populations while assuming federal responsibility for large-scale employment programs for workers on relief. For the large population of "employable" workers on relief, the Works Progress Administration, created in May 1935, was expected to operate a program of "small useful projects" and to coordinate federal works programs.<sup>51</sup> Nationally, over an eight year period the Works Progress Administration, later renamed the Work Projects Administration, provided employment for a total of 8.5 million individuals. It is estimated that nearly one-quarter of all families in the United States were dependent on WPA wages at some time for their support.<sup>52</sup> In retrospect, the WPA can be seen as part of a three-pronged attack on the problems of unemployment and local relief needs. First, federal aid was provided under the Social Security Act of 1935 for persons deemed "unemployable" -- the needy aged, mothers with dependent children, and blind persons. Secondly, the Public Works Administration (PWA) was expected to improve the economy through support for large-scale federal, state and local public works projects. Finally, the WPA was designed to provide immediate work for able-bodied persons on the local relief rolls.

Because of its focus on providing work for families and individuals supported by municipal and county relief agencies, WPA regulations required that 90 percent of project workers, and later 95 percent, be on public relief or certified for public relief. In contrast to the FERA programs which had provided grants to state governments who then allocated monies for direct relief and work projects, the administration of the WPA projects was tightly controlled by the federal government. Local project sponsors submitted proposals to the federal agency detailing the scope and plans for the work, locations, and budget estimates of labor, material and equipment. These plans were reviewed by the WPA district office, state office, regional office and Washington office, with final approval granted by the President. The federal administration reviewed project designs and budgets, selected and scheduled local works projects, and established employment quotas within each state. District WPA offices located in larger cities not only reviewed and approved certifications of eligible workers, but also assigned workers to projects and managed project operations.<sup>53</sup>

#### *Criteria for WPA projects:*

- 1. sponsor legally authorized to carry out the work,*
- 2. has a general public usefulness,*
- 3. not result in displacement of regular employees or prevent re-employment of previously employed workers,*
- 4. can be executed by available supply of eligible workers,*
- 5. costs of materials not excessive,*
- 6. can be completed by specified date,*
- 7. work is on public property.<sup>54</sup>*

*"My business is to try to find jobs for the unemployed -- the kind of jobs that will jerk good citizens back from the brink of despair, sharpen their skill, boost their spirits and set them on the road back to self-reliance again."<sup>55</sup>*

--Harry L. Hopkins,  
Director, Works Progress  
Administration

*"120 workers over 65 years of age were ousted from their [WPA] project jobs and shown the way to the old age pension office at the courthouse. Another 258, mothers of small children, were told that their place was at home and that if they needed help they could get aid for their dependent children under the social security act."*<sup>56</sup>

-- Milwaukee Journal  
March 14, 1937

In Milwaukee County the Department of Outdoor Relief certified employable relief workers for referral to WPA employment. One employable member, usually the male parent, was identified for each family case. County relief "visitors" continued to determine the family's "budgetary deficiency" and beginning December 1935 county relief funds were provided to families of WPA workers whose pay did not meet the minimum required.<sup>57</sup> In 1936 the county reported that about 19,000 relief cases had a worker placed on the WPA, but that about 3,200 of these families required supplementary county relief payments. In addition, about 700 workers employed in private industry required supplementary aid, and the county was providing full support to about 1,500 families not able to work because of a permanent physical or mental incapacity, 1,000 cases with workers too old to be assigned to WPA and not eligible or not yet receiving an Old Age Pension, and 650 mothers with very young children either ineligible for Mother's Aid or in the process of being accepted.<sup>58</sup>

The wage policy for WPA workers changed several times. Initially, WPA workers were paid prevailing wage rates but employed fewer hours so that their wages would be *"larger than the amount now received as a relief dole, but at the same time not so large as to encourage the rejection of opportunities for private employment."*<sup>59</sup> The wage schedule for Milwaukee was \$0.70 per hour for unskilled workers, e.g., park laborers (\$60 a month for 86 hours); \$0.875 per hour for intermediate workers, e.g. roofers (\$70 a month for 80 hours); \$1.125 per hour for skilled workers, e.g., carpenters (\$90 a month for 80 hours); and \$90-126 a month for foremen.<sup>60</sup>

In July 1939 hourly wages were reduced by about 40 percent, to "security wage rates" of \$0.44 for common laborer, \$0.53 for semi-skilled labor, and \$0.69 for skilled labor while the time these workers were expected to labor was increased to 130 hours per month. The Milwaukee Journal reported, *"A storm broke as a result of the wage and hour changes. Centering in Milwaukee county, a strike paralyzed a number of WPA projects throughout the state. Building trades union members protested, claiming that the increase in the number of working hours without an increase in pay upset prevailing craft wage rate scales. . . . The strike broke after lasting nine days, when WPA officials warned workers that they would be discharged for being absent voluntarily from their projects for three days."*<sup>61</sup>

## A. 12,000 WPA Jobs Sponsored by the City of Milwaukee in 1936

As with previous work programs, the City of Milwaukee immediately planned construction projects throughout the city's twenty-seven wards. The first city projects were approved in September 1935 and within four months, the city had over 12,000 workers employed on projects. In the first sixteen months of WPA, from September 1935 through December 1936, the City of Milwaukee operated 90 different projects, including 52 construction projects and 38 "white collar" projects.<sup>62</sup>

Analysis of WPA projects in operation in 1936 shows the scope of work initiated throughout the city. That year the city created jobs for 8,192 WPA workers in construction projects including street construction and repair, landscaping, repair and construction of facilities in the city's parks, work on the Lincoln Creek Parkway, improvements of school buildings and facilities, construction of sewer and water mains, construction and improvements of city playgrounds, work to reduce flooding at Lincoln Park on the Milwaukee River, installation of the fire and police alarm system, modernizing street lighting and traffic signals, construction and improvements of bridges and public buildings, painting and remodeling the Milwaukee Vocational Schools, and alterations to two fire houses.

In addition to outdoor work, the city created jobs for men and some women not easily placed in construction work and not experienced in clerical tasks. The Public Museum sponsored the work of men and women who built exhibits and classified specimens and collections. The health department employed workers to assist in citywide immunization of children for diphtheria, smallpox and scarlet fever and to sew needed medical materials. The school board used workers to offer recreational and adult education activities, and the park board used workers to design and sew costumes for summer operas. The city created jobs for 663 "white collar" workers, modernizing city property assessment, tax, legal, engineering and school board records, surveying all privately owned properties for tax assessment purposes, conducting a fire prevention survey of all buildings in the city, and cleaning and indexing library materials.

*"The WPA officials require complete plans, working procedures and accurate estimates of each project and spend considerable time examining each project before granting approval. The City has 73 projects approved, of which 12 were completed prior to September 1, 1936."<sup>63</sup>*

-- City of Milwaukee Report, 1936.

**WPA Construction Projects: City of Milwaukee, 1936  
8,192 Workers at WPA Cost of \$26,485,876**

**Street Construction - 2,520 Workers**

Resetting stone curb, repairing macadam gutters; repairing and constructing curbs and gutters; raising and repairing walks and pavements; reconstructing radius corners; grading and surfacing unimproved streets; constructing shoulders, ditches and footpaths; office and engineering work. (1,256 workers)

Oiling and repairing macadam streets in the city. (836 workers)

Operating the municipal stone quarry and Lincoln Park crusher; producing crushed stone, stone curb, rubble stone and cut stone for other WPA projects in the city. (275 workers)

Repairing pavements, including wood-block, brick, asphalt, granite block, sandstone block, macadam and concrete; investigating street appurtenances. (153 workers)

**City Engineers - 1,427 Workers**

Ditching, grading and landscaping at the Lincoln Creek Parkway, including deepening and widening the creek, digging a new channel, extending sewerage and water systems, building roads and two small bridges for a parkway drive. (957 workers)

Blasting and excavating rock ledge in Milwaukee River bed at Lincoln Park to reduce flooding, including construction of temporary service bridge, 1,950 ft. rock and earth fill dike, retaining wall. (470 workers)

**Park Board - 1,386 Workers**

General improvement and landscaping of parks, squares, boulevard center plots and triangles, including grading, shaping, planting, seeding, sodding, installing sprinkling systems, drainage, walks, park driveways, tennis courts, baseball diamonds, rustic work, rip-rapping of river shorelines, construction of waterfalls and dams, cultivating of shrubs, trees, evergreens, and plants. (1,361 workers)

Repairing and painting of park board buildings, incl. band shells, bathhouses, pavilions, bridges, residences, service buildings and playground buildings in the following parks: Washington, Smith, Gordon, Riverside, Lake, Lincoln, Lindberg, Kern, Jackson, Humboldt, Mitchell and the Municipal Nursery. (25 workers)

**School Board - 901 Workers**

Painting interiors and exteriors of school buildings, refinishing school room and laboratory furniture, together with carpenter and other work; repainting fences, installing new fences; grading, surfacing and resurfacing school playgrounds; constructing additions to present school playgrounds; landscaping including planting of trees and shrubs and seeding and sodding; repairing and installing drainage in athletic tracks and fields; construction masonry walls. (592 workers)

Painting and repairing social center buildings, fences, recreation apparatus, bleachers, athletic equipment, and reconditioning playgrounds. (309 workers)

**Sewer Department - 616 Workers**

Deepening, widening, relocating, revetting Menomonee River from N. 27th St. to N. 60th St. (182 workers)

Installing storm and sanitary sewers, manholes and catch basins in Johnson Woods District. (170 workers)

Ventilating, repairing, reconditioning and bringing to grade manholes and catch basins. (127 workers)

Laying water connections for boulevard parkways; laying lead pipe water service and necessary valve and fittings from street water mains to points within center plots to connect sprinkling systems. (60 workers)

## **Sewer Department (cont.)**

Rehabilitating the sewerage system to include necessary repairs and extensions of existing storm and sanitary sewers, manholes and catch basins. (40 workers)

Constructing new catch basins and manholes and repairing existing catch basins and manholes, resetting stone curbs, repairing macadam gutters; repairing and constructing curb and gutters; raising and repairing walks and pavements; reconstructing radius corners; grading and surfacing unimproved streets. (37 workers)

## **Playground Division - 493 Workers**

Grading roadway and banks, filling Blue Hole dump, constructing macadam roadway, stone rip-rap wall, bridle paths; landscaping banks, planting trees, shrubs; seeding banks; laying shallow water system; laying sewer and drain tile; building catch basins; constructing toilet-shelter house, cleaning lagoon for swimming facilities. (200 workers)

Improving new playgrounds and play fields, reconditioning physical equipment of old playgrounds; grading, laying drain tile, constructing shallow water sprinkling systems, erecting fences, seeding, sodding, planting trees and shrubbery; building frame service buildings, concrete wading pools, clay and hard surface tennis courts; painting and repairing of fences, rebuilding catch basins, and sewers. (126 workers)

Constructing a brick and concrete field house containing toilet, assembly, checking, and dressing rooms; erecting playground, apparatus, fencing around the outdoor theater, at the Burbank Playground. (89 workers)

Constructing a brick and concrete field house with toilet, checking assembly, shower and boiler rooms; a pergola screening wading pool from street for the Mt. Vernon Playground. (78 workers)

## **Electrical Services - 420 Workers**

Installing underground conduit, manholes, and cables for the Fire and Police Alarm Division. (206 workers)

Constructing equipment storage building, transformer vaults, manholes, safety island, underground conduits, underground cables; resetting lighting units, resplicing and relocating underground cables, transformers and conduits as part of street lighting and traffic control systems being installed or altered. (174 workers)

Rehabilitating, repairing, refinishing, repainting, rebuilding, and modernizing street lighting units, traffic signals, playground lighting, traffic and street signs. (40 workers)

## **Bridges and Public Buildings - 369 Workers**

Erecting reinforced concrete flat slab bridge with stone facing, spanning Lincoln Creek at N. Teutonia Ave. (157 workers)

General painting of city buildings and structures at various locations; varnishing and refinishing furniture, washing walls, cleaning and painting iron fencing and structural steel, also general inside and outside painting of buildings. (133 workers)

Grading and constructing a dry stone wall at 17th Ward Yard; plowing, harrowing, and seeding weeded areas on Honey Creek parkway; excavating and constructing a reinforced concrete retaining wall and placing rip-rap on bank of 1st Ward Yard. (79 workers)

## **Vocational School - 35 Workers**

Painting and remodeling at the Milwaukee Vocational Schools. (35 workers)

## **Fire Department - 25 Workers**

Alterations to Fire House #20 located on North 6th Street between West Michigan and West Clybourn Streets, and Fire House #15 located at North Water Street Bridge. (25 workers)

**WPA Education, Health and Recreational Projects: Milwaukee, 1936**  
**451 Workers at a WPA Cost of \$954,083**

**Public Museum - 351 Workers**

Building exhibit cases; improving lighting system; repairing mosaic flooring; painting walls and ceilings, refinishing wood floors; painting pictures of native species of birds, insects and flowers in oil and watercolor for exhibition. (174 workers)

Classifying, cataloging and exhibiting specimens and collections; making groups, murals and models; preparing, cataloging and systematizing visual aids. (173 workers)

Mending, repairing and cleaning historical and ethnological specimens; making new costumes for the colonial village exhibit. (4 workers)

**Health Department - 44 Workers**

Immunization of children for diphtheria, smallpox and scarlet fever; registering and examining children in a city-wide Child Welfare Program; typing immunization records; establishing and maintaining clinics; tabulating and copying laboratory and dental records. (36 Workers)

Cutting and sewing hospital linens, nurses' aprons, doctors' gowns, field bag linings, diapers, bed sheets, pajamas, and pillow case tubes; renovating Health Department records. (8 workers)

**School Board - 33 Workers**

Social center recreational and adult educational activities involving holding classes in English, drama, arts, sciences and sports and other activities.

**Park Board - 23 Workers**

Designing and sewing costumes for summer operas.

**Modernization of City Records and Systems: Milwaukee, 1936  
663 Workers at WPA Cost of \$705,737**

**Tax Enforcement - 192 Workers**

Modernizing real estate tax data files; compiling and combining information from the City Treasurer and Register of Deeds along with sketches showing dimensions and location of each property from official plat books of the Tax Commissioner.

**City Comptroller - 95 Workers**

Making a complete inventory of city-owned land, buildings and improvements, all city-owned machinery, tools and equipment including an appraisal of the present value; installing a card index system.

**City Engineers - 79 Workers**

Compiling permanent land records; abstracting and transcribing land records from the Register of Deeds.

**School Board - 61 Workers**

Completing school real estate plats and legal descriptions; recording costs of school real estate and records of cost of construction of school buildings; investigating efficiency of illumination in school classrooms; updating records of manual training machinery and mechanical equipment; cataloging and mending architectural plates, maps, sheet music, and textbooks.

Cleaning, re-arranging and inventorying statuary pieces, pictures and science specimens; clipping and mounting pieces of art, catalogue and illustrative material; classifying, indexing, typing and filing pieces of reference material; stenciling and mimeographing art outlines and projects; cataloging books and magazines; repairing and rebinding books.

**Tax Assessor - 40 Workers**

Surveying all privately owned buildings for assessment purposes. Buildings would be measured, checked and appraised in the field, and drawings recorded along with data on the type of building, type of construction, present condition of buildings and other information needed for tax assessment purposes.

**Public Library - 36 Workers**

Reorganizing records and catalog indexes, rehabilitating and repairing books for circulation; examining, repairing, re-backing, cleaning, treating, rehabilitating and renewing all library books in the main library and its branches.

**Sewer Department - 28 Workers**

Rearranging and installing file records and index, cost, and inventory systems.

**Fire Department - 24 Workers**

Conducting a fire prevention survey of all buildings and premises in the city.

**Building Inspection - 23 Workers**

Determining new street names and house numbers on all existing records in the Building Inspector's office. Changing files and city records to correspond with the new system of names and numbers as established by the Common Council in 1929.

**City Comptroller - 12 Workers**

Making a complete analysis and tabulation of budgets, tax levies, assessed valuation, revenues and disbursements of the City of Milwaukee since 1835.

**Land Commission - 11 Workers**

Conducting a city plan survey to inventory the progress of city planning in Milwaukee.

**City Clerk - 10 Workers**

Checking and codifying traffic ordinances and amendments; segregating chattel mortgages into live and dead files; checking council proceedings for revocation of liquor licenses.

**City Comptroller - 10 Workers**

Sorting and arranging records in various City Hall vaults; supervising the destruction of old records; building shelving in vaults.

**City Attorney - 10 Workers**

Preparing and typing a subject index of court cases handled by City Attorney's Office from 1910 to date; typing a copy of the digest of workmen's compensation cases maintained in the Circuit Court library; annotating court cases and various court cases and opinions of the city attorney; compiling and typing ordinances on malt beverages and intoxicating liquors.

**Real Estate - 8 Workers**

Searching records for all city-owned property since 1846; preparing maps and completing records of acquisition and use of city property; inspecting and recommending future disposition of properties; appraising city-owned property.

**Electrical Services - 6 Workers**

Modernizing records of the Bureau.

**Tax Assessor - 5 Workers**

Compiling and evolving a schedule of rates, formulas and general information pertaining to depreciation and obsolescence or adoption by the Tax Assessor's Office for future assessments.

**Municipal Reference Library - 5 Workers**

Cataloging and indexing unclassified library material; compiling a biographical reference file; compiling a reference file of ordinances of other municipalities; compiling bibliography on municipal subjects of interest; weeding out obsolete library materials; preparing a summary of industrial statistics for the city and a survey of statistical records kept by various city departments.

**Fire Department - 4 Workers**

Designing new equipment, including one fire truck (water tower), one squad truck, one engine truck and one ladder truck; recording changes made on fire boats and revising original plans accordingly; preparing stream charts and a fire equipment reference book.

**Bridges and Public Buildings - 4 Workers**

Cleaning and dusting all books, oil treating leather bound volumes.

The city also placed 2,891 workers on WPA projects building the infrastructure needed for a federal housing project constructed by the Public Works Administration. After abandoning plans to conduct a slum clearance program in the sixth ward, a 42-acre parcel was purchased on the outskirts of Milwaukee for the "Parklawn" apartments.<sup>64</sup> The rural site required extension of sewer and water mains, streets, curbs and gutters, street lighting, police and fire alarm units, and a bridge across Lincoln Creek at North 43rd Street -- all projects constructed by WPA workers. Workers also built a six acre playground and recreational area for the families in the 518 apartments.

**WPA Projects Building Infrastructure for the Parklawn Federal Housing Project  
2,891 Workers at a WPA Cost of \$1,342,670**

**Sewer Department - 1,901 Workers**

Laying sanitary and storm sewers, house drains, water connections, and paved streets to serve Parklawn site.

**Street Construction - 478 Workers**

Grading; building concrete curbs, gutters, cement walks; paving streets around and leading to Parklawn.

**Water Department - 300 Workers**

Laying water mains in the streets to provide water to Parklawn.

**Electrical Service - 87 Workers**

Installing street lighting and Fire and Police alarm units in Parklawn.

**Bridges and Buildings - 76 Workers**

Erection of a reinforced concrete flat slab bridge with ashlar stone facing, 64 feet wide by 40 feet long, spanning Lincoln Creek at North 43rd Street, in connection with Parklawn.

**Playground Division - 49 Workers**

Developing of the 6-acre recreation center of Parklawn. Work includes grading; planting; drainage; installing of a shallow water system; construction of a shelter shed for servicing the park; constructing and paving tennis courts, play areas and walks; constructing a wading pool, shuffleboard courts and other concrete masonry; erection of fences, installing play apparatus and flood-lighting the surfaced play areas.

## B. Construction of the Village of Greendale: A Joint WPA-RA Project

*During her visit to the Greendale site in November 1936, Eleanor Roosevelt noted with concern that the homes were designed solely for white families. She also complained that the laundry tubs were located next to the coal bins. A wall was placed between the tubs and the coal, but the policy to exclude Negroes from the Greendale housing was not changed.<sup>65</sup>*

A second major housing project, developing the Village of Greendale, provided employment for Milwaukee area relief workers from December 1935 through May 1938. This project, one of four in the country, created an experimental "garden" community constructed by the federal Resettlement Administration (RA) on a 3,400 acre tract three miles southwest of Milwaukee.

A combination of WPA and RA workers constructed 572 homes in the village, named Greendale, and landscaped several thousand acres of green space and parkways. Histories of this project discuss the conflicting practices of federally-funded work relief and public works programs. The Greendale project employed both WPA and RA workers, with WPA approval required for authorization of non-relief workers. One historian concluded, *"The R.A. hoped that ninety percent of its laborers could be taken from the relief group, but this proved to be impossible. Therefore, whenever the R.A. found it necessary to hire skilled labor from outside the relief group, the W.P.A. would approve only on the condition that a larger number of unskilled relief workers be hired at the same time. The unemployed men were willingly taken on, but R.A. officials regretted that there was often little productive work for them to do, particularly in the latter stages of construction."*<sup>66</sup>

The problems in assigning work appeared to stem from several factors. Some jobs required skilled workers and the Greendale project's endorsement by the Milwaukee Building and Trades Council had likely been contingent on guarantees that mainly union workers would be hired for construction work.<sup>67</sup> In some cases, the work was split. The community building, for example, was constructed by WPA workers; utilities were installed by RA workers. Also, the RA's emphasis on modern technology and efficiency measures conflicted with WPA methods limiting use of machines and earthmoving equipment, preferring labor intensive use of men instead.<sup>68</sup> (Horsedrawn carts were used on site by the WPA workers.) The weather contributed to work delays. In the winter of 1935-36 ten foot snow drifts made it impossible to accurately lay out streets; in the summer of 1936, one day's 110 degree temperatures caused a dozen workers to collapse on the job.

Furthermore, WPA workers were treated differently from the workers paid by the Resettlement Administration. At every skill level, WPA "security wages" were paid below the RA wage rates. Furthermore, the WPA laborers worked 130 hours a month, while the RA laborers worked only 88 hours.<sup>69</sup> The Resettlement Administration made special efforts to accommodate the skilled craftsmen they employed. The Greendale history, Main Street Ready-Made, noted, "*The budgetary burden of non-relief labor at Greendale consisted not solely of large payrolls, but also of incidental funds spent to support a skilled crew. The WPA, for example, regularly asked hirees to provide their own transportation to and from work sites, but the Resettlement Administration at Greendale, relying so heavily on Milwaukee tradesmen, decided to spend \$140,000 on 15,000 feet of spur line connecting Greendale with an urban electric rail line. Besides the initial expense of laying the track, the Resettlement Administration agreed to pay a surcharge on all men and materials hauled by rail.*"<sup>70</sup>

In all, about 2,000 men from relief rolls were employed on the project. However, fifty-five percent of the labor costs for the Greendale project were paid to non-relief workers, including many union craftsmen from the Milwaukee area.<sup>71</sup> Costs of the Greendale project totaled \$10.6 million, including \$6.6 million for housing construction, and the remainder for roads, community buildings, schools, and landscaping.<sup>72</sup>

*The Resettlement Administration constructed an electric rail line to bring skilled Milwaukee tradesmen to the Greendale work site.*

*"The WPA sewing center . . . is operated like a modern, high production garment factory. Its output, which totals 900,000 articles of apparel, was used by needy families and people in public institutions."*

Milwaukee Journal,  
December 31, 1939

*Ulbricht and Kellogg envisioned work for women producing well-designed materials useful to public institutions and helpful in educating young children.*

### C. Sewing Center Employing 1,000 Women

In August 1935 Harriet Clinton was named district supervisor of WPA Women's Projects in Milwaukee County. Clinton was responsible for planning and arranging worthwhile work for 2,400 women on the relief rolls who had received a first priority ranking for WPA jobs, and as she reported the following year, *"This was accomplished by December 1."*<sup>73</sup> One of the largest projects Clinton established was a sewing center which by April 1936 employed 1,000 women.<sup>74</sup> Only about 3 percent of the workers had experience operating power sewing machines before their employment, and the remainder were trained to work alongside more skilled garment workers.<sup>75</sup> Clothing, including dresses, pajamas, overalls, jackets, wool coats, suits, and overcoats, were made, as well as sheets and pillow cases. A knitting unit produced sweaters, dresses and caps. The center designed all the garments, drew patterns and even constructed much of the machinery used. After an inspection by the State Board of Control, which managed all state institutions in Wisconsin, the center received a contract for a year's sewing work for the workers.<sup>76</sup>

### D. Light Manufacturing for 1,350 Unskilled Workers

One of the most successful and highly publicized WPA projects in Milwaukee provided light manufacturing work for unskilled workers who had not been selected for the city and county construction and "white collar" projects. This project engaged workers in manufacture of dolls, toys, draperies, furniture, book binding, weaving, and textile printing under the supervision of designer-technicians drawn from among graduates of the Milwaukee State Teachers College art department.

The project plan called for employment of women who had become bread winners for their families and who had not found work on other projects. Initiated by the WPA Women's and Professional Division, the project was devised by Elsa Ulbricht, an art teacher at the Milwaukee State Teachers College, and organized by one of her fourth year students, Mary June Kellogg. Clinton urged Ulbricht to develop a handicraft project for women.

Ulbricht recounted, "One of her [Clinton] suggestions to me -- and I can remember this so well -- was that we could cut out some pictures from wallpaper and make scrapbooks. And knowing her very well, I said, 'Well, I don't think that would be interesting enough for me, and if that's what we're going to do, I don't want this job.'"<sup>77</sup> Ulbricht initially anticipated that she could employ women with sewing and other skills who could be easily trained for the handwork needed. However, when she reviewed the applications on file with the Milwaukee Public Employment Service she discovered that skilled workers on relief had already been culled for other projects, including the women's sewing project, and that workers available had few, if any, apparent skills. Ulbricht described the first day of the project in an article for Design magazine.

*When the Milwaukee Handicraft Project opened its doors November 6, 1935, a motley, careworn and harassed group of women were greeted and received by a small number of eager and socially sensitive young women and men into whose hands they were to be entrusted. They had been assigned from the relief lists of the United State Employment Service, in groups of fifty and one hundred at a time. Those who reported that memorable morning and the following few mornings, were nervous and excited, many of them arriving long before eight o'clock, having walked long distances. . . . They manifested uneasiness, uncertainty and great apprehension of their ability to meet the needs of this job to which they had been indiscriminately assigned and of this project about which they knew nothing. Many of them had had no work or very meager work experiences; many had been out of employment for so many months that they had become disheartened and depressed. They were of all ages, all nationalities, (some speaking very broken English), some could neither read nor write, Negro and white, of all degrees of intelligence and education. Many were poorly clothed, even unkempt, and some appeared physically weak from the lack of nourishment, medical attention and insecurity suffered for so long a time.<sup>78</sup>*

*When it became known that the Handicraft project, unlike many WPA projects in the community, accepted African American as well as white workers, the numbers employed swelled to 900 women and men within the first weeks.<sup>79</sup>*

*Ulbricht established a Citizens Committee of Milwaukee State Teachers College faculty and community leaders, mostly women, who reviewed educational aspects of the work and approved the products to insure that designs were of high quality.<sup>80</sup>*

*An elected Workers' Council was created, which set many of the administrative policies, handled most disciplinary problems, maintained a grievance committee, and organized social functions for the workers.*<sup>81</sup>

*"The most discouraging phase of the entire work-situation at all times was the constant turnover in working personnel, which was natural and right in a work-relief program of this kind....For as soon as these workers acquired real skills, they were either absorbed in industry or transferred to projects where it was necessary to employ more skillful people."*

*-- Elsa Ulbricht*

Staff had originally planned to rotate workers twice a day into different production units, but this proved unfeasible given the large numbers of employees, their limited skills and the supervisory time required. Efforts were made to locate workers in a production unit which suited their skills and interests, and very simple tasks (e.g. braiding carpet strings for pull toys) were identified for workers with learning deficiencies.

In 1937 the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors took over sponsorship of the project, but the Milwaukee State Teachers College maintained its influence over development of product designs. New toys were tested in local kindergartens and nurseries before beginning mass production. Draperies made of percale ("*easy to launder and press*") were provided to schools and hospitals. Female workers, some of whom spoke only limited English, helped in making a collection of authentic doll costumes representing 50 countries for the state historical museum, and black and white dolls were prepared for nursery schools and hospitals. (According to Ulbricht, "*Wherever there was a white doll there was a black doll too.*")<sup>82</sup> A number of older men who had been labeled "unemployable" due to age or physical handicaps proved to be competent carpenters and constructed looms for weaving and cabinets and cases needed by the project. The furniture unit built specially designed pieces for public rooms, including lounges at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Memorial Union, law school and dormitories, and the browsing room of the Milwaukee Public Library.

Supervisory staff changed constantly as young college graduates found non-WPA employment. There was also constant turnover of WPA employees, as workers gained skills and found work in private industry. As Ulbricht later recalled, "*It was an ever-changing training program for skills because the new ones that would come would have to be taught all over again. And it took a great deal of time and patience to do that.*"<sup>83</sup> According to Ulbricht, the constant turnover in WPA workers, "*meant a continuous training of new assignees in the work-methods of the project, in work habits and in new skills, which naturally retarded the speed with which production was possible as well as lowering the craftsmanship of the product for a time, and made it ever difficult to be assured that production would flow as promised.*"<sup>84</sup> Over the project's first eight years, more than 5,000 workers were trained.

The production units were moved a number of times due to the need for additional space, and at one time seven sites housed different production units. At its peak, the project employed 1,350 workers, housed in three floors of a factory building one square block wide. Eventually, eleven production units were established, as listed below.

*"[I]t was decided that no matter how simple the article to be made or how inexpensive the materials to be used in the construction, the article would be well designed or it would not be made."<sup>85</sup>*

-- Mary June Kellogg

### Production Units of the Milwaukee Handicraft Project<sup>86</sup>

bookbinding unit -	rebinding old books, binding books in Braille, producing hand bound books, portfolios, cases and boxes.
blockprinting unit -	making decorative wall-hangings and draperies for use by nurseries, schools, institutional buildings and hospitals; decorating covers for bound books.
screenprinting unit -	printing textiles for wall-hangings and draperies
weaving unit -	making fabric for drapery and upholstery
rug unit -	producing button hole rugs and small and large hooked rugs for schools and institutions using cotton and wool strip waste products
applique unit -	producing bedspreads, draperies, decorative wallhangings, and quilts for educational and penal institutions.
doll unit -	making cloth dolls and wardrobes for nurseries, schools, and institutions (4,000 dolls were produced for one Christmas), and dolls in historical costumes for the state historical museum.
cloth toy unit -	making washable cloth animals, alphabet books and blocks of various sizes and shapes for sick children in hospitals
costume unit -	sewing creative and period costumes for local pageants, school and community plays
wood unit -	cutting, sanding, painting and assembling wooden toys, including some designed for physically handicapped and mentally retarded children
furniture unit -	producing custom made furniture including chairs, davenports, cases, desks and tables (and using project woven materials).

*[These workers]  
"would be labeled  
unemployable in  
industry. Many of  
those in charge of the  
departments are men  
and women who  
learned their craft  
while on the  
project."<sup>87</sup>*

--Milwaukee Journal  
Sept. 21, 1941

Products were sold (for the cost of materials) or given to public institutions so that the federal project would not compete with sales by private industries. In spite of constant staff and employee changes, the project was able to raise funds through product sales to cover most non-labor costs, including materials and equipment for the work. The project was highly successful in marketing products to public institutions and produced a catalog for national distribution listing more than 30 items available. More than half of the product sales were to tax-supported institutions outside Wisconsin, and eventually sales were made in all of the states of the union.

Near the end of the WPA in 1941, with private employment increasing, the average age of women and men employed in the production units was 50 years of age, with the oldest worker around 68 years of age. After federal support for the project ended in 1942, Milwaukee County continued the project as a sheltered workshop for persons on county relief who had physical disabilities.

## E. Examples of 1940 WPA Projects Operating in Milwaukee County

In May of 1940, the city and county sponsors of WPA projects held an open house to showcase the activities of 4,500 non-construction WPA workers. Many projects were continuations of activities initiated in 1935 and 1936. Notable projects included establishment of nursery schools for children from needy and "under privileged" families, employment of women to serve hot lunches to children in Milwaukee County rural schools, and operation of a toy loan program. The toy loan project collected and repaired toys for children and operated 20 branch toy lending "libraries." The project received wide support, as reported by a local news article:

*Everyone around the county pitched in to make the toy loan project successful. Truck drivers volunteered services. Union labor organized drives among memberships. The Transport Co. carried appeals and the Red Cross sponsored a campaign. Dairy company route men plastered the city with milk bottle notices asking for discarded toys. And before long 75,000 articles, from stuffed polar bears, dolls by the thousand, roller skates and games poured in to be prepared for distribution at 20 loan centers. A total of 32,000 children registered between the ages of 2 and 16 years...[to borrow] toys.<sup>88</sup>*

*"Tricycles, scooters, roller skates, and whatever else has been placed in attics, basements, or out-of-the-way corners by housewives because of broken parts can be put into use immediately at the toy loan centers if donated."*

*-- Thirty Minute Review,  
August 3, 1939*



**May 20-26, 1940 Open House of "White Collar" WPA Projects  
(excerpted from the open house brochure)<sup>69</sup>**

**Historical Records:** First nation-wide inventory of documents of historical value is being compiled.

**Public Land Inventory:** Analyzing tax methods in Wisconsin, reporting the manner in which each local governmental body in the State levies, collects and spends taxes. Cause of tax delinquency are determined and proper adjustments affected.

**Tax Descriptions:** To correct the illegal real estate descriptions appearing on tax rolls, and furnish each assessor with adequate maps showing correct boundaries of all real estate parcels within each district.

**Grantor-Grantee Index:** The ownership history of each parcel of land in Milwaukee County, beginning with time of original government grants compiled in a single, running record chronologically.

**Index of Research Material:** All available research and statistical material in the field of Municipal planning in Milwaukee County is indexed and abstracted.

**Court Records:** Systematized service to the legal profession and the public reduces the cost and time in handling of court cases.

**Braille:** Blind supervise the sighted in transcribing works of literature.

**Health:** Thousand of children in public and parochial schools, in cooperation with local public health authorities, are having physical and dental examinations and hearing tests, as well as blood tests made. Physical defects are reported to the parents for referral to the family physician or dentist.

**Adult Education:** Adults go back to school to study the three R's, or Americanization or even chemistry. Classes formed in groups of ten or more. Vocational and avocational training.

**Workers' Service:** Classes in public speaking, rules of order and similar subjects for worker groups.

**Exhibits:** Miniature scenes are designed and constructed for display purposes to show how governmental agencies serve our community.

**Writers:** Histories and guide books are being prepared for Milwaukee, West Allis and Shorewood, and biographies of Milwaukee men and women for the State Encyclopedia of Biographies.

**Newspapers:** Rapidly deteriorating newspapers and microphotographed and indexed to perpetuate Milwaukee history.

**Pageants:** Production of Historical Fetes and dramatic accessories for schools and public recreation.

**Nursery Schools:** Nurseries are operated to develop the physical and mental well-being of pre-school children from needy and under privileged families, and to assist parents in nutritional, physical, educational and social needs of their pre-school children.

**Soil Conservation:** Pioneer work in soil conservation is aided by assisting in the development of erosion control.

**Soil Testing:** Samples are tested for farms and city garden plots.

**Recreation:** Trained leaders in music, drama, athletics and art expand leisure time programs of municipalities and counties: soft ball, boxing exhibitions, concerts and other activities.

**Public Museum:** Assistance given by WPA in all branches of museum work.

**State-Wide Museum:** Specimens for public museums throughout Wisconsin are being collected, repaired or made.

**Natural Science Research:** Laboratory assistance is provided for professors in sciences such as chemistry, zoology and botany. Also books on advanced mathematics are catalogued in the city and university libraries.

**Pupil Record Analysis:** Scientific data about the educational system in South Milwaukee, basis for remedial educational measures which will give students more adequate preparation for private industry.

**Housing:** Real Property and Land Use Survey to supply data for formulating policy as to parks, communications and other public enterprises.

**Vital Statistics:** Unification of birth certificate records.

**School Lighting:** Engineering tests made as a basis for improving the lighting and heating in the schools.

**Hot Lunches in Rural Schools:** Hot School Lunches served daily to Milwaukee County School children contribute to the health and betterment of future citizens. Good health is maintained -- deficiencies of the undernourished child provided for.

**Art:** Supplying art objects to schools and other public buildings. Stimulating art interest and promoting art education.

**Handicrafts:** Produces originally designed craft articles for use in tax-supported institutions and at a very low cost.

**Books:** Repair and binding of worn and torn books.

**Household Training:** Training in all branches of domestic service for young men and women.

**Old Milwaukee Restored:** The Church House in Estabrook Park, restored and refurnished.

**Council Proceedings Index:** Ready reference and cross-index to all subject matter of minutes of proceedings of Common Council.

**Toys:** Cleaning and repairing donated toys in order that Milwaukee children may borrow playthings from 20 branch toy libraries.

**Music:** "Music for You -- Under the Stars" series by a complete symphony orchestra at prices within reach of all.

**Traffic:** Survey to gather data to be used to prevent accidents, congestion, parking and bad pedestrian practices.

**Sewing:** A mechanized garment factory manufacturing over 70% of the clothing distributed by the County Relief Department.

**Job Placement Clinic:** WPA Youth Survey of employable youth without jobs, Milwaukee Vocational School job analyses, training applicants in job seeking technique.

The City of Milwaukee reported that in 1940 WPA workers continued projects repairing sidewalks, grading streets and alley, constructing sewers, and extending the city's fire and police alarm system and underground electrical conduit. Examples of city construction projects are summarized below. In Shorewood, WPA workers built a pedestrian tunnel at Hubbard Park. In Granville, an addition was built to the Carleton School and construction was started on the Hampton School.

## Examples of Construction Work Completed by the WPA in the City of Milwaukee: 1940<sup>90</sup>

### Street Construction

- Repaired and oiled 52 miles of macadam streets.
- Repaired 34,700 square feet of city sidewalks.
- Stone surfacing of 6.5 miles of streets.
- Constructed 1-1/8 miles of shoulders and ditches.

### Sewer Department

- Constructed 12.44 miles of sewer.
- Constructed 433 manholes and 751 catch basins.
- Adjusted to grade 1,200 manholes and catch basins.
- Abandoned and filled 300 catch basins.
- Repaired brickwork in 192 old manholes.

### Electrical Service

- Constructed 4-1/4 miles of underground electrical conduit.
- Constructed 6-3/4 miles of Fire and Police Alarm System underground conduit.
- Constructed 25 center-of-street safety islands and 10 loading zone islands.
- Repaired and rehabilitated 25 traffic signals and 167 street lighting units.

*"We agree that many of the persons now employed on WPA will not find private employment. This is because they are not 'employables' according to reasonable standards of private employment. These people are really relief cases and we believe that they should be cared for under the general relief program and not given preferential treatment [for defense program hiring]."*<sup>91</sup>

-- Citizens' Bureau of Milwaukee, 1941

By April 1940, WPA workers in Milwaukee County had constructed 84 public buildings, 884 miles of streets and highways, 31 bridges and viaducts, 206 miles of sidewalks, 187 miles of curbs, lighting for 215 miles of streets, and reconstructed 478 buildings.<sup>92</sup>

The largest county WPA projects focused on the parks and the airport. In August 1940, the WPA approved \$10 million in parks work, including construction of a swimming pool in Kosciuszko Park, a playground in Pulaski park, and new building and improvements at the Washington Park Zoo. Other park work financed constructing roads and bridges, and grading and landscaping parklands and recreational areas.<sup>93</sup> In order to meet the nation's defense needs, county airport work included plans for additional runways, construction of a hangar-administration building, construction for a combined airport passenger and mail terminal and administration building, and laying of drains and concrete "turning circles" on the runways. The WPA also approved construction of an addition to the Wisconsin national guard armory in Whitefish Bay, plans for an armory on the south side, and additions to the South Milwaukee vocational school.<sup>94</sup>

Another 1940 project, conducted by the Milwaukee Vocational School, employed workers to interview 47,350 Milwaukee young people between the ages of 19 and 24 who were in the labor force. The survey found half of these youth employed full-time, 973 working and studying under the National Youth Administration program, 248 in CCC camps, and 1,133 on WPA. The survey was used by the placement bureau at the Vocational School to help counsel the 8,000 young people looking for work and 1,200 youth employed only part-time for minimum hours.<sup>95</sup>

*"Schedule a visual demonstration of [job] placement methods for your club or employers group."*

-- Open House Brochure, May 1940

## F. Accomplishments of WPA Projects in County Parks and the Museum

The most visible legacy of WPA projects in Milwaukee County is the parks system. The Milwaukee County Park Commission has stated that the accomplishments of relief labor available from 1931 through 1941 *"far exceeded those of any period of equal length in the park history."*<sup>96</sup> During this eleven year period, \$21.6 million was spent on relief work in the parks (including \$3 million in county funds and \$18.6 in federal monies).

The Park Commission's success in using unemployed workers to improve parks and parkways was due to several factors. First, the Commission had developed visionary plans not only for parks, but also for a series of 84 miles of parkways. Members of the park commission traveled around the country visiting parkways and developed slide shows to promote parkway development in Milwaukee. Secondly, the commission had secured state legislation in 1927 to facilitate acquisition of land for parkways and used the opportunities afforded by the Depression to acquire land parcels which had fallen into public ownership through tax delinquency. After the city parks were transferred to the county in 1936, city staff joined the park commission. With federal monies available for public works, about 175 technical employees were recruited to turn out detailed plans for parks throughout the county.<sup>97</sup> A park commission report listed the following accomplishments of WPA workers:

*"The Works Progress Administration contributed to the development of practically every park in the system."*<sup>98</sup>

--Milwaukee County Park Commission

### **WPA Work in Milwaukee County Parks: 1935-1941<sup>89</sup>**

- Six reinforced concrete swimming pools were constructed, complete with filtration plants and bathhouses.
- A pavilion and wading pool were constructed at Red Arrow Park.
- A skating and boating pavilion was completed in Brown Deer Park.
- A new drive and parking station was laid out in Washington Park.
- The administration building for the Botanical Garden was completed and a new golf club house was erected in Whitnall Park.
- A shelter and recreation center was built in Smith Park.
- Service buildings were provided in Jacobus, Jackson, and Whitnall parks.
- A curling rink building was constructed at Riverside Park.
- A new elephant house was built at the Washington Park Zoo.
- A bathhouse was built at Doctor's Park.
- New roads were constructed in nearly every park.
- Walks and drives were resurfaced.
- Lincoln Memorial Drive was completely repaved.
- Sewers and drainage lines were laid and existing ones repaired.
- Jetties along the lake front were realigned and repaired.
- A retaining wall and a fence were erected along the north boundary of Mitchell Park.
- The pool in the sunken garden of Mitchell Park was cleaned and repaired.
- The lagoons at Washington and Jackson parks were drained and cleaned.
- New recreation areas were developed and old ones were modernized.
- Lighting systems were installed in some of the parks for night ball games and tennis.

Like the Milwaukee County Park Commission, the Trustees of the Milwaukee Public Museum embraced the WPA as an opportunity to expand services in spite of the economic problems brought on by the Depression. The centennial history of the Milwaukee Public Museum described the reductions in services necessitated in the 1930s: *"As the Depression deepened in 1933, there were further cutbacks. The lecture series budget was wiped out. The publications fund was used up and the Bulletins went the way of the Yearbooks which had been suspended in 1932. There was no money for field research, special specimen purchases, books for the library or new and replacement equipment."*<sup>100</sup> Museum Director Samuel A. Barrett seized the opportunity to employ relief workers to provide an estimated \$1.5 million of work for the museum.

The Public Museum sponsored the work of about 400 men and women who built exhibits and classified specimens and collections. These workers were described as *"the unskilled man -- the salesman, the store clerk, the foreman -- all those indoor men untrained in any specific office procedure...[and] women who were formerly department store bundlers, waitresses, bakery helpers and that large borderline group which cannot accurately be called either clerical or manual, for which it is so difficult to plan [work]."*<sup>101</sup> Workers remounted specimens, prepared slides for the school loan collection, sewed costumes for the wax exhibits, and re-indexed educational materials.

Barrett enthusiastically promoted the accomplishments of the museum WPA workers in the media. A bulletin board display in the museum lobby listed all the improvements made possible by the federal programs and acknowledgements to workers were posted throughout the exhibition halls. In 1938 after the renovations and specimen work were completed in the Milwaukee Public Museum, Barrett created a "State-Wide Program," which employed over 400 workers to prepare specimens, paintings, small exhibits and dioramas for other museums in the state.

*"The Milwaukee museum is one of the few in the country which has seen fit to sponsor a large WPA project. Therefore the workers who are getting this training in museum technique may expect future jobs in museums all over the country. . . . it is gratifying to be assured by the director that he will unhesitatingly recommend many of his present WPA workers to other museums."*<sup>102</sup>

-- WPA Supervisor for  
Women's and Professional  
Projects

*"By 1938, there were only routine tasks left for WPA labor to do in the museum and Barrett, in the phrase of the day, was not about to let his federally funded crew of over 200 people 'rest on their shovels.' He instituted another series of projects known as the State-Wide Program to assist other museums with work done on contract for modest cost which provided matching funds for supplies."*<sup>103</sup>

-- Nancy Oestreich Lurie,  
A Special Style: The  
Milwaukee Public Museum  
1882-1982

The museum history recorded the WPA workers' notable improvements to the museum.

*The exhibit production schedule was moved ahead by 25 years, according to Barrett's estimate. Existing exhibits were renovated and cleaned. The Calumet Club Annex was connected to the museum by an enclosed corridor and an addition was built on the Annex for the display of the typewriter collection donated to the museum by Carl Dietz in 1934. Murals were painted and installed above wall cases throughout the exhibit halls. More than a hundred oil paintings of birds were produced as an ornithological study series. Various small exhibits and kits of specimens were created for the school loan collection. Repairs were made to the mosaic floor of the rotunda and other necessary maintenance was carried out. Federally funded employees worked in all the scientific departments where they cataloged and mounted or otherwise preserved specimens. The loose files of Trustees' minutes and monthly reports going back to the turn of the century were collated, paginated and bound in volumes for easy reference. Strikingly beautiful stained glass windows were made for decorative details throughout the building.*<sup>104</sup>

## V. Construction Projects Under PWA: Preference for Union Members on Relief

In 1933 the federal government appropriated \$3.3 billion for public works projects for federal, state and local governments. These funds were intended to support capital improvements projects, handled by private contractors and employing non-relief workers. About a third of the funds were appropriated for federal projects and the remainder for state and local construction. State and local governments applied to the Public Works Administration (PWA) for funding for capital improvements projects. If approved, the federal agency paid 30 percent of the cost of labor and materials and the local government 70 percent. (In 1935 the federal share was raised to 45 percent of project costs.) The PWA loaned funds for local costs at 4 percent annual interest. Local sponsors let bids to private construction contractors who agreed to pay prevailing wage rates.

The PWA regulations required preference in hiring to union members on the relief rolls. In practice, the number of workers taken from local relief lists was relatively small. In a 1941 review of federal work and relief programs, government researchers observed, *"The relatively large expenditures which must be made for materials on the PWA type of projects has meant that, for the total spent by the agency, direct employment figures are not high."*<sup>105</sup> Federal staff emphasized that the high spending for materials and equipment generated additional private sector jobs.

The September 1935 administrative orders for the PWA exempted contractors from the requirement to hire 90 percent of their work force from the relief rolls. In assigning workers to projects, employment agencies were expected to give preference to workers from the municipality sponsoring the project and secondly to residents of the county where the project was located. In cases where the contractor requested union labor, the following procedure was required: *"First, those members of such unions who constitute regular employees of the contractor and who are on the local public relief rolls; Second, other members of such unions who are on relief; Third, upon the exhaustion of union members on such rolls, any other members of the union."*<sup>106</sup> In cases where the unions could not refer qualified workers, the contractor could chose other qualified workers referred by the employment agency.

*"[T]he large percentage of specialized and skilled workers needed for the PWA heavy construction work would make it impossible for many persons from relief rolls to qualify."*<sup>107</sup>

*"A contractor, when he contracts to take a [PWA] job ... knows all about his crews of men. He knows their capabilities and abilities and he bids on that. If he has to take people that are given to him from the relief rolls, he is going to be very loath to bid on a project."*

-- Harry L. Hopkins<sup>108</sup>

"P.W.A. is not  
W.P.A."

The Wisconsin Construction Industries Advisory Council supported the PWA as a means to revitalize the construction industry, and emphasized differences in philosophy between the PWA and WPA programs in a 1938 promotional tract entitled, "*A Total Construction Program of 66 Millions is Possible Under the P.W.A. for the State of Wisconsin. Think of the Possibilities this Program Has for Sound Employment.*"

**Perspective on the PWA by Construction Trades  
Wisconsin Construction Industries Advisory Council: 1938<sup>109</sup>**

Do not confuse P.W.A. with W.P.A. W.P.A. is the work organization which employs relief clients at prevailing hourly wages for short intervals of time per month so that the relief workers can only secure a minimum subsistence wage. These workers must definitely be on relief before they can secure work under this program. They work on projects presumably requiring a minimum of materials and maximum of hand labor. . . . The projects themselves are performed by the day-labor method in which there is no definite requirement on anyone's part to get production for any required cost or completion within any definite time limit. The selection and approval of the projects themselves is a complicated process involving divided local and federal responsibility.

The P.W.A. program, on the other hand, uses the established organizations and the competitive contract method of the construction industry. It produces projects of lasting value to the community, and pays the prevailing wage at the site. The workers are on a full month work basis, are non-relief taxpayers, unemployment benefit and old age benefit insurance paying citizens. They work on projects of a more complicated type requiring definite skills, substantial amounts of materials, and a definite time performance at definite costs. Whereas under W.P.A. the relation of direct labor at the site to materials is as four-to-one, the relationship of direct labor at the site to indirect labor under P.W.A. is as one-to-three. . . . It is the contention of the construction industry that the P.W.A. program (a 100% construction program), by maintaining normal trade relations and trade volumes, prevents unemployment, and, thereby, offers a positive solution to the unemployment problem.

In spite of its massive appropriations, the PWA was slow to get projects off the ground. The largest PWA project in Wisconsin was construction of the City of Milwaukee Linwood water filtration plant, a \$4.6 million construction project employing about 1,700 men for a year. The PWA also helped finance sewerage system expansions, construction of elementary schools, and additions to high and vocational schools.

## Partial Listing of Milwaukee County PWA Construction Projects<sup>110</sup>

### City of Milwaukee Projects

- water filtration plant
- Gaenslen school for handicapped children
- Manitoba Street school
- Windlake Avenue school
- addition to Riverside High School
- water department storage tank and pumps at the Soldiers' Home
- concrete roof over Kilbourn Park reservoir

### County Projects

- central laundry
- county incinerator
- additions to county institution buildings
- drain and sprinkling system for Pulaski Park
- pedestrian tunnel at Hubbard Park

### Projects in Other Milwaukee County Municipalities

- West Allis schools
- road and bridge construction in West Allis
- street lighting system in West Milwaukee
- water mains and sewers in Fox Point
- River Hills sewerage system and bridge
- new village hall in River Hills
- Shorewood auditorium
- Fox Point water works and sewerage system
- Wauwatosa swimming pool
- addition to Wauwatosa High School
- addition to Cudahy High School
- addition to Cudahy Vocational School
- addition to Cumberland School in Whitefish Bay
- Cooper School in Greenfield

### Sewerage District

- Jones island sewerage plant extension
- new connections and extensions

Milwaukee was also selected as a site for a PWA-Housing Division apartment development. Upon advice from city officials, the federal agency purchased a 42 acre tract of land on the outskirts of Milwaukee and committed \$2.6 million to construction of 518 "low-rent" apartments on the "Parklawn" site.<sup>111</sup> As noted, the city used WPA workers to prepare the infrastructure for the project, including sewers, water mains, streets, lighting, fire and police alarm systems, and a playground.

*"[The PWA] Housing Division's construction costs will stand comparison with any but the cheapest frame buildings built by private enterprise at the same time and under similar conditions."<sup>112</sup>*

## VI. Employment Programs Targeted at Young Workers from Families on Relief

During the depression the problem of unemployment was particularly acute for young people, who lacked work experience and usually showed little success in competing for those jobs available. Two major federal initiatives were developed for youth -- the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which enrolled only young men, and the National Youth Administration (NYA), which enrolled young men and women.

### A. Six Civilian Conservation Corps Camps in Milwaukee County

The CCC was established as part of a "Reforestation and Relief Bill" adopted in 1933, which authorized establishment of forest camps that would employ physically fit young men, ages 17 through 28, who were single and unemployed. Men enrolled for a six month period, and could re-enroll for a total of two years. (In 1937 total CCC service was reduced to 18 months.) In spite of objections by Wisconsin Governor Philip La Follette and William Kelly, executive secretary of the Milwaukee Urban League, most of the Wisconsin camps were closed to African American men, with a segregated camp in Illinois designated a "Negro unit."<sup>13</sup> (Photographs show integrated CCC crews in Milwaukee County.<sup>14</sup>) The camps were operated by the U.S. Army, followed strict regimen of discipline, and provided uniforms for the corpsmen. In Wisconsin over its nine year history, the CCC employed more than 92,000 men, including about 50,000 men from Wisconsin, at 97 camps.<sup>15</sup>

*"[CCC crews] at Estabrook park cleaned about 100,000 cubic yards of rock out of the bed of the Milwaukee river for three-fourths of a mile and are now completing a \$65,000 dam with flood gates that is expected to lessen flood damage."*

-- Milwaukee Journal  
April 3, 1938

In Milwaukee County the Department of Outdoor Relief certified eligible young men for the CCC, opening up enrollment every four months. Federal CCC regulations allowed enrollees from non-relief families, but initially the men were selected from active relief cases, WPA cases with large families, and Aid to Dependent Children cases.<sup>16</sup> Regulation changes allowed enrollment of youth from families not on relief but with income "below a normal living standard." In 1938, 28 percent of Milwaukee County men enrolled in CCC were from relief families, 61 percent were members of families formerly aided by the Outdoor Relief Department, and the remaining 11 percent had not received county relief.

Workers received \$5 a month, with another \$25 sent home to family dependents. The CCC check "home" was sufficient to close half of the county cases of workers on public relief, and to substantially reduce payments for the other half.<sup>117</sup>

Six CCC camps were operated in Milwaukee County at the request of the Park Commission: two at Honey Creek, and one each at Kletzsch, Sheridan, and Whitnall parks. (The camp at Kletzsch Park closed after six months, following construction of a dam in the Milwaukee River.) The camps employed about 200 men each, and the federal government provided equipment for heavy construction work and grading, and most costs of materials. The CCC crews laid jetties into Lake Michigan to control erosion at Sheridan Park, where the bluff had been receding at a rate of two feet a year. Other crews excavated rock and dirt and built dams on the Milwaukee River to control flooding, landscaped miles of parkway, and developed large sections of Whitnall Park. A Milwaukee Journal article described the work on the dam at Kletzsch Park.

*Most of the work on the dam was done in the winter of 1936, in a mad race between bad weather and a camp of lusty CCC youths who worked day and night in eight hour shifts. They strung floodlights over the project and set up steam boilers to heat materials. The bottom of the footings were about 14 feet below the river level and only a very small opening could be provided to permit the water to flow. Had a thaw come before the work was done, melting snow and causing the river to rise, the whole project would have washed out. The youths worked against time. On the afternoon they poured their last concrete, a blizzard came -- but the work was done. The CCC had won.<sup>118</sup>*

*"Fortunately, the county had many large acreages of undeveloped park land and also had plans prepared, ready for construction. The result was that the county obtained a great amount of benefit from the CCC camps."<sup>119</sup>*

--Eugene A. Howard,  
Milwaukee County Park  
Commission

*"CCC crew . . . worked to move ice jams in the Milwaukee River. Lifelines were ready to be thrown from shore and the bridge if waters became too rough."<sup>120</sup>*

-- Eugene A. Howard

## Examples of CCC Projects for Milwaukee County<sup>121</sup>

### **Sheridan and Grant Parks**

Built 13 jetties to control lakeshore erosion.

### **Estabrook Park**

Removed about 100,000 cubic yards of rock from the bed of the Milwaukee River at Estabrook Park. The rock was crushed and used for roads and dam construction.

Constructed a flood control dam at Estabrook Park, including a rock spillway and flood control gates, separated by a small island.

### **Whitnall Park**

Developed the easterly portion of Whitnall Park, extended the drive south of College Avenue to connect with the golf entrance at South 92nd Street, constructed a 15 acre lake (excavating 120,000 cubic yards of earth), graded three islands, constructed a reinforced concrete dam faced with field stone, improved the channel of the creek north of the lake, reinforced the concrete bridge with wood railings and field stone facing, graded and graveled a parking station for the golf course, erected a service building in the parking area, developed an arboretum area with a farm house style building.

### **Honey Creek Parkway**

Improved 225 acres of the parkway from North Avenue to Church Street, planted 10,000 shrubs and trees, built 7 bridges, constructed 5 miles of roads.

Erected 2 miles of retaining wall along the Menomonee River to halt erosion.

Constructed an overhead for the Rapid Transit over the parkway.

### **Menomonee River Parkway**

Constructed a suspension bridge on the parkway leading into Hoyt Park.

## B. National Youth Administration Sewing, Parks and Vocational Training Projects

The National Youth Administration (NYA) was established within the WPA to *"to initiate and administer a program of approved projects which shall provide relief, work relief, and employment for persons between the ages of 16 and 25 years who are no longer in regular attendance at a school requiring full time, and who are not regularly engaged in remunerative employment."*<sup>122</sup> The administration operated two programs: an out-of-school work program for unemployed youth and a financial aids program to enable young people to continue their education part-time.

The Milwaukee County Department of Outdoor Relief sponsored a youth sewing project which initially employed young women ages 18 to 25 in three shifts of 70 workers each to produce clothes for families on relief and persons in county institutions. (In 1939 the numbers employed reached a high of 560 a month.) The project was described by the Outdoor Relief Department: *"Production at the beginning was limited to simple garments, and infants' layettes. Infants' dresses, nightgowns and slips, blankets and bands, boys' woolen knew pants and blouses, and girls' and children's clothing are now also produced. . . . The girls [women] are encouraged to sew for their own family needs, and are taught to weave rugs, upholstery materials, etc. The educational interest of the girls [women] was stimulated through a series of talks by recognized authorities on questions such as household arts, women's employment, labor legislation, how to apply for a job, health, family relationship, etc. A guidance counselor has been assigned on a full time basis by the W.P.A. Adult Education Project, to continue this work."*<sup>123</sup>

Over time the operation was expanded to include an arrangement with the Milwaukee School administration to sew gym suits, kindergarten aprons, cooking aprons and workshop aprons, which could be sold at school bookstores on a "cost-of-material" basis. As workers gained more skills they also prepared woolen snowsuits and coats, and products were expanded to include doctors and nurses operating uniforms and hospital supplies. A weaving department was established to make upholstery material and woven rugs. The women were allowed to use the machines on their own time to sew clothes for their families and encouraged to enrolled in school courses.

*"The youth problem is serious. It's harder for young people to break into industry now than it has been for several years."*

-- William F. Rasche,  
Milwaukee Vocational  
School, 1940

*"It would be well to make [the NYA sewing project] a permanent interim school for training those least able because of economic or other handicaps, to get suitable employment, forming a bridge between school and job."*<sup>124</sup>

-- Milwaukee County  
Department of Outdoor  
Relief, 1937

Wage scales for the women's sewing project varied over time. In 1936 workers received \$6 a month for personal expenses and \$14 to contribute to the family budget. The Department of Outdoor Relief strongly supported the NYA sewing project. In late 1939 the county Board of Public Welfare established a policy that if a young woman refused to accept NYA work, her family's relief budget would be reduced by the amount of the NYA employment.<sup>125</sup>

Parks programs were used to employ young men in the NYA in Milwaukee County. According to the Park Commission, *"They cultivated shrub beds and newly planted trees, mowed lawns, raked leaves, took care of weeding and watering, did clean-up work in the parks and buildings, worked in the nursery and in the gardens at Whitnall Park, helped with some of the planting in the parks and parkways, and erected fireplaces for picnic areas. A large crew was kept at the service department making benches, picnic tables, and boats, painting, making signs, dismantling obsolete buildings, and helping with the repair and maintenance of equipment. Some of the boys [men] who had clerical training assisted with records and carried on routine office tasks. In many of the jobs individuals worked as assistants to regular park employees, affording them an opportunity to learn many of the various phases of park operation."*<sup>126</sup>

In the summer of 1935, sixty Milwaukee men were sent to cherry-picking camps in Door County and another crew helped operate a camp for physically handicapped youth at Camp Whitcomb, thirty miles northwest of Milwaukee.<sup>127</sup> In Milwaukee County crews erected and operated two camps -- one at Holler Park for handicapped children and one in the Root River Parkway for African American children from needy families.

The student aid program of the NYA provided part-time jobs to young people to enable them to continue their schooling. In February 1936, Milwaukee County had 2,461 students from 53 schools on financial aid. Aid payments were based on the level of schooling, with \$6 a month paid for students attending high school.<sup>128</sup> Types of vocational training programs encouraged under the program are shown in a report on NYA programs in 1940.

**Report on the Milwaukee NYA Training Program: 1940  
(Milwaukee County Board of Public Land Commissioners)<sup>129</sup>**

The National Youth Administration training program in the Milwaukee area is considered one of the most efficient in the United States. As of December 4, 1940, a total of 2,087 youths were being served by N.Y.A. in the following manner:

- 489 receiving comprehensive metal training,
- 80 receiving aviation mechanic training,
- 70 receiving technical training, 31 of which are in a 20-week short-wave radio course in the Milwaukee Vocational School,
- 67 in automotive repair in West Allis and Milwaukee Vocational Schools,
- 664 in clerical and service work,
- 501 [women] receiving training in comprehensive power sewing work, and
- 216 in common labor.

The youths work 46 hours per month on production projects and go to school the balance of the time. The Vocational Schools operated by the City of Milwaukee, City of West Allis, City of Cudahy, and the City of South Milwaukee are heartily cooperating in this work.

When properly trained, all of these youths will be available for, and anxious to work in private industry situated within a reasonable distance of their place of residence. Unless employment is available, an important phase of the National Youth Administration program will not be realized. Jobs must be found for these young people when their period of training has been completed if the morale of the youth of America is to be maintained on a satisfactory plane.

## VII. Wisconsin Work Programs for Unemployed Teachers

*"One of the chief aims of the WPA has been to develop in unemployed persons those skills, knowledges, and personal qualifications which will enable them to secure private employment, and the WPA adult education program has attempted to include courses and instruction directed toward this end."*<sup>130</sup>

--State Board of Vocational and Adult Education, 1941

Throughout the Depression, the Wisconsin State Board of Vocational and Adult Education promoted the employment of out-of-work teachers to organize adult education courses in the state. In 1933 under the Civil Works Administration, approximately 900 teachers were employed with over 40,000 adults enrolled in classes. In 1934 about 1,450 unemployed Wisconsin teachers were hired under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration to conduct adult education, vocational, and literacy classes for about 63,000 adults.<sup>131</sup>

When the WPA was established, projects were allowed to employ teachers who had lost their jobs and were on public relief during the depression. Other persons on relief who appeared capable of teaching adult classes were also recruited to organize course offerings. The WPA regulations initially restricted WPA teachers from supplanting or assisting with regular courses already offered by the public schools, providing courses in music or art at the public school, or providing remedial education to children.<sup>132</sup>

The Board of Vocational and Adult Education served as state sponsor for adult education projects in Wisconsin, working with local sponsors, including directors of vocational schools, city superintendents of schools (in cities not having vocational schools), and county superintendents of schools for rural and village areas. Local schools were expected to offer free classroom space and loaned textbooks. The State Board screened relief clients to identify persons they believed could be trained to be effective adult education and vocational instructors. Many of the WPA instructors subsequently found regular employment as adult educators or returned to elementary and secondary teaching, which contributed to a constant turnover in staff. To train newly hired teachers and to improve the quality of adult instruction, the Board established a program of continuing in-service training, conferences on techniques for teaching adults, and bulletins on developing course outlines and lesson plans.

Monthly wage rates, which varied for urban and rural areas, were set in Milwaukee at \$55 for unskilled workers, \$65 for intermediate workers (with no experience or professional training), \$85 for skilled workers (with high school or elementary school teaching experience, or highly skilled in a given profession), and \$94 for professional and technical workers (licensed to teach, with a college degree, and senior high school or college training).

Sponsors who hired nine or more teachers from relief rolls were allowed a supervisory position, preferably filled from the relief rolls but if not, with a teacher assigned by the district WPA office. Projects with at least ten teachers could request clerical assistance.

George Hambrecht, State Director of Vocational Education, saw WPA as an opportunity to increase the skills of unemployed workers, observing, *"With this nationwide [WPA] plan to make jobs for the unemployed, no adequate funds were provided for the vocational training of the unemployed for greater vocational usefulness and for better living. In fact, requests for increased federal aid for vocational training were actually resisted most strenuously by many of those in authority."*<sup>133</sup>

The Wisconsin State Board received permission from federal WPA officials to expand its existing course work in adult education, and particularly high school subjects (e.g., history, economics, English, literature, mathematics, chemistry, physics, foreign languages) targeted to factory workers, scout and recreation leaders, WPA workers and other adults. Adult education and vocational classes were developed in over 300 municipalities throughout the state, with strong emphasis placed on expanding opportunities for adult education into unserved rural areas. In 1936 about 700 WPA teachers were employed and 50,000 adults enrolled in classes; in 1937 over 800 teachers provided classes for 65,000 students.<sup>134</sup>

Sixty WPA teachers were assigned to 43 Civilian Conservation Corps camps, where they provided grade school and high school course work and assisted CCC enrollees in qualifying for 8th grade and high school diplomas. (From 1935 to 1940, a total of 1,678 young men received their eighth grade diplomas and 112 were granted high school diplomas.)<sup>135</sup> Over 100 teachers provided vocational education at the CCC camps with over 10,000 workers enrolled in instruction in auto mechanics, machine shop, welding, electricity, woodwork, aviation, drafting, mechanical drawing, radio, seamanship, telegraphy, typesetting, metalwork, etc. The State Board also used available WPA teachers to expand vocational course offerings statewide in business and clerical skills. By the end of the decade, the State Board saw an increase to nearly 4,000 students in adults enrolling in Americanization classes for immigrants wishing to become naturalized citizens. These classes enrolled many adults over age 50 who had not learned to read and write English and had consequently been unable to qualify for citizenship.<sup>136</sup> In addition, about 75 teachers provided instruction in avocational and leisure-time activities for over 8,000 adults statewide.

*"Educational benefits to be derived were emphasized rather than the mere employment of unemployed teachers. Workers were assigned because they were qualified to give something of educational value to the communities in which they were employed."*<sup>137</sup>

-- State Board of Vocational Education

*By 1939 over 70,000 individuals in the state were enrolled in classes taught by about 650 WPA teachers.*

**"Accomplishments of the WPA Education Program"<sup>138</sup>  
(State Board of Vocational and Adult Education, 1941)**

**First:** Needy, qualified teachers have been given employment in their profession.

**Second:** Adult Education has been promoted in many rural areas in this state which might have been impossible otherwise. Experiments have been made possible to determine the most feasible methods of conducting adult education programs in rural areas. These experiments will be invaluable when plans are made for permanency of adult education programs in the rural areas of this state.

**Third:** Schools of vocational and adult education have been enabled to experiment with new activities through the use of WPA teachers. In many cases those activities prove successful where the workers are taken over on the regular staff of the school.

**Fourth:** Educational opportunities are being offered to many heretofore educationally underprivileged groups including Indians, persons on relief, and workers on other WPA projects.

**Fifth:** Thousands of non-citizens have been given instruction which enabled them to obtain their citizenship.

*At the Milwaukee Vocational School VE-ND classes were held Monday through Friday nights, with one six-hour shift starting at 9:00 p.m. and a second shift starting at 3:00 a.m..*

*600 instructors taught 565 defense programs, with average monthly enrollments of 8,000 students, using every training station in the 43 vocational schools in Wisconsin.<sup>139</sup>*

At the onset of World War II, WPA adult education projects focused on the nation's defense needs. The federal government established a special WPA program for Vocational Education for National Defense (VE-ND), which provided federal support for teachers, supervisors, equipment and supplies for course work preparing workers for defense industries. VE-ND training courses ran from 3 to 12 weeks and used existing classrooms in the evenings and weekends when regular vocational classes were not in session. Students received 10 week, 300 hour refresher courses in mechanics, welding, metal work, automotive repair, foundry work, engines, and other industrial skills. For the VE-ND classes, instructors were hired from private industry with at least seven years practical experience. Over half of the students were WPA workers who continued to draw WPA wages while attending school. Most of the other students were unemployed workers referred by the public employment service.<sup>140</sup>

In addition, VE-ND training was provided directly on site in local factories. One history explained, "*Early in the War, the demand for workers had been so great that some factories hired untrained people. This practice resulted in damage and lowered productivity. The training-within-industry program was added to VE-ND in 1941. In Milwaukee alone, 27 war production plants had Milwaukee Vocational and Adult School instructors in-house over two years.*"<sup>141</sup>

## VIII. Milwaukee County Work and Relief Programs through the 1960s

The nature of work relief projects in Milwaukee County shifted as the WPA was phased out and the economy improved. County-operated work programs initiated in 1941 emphasized maintenance and operation of county services -- work activities not permitted under the WPA. Adults on relief who did not have the skills or experience to be competitive in the expanding wartime labor market were assigned to maintenance work in county parks, buildings and grounds. The toy lending and repair, Milwaukee Handicrafts, and sewing projects begun under WPA continued as county-sponsored employment programs for low-skilled workers. County work programs operated at a reduced level throughout the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, increasing during recessions when caseloads rose.

In 1950 the welfare department in cooperation with the Milwaukee office of the Wisconsin Industrial Commission began a job placement service to assist general assistance recipients who had difficulty finding private sector employment. The department estimated that its two job counselors placed 250 individuals in jobs during 1950. Only those persons who could not be placed in private sector jobs were assigned to the county work program. According to the welfare department, none of these workers would have been considered "fully employable" in a normal labor market.<sup>142</sup>

The county work program was also expanded in 1950 in response to increasing caseloads due to high unemployment levels. Up to 700 workers were employed -- the largest number since the Depression. A two-tiered wage structure was established which paid the prevailing laborer wage of \$1.37 per hour for able bodied workers and \$0.75 for workers of limited employability. The \$0.75 wage rate was also used to discourage so-called "slackers" who were placed in the lower tier based on their performance at county work sites. The amount of relief was based on family size and averaged \$60 per month. Workers at the \$0.75 level would need to work 80 hours per month to earn \$60 while workers at the higher rate of \$1.37 would require only 44 hours per month.<sup>143</sup> Relief work included sheltered workshop activities for handicapped persons enrolled in the toy loan and repair program. Other jobs were designed for the population unable to find employment and most often were service jobs maintaining county parks, buildings and institutions.

*"100 or so [general relief workers] are employed by the city, with the county paying the salaries. They help the ward workers in cleaning streets and alleys, do landscaping at the purification plant, do minor repair work, repair loan materials and specimens at the public museum, help at the sewage plant in grubbing out trees, leveling filled areas and repairing broken dock walls, sort and file materials, and help bring old records up to date in the city hall."*

-- Milwaukee Journal  
June 11, 1950

*A study of the work relief program in October 1954 found that only 7 percent of workers "had developed to a point where they could be considered as skilled laborers and they were among the older age groups. The rest would generally be classed as unskilled and were able to compete in the labor market for jobs at common labor."<sup>144</sup>*

*From 1957 to 1958, the number of general assistance caseheads who were considered unemployable increased by 16 percent while the number of caseheads who were "fully employable" rose by 104 percent.<sup>145</sup>*

The Department of Public Welfare required adults on general assistance who were considered able to work to register for employment. Adults who were prevented from working due to illness or disability were required to report to the county dispensary for a medical examination and medical care, as needed. Referrals were also made to the state Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. A county welfare department study of 300 cases closed in December 1951 showed that on average individuals relied on general assistance for short periods, with a median stay of 3.9 months.<sup>146</sup> Over a third of the general assistance cases closed when workers found private sector employment. Only two cases out of 300 were closed due to failure to comply with department policies.

Welfare rolls continued to fluctuate with the unemployment rate as recessions came and went throughout the 1950s. Unskilled workers were particularly hard hit by the recession, with many workers ineligible for or no longer covered by unemployment compensation. During this period county welfare officials remained convinced of the adverse impact of unemployment on families and relief caseloads. With the onset of the 1957 recession, welfare officials reported, "*Although the General Assistance caseload is the most reliable barometer of economic conditions, the other caseloads of the department also are affected.*"<sup>147</sup> The department reported old age assistance increases as unemployed sons and daughters were unable to care for their parents and AFDC increases as fewer divorced fathers were able to make child support payments. Caseload increases were seen as resulting not only from the growing number of unemployed workers, but also the length of the recession.

As the 1957 recession wore on through 1958, Milwaukee County officials attempted to assess its financial impact. The year-long economic downturn tripled unemployment compensation payments which supported the brunt of unemployed workers, while the general assistance caseload showed a 50 percent increase. County officials began to consider vocational training programs for general assistance recipients since unskilled workers comprised most of the employable general assistance population and were hardest hit by recessions during the 1950s. Officials hoped that vocational training could raise the skill levels of adults on relief and result in placement of workers in semi-skilled jobs which were in greater demand.

A voluntary program with Milwaukee Vocational and Adult School and the Milwaukee employment service office was targeted to general relief recipients who were under forty years of age and had at least a sixth grade reading level. Job Service identified semi-skilled occupations which were in demand and assisted in job placement after clients completed their training. The vocational school provided short-term training in machine shop, clerical, foundry, welding, basic education, and a variety of other courses in the semi-skilled area. Training costs were supported by the welfare department for persons who completed. However, basic skill levels and attendance appeared to be serious problems with 20 percent of applicants failing to pass the sixth grade equivalent qualifying test and 37 percent never making it to class.<sup>148</sup>

Public officials' concern over the skill levels of welfare recipients continued throughout the 1960s and an increasing number of federal training programs were introduced to upgrade the academic and vocational skill levels of adults. With the growing emphasis on skill training, the federal Manpower Development and Training Act, Adult Basic Education, Work Incentive Program, and a variety of "Great Society" programs were adopted which placed increasing numbers of recipients into training components. Persons enrolled in training represented only a small portion (less than 100 individuals) of the Milwaukee County general relief population in the early 1960s but after the expansion of federal education and training programs rose to well over 1,000 persons by 1969.

However, by the end of the 1960s, federal training dollars for adults on welfare had shifted their focus to the AFDC population rather than general assistance recipients. As a result, 75 percent of Milwaukee County recipients participating in training in 1969 were women enrolled in the federally funded Work Incentive Program (WIN) and fewer than 25 male general assistance recipients were assigned to training in these projects.<sup>149</sup>

County work programs and job search activities remained the primary focus of the general assistance employment efforts during the 1950s and 1960s. The number of adults in work programs rose from a low of 250 in the early 1950s up to 2,000 jobs per month in 1961.

*The Milwaukee employment service office reported that before the 1958-59 recession it had 19 applicants for every job listed for unskilled workers. By January 1959 the ratio was 184 applicants for each listing for an unskilled job.<sup>150</sup>*

*According to welfare officials, work relief was used "partly as a test of sincerity in requesting assistance, partly as a sheltered workshop for those individuals too handicapped ever to find work in private employment, and partly as a service to teach work skills."<sup>151</sup>*

## County Work Projects for 1,939 General Assistance Recipients: December 1961<sup>152</sup>

### **MILWAUKEE COUNTY (1,315 Workers)**

Maintenance work in all county parks and parkways: picking paper; care of shrub and flower beds; maintenance of lawns; and cleaning of buildings, walks and driveways. Employees also do the same type of work assigned to the service department. (598 workers)

A project to maintain and operate toy and doll lending centers throughout Milwaukee County, including the repairing of toys and dolls for free loan to children. (288 workers)

Ground maintenance work at the county institutions. (154 workers)

Hand production of institutional and educational materials (Milwaukee County Handicraft Project). (122 workers)

Sewing of garments for County Institutions. (55 workers)

Maintenance of lawns, cleaning of sidewalks and steps, and janitorial service in the Courthouse and Safety Building. (43 workers)

Filing, preservation and exhibition of historical material pertaining to early Milwaukee. (33 workers)

Stapling and assembling of forms, gathering of forms and pick up and delivery of supplies for the Department of Purchasing. (8 workers)

Clerical assistance for county departments. (14 workers)

### **CITY OF MILWAUKEE (579 Workers)**

Cleaning and repairing books in the public library; maintenance of blueprints in the City engineer's Office.

### **STATE OF WISCONSIN (26 Workers)**

Maintenance of lawns, and janitorial work in the buildings at the Wisconsin State Fair Grounds.

### **CITY OF SOUTH MILWAUKEE (19 Workers)**

Work in the street sanitation departments.

Most jobs for general assistance workers were with county and city governmental units. General assistance recipients were working throughout Milwaukee County government, from clerical tasks for the County Executive's Office to maintenance work at the County Institutions. In some cases, recipients were assigned to regular county jobs (e.g. grounds and building maintenance) which were also performed by county employees. Sheltered workshops remained a strong component for adults who were handicapped or "unemployable" through the sewing project, Milwaukee Handicrafts project, and the toy loan and repair program. In September 1967, the county also entered into a contract with the Veterans Administration hospital to provide training and work experience slots, and this relationship has continued.

## IX. A Reluctance to Serve the Hard Core Unemployed in Federal Public Service Employment Programs in the 1970s

In 1971 as a counter cyclical response to increasing unemployment rates, Congress passed the first Public Employment Program (PEP) since the 1930s. This two-year program was intended to create temporary jobs in those areas of the country with high unemployment and at the same time to provide needed governmental services. The emphasis of the program was entirely on employment and was targeted to unemployed and underemployed workers, and particularly veterans. Jobs paid wages of up to \$12,000 per year and were expected to lead to private sector employment. Local governmental units were required to use the funds to create new jobs supporting services which were necessary but not currently provided, so that existing public jobs would not be jeopardized.

The City of Milwaukee quickly responded to the PEP initiative, creating a wide range of jobs throughout city government. City departments proposed a variety of activities for the PEP, including ash box removal, in-school health check-ups, sanitation and recycling projects. One-third of the 609 initial PEP positions were in the Milwaukee Public Schools with most positions for teacher aides. The City Department of Public Works created 95 positions, mostly for laborers. The Department of City Development offered 105 positions most of which were for watchmen and community aides, and the balance of jobs were spread throughout departments as clerical and administrative staff. During the first year of operation, most of the \$5.6 million for Milwaukee County went to the city, with \$388,300 to the county and \$681,400 to create jobs in state agencies located in Milwaukee.<sup>153</sup>

A profile of the 980 participants during the first year showed that half (50 percent) earned less than \$2.99 per hour, and 37 percent earned \$3.00-3.99 per hour. Target groups for PEP were reflected in the characteristics of participants where 67 percent were veterans, 11 percent on public assistance, and another 17 percent economically disadvantaged. Most workers were relatively well-educated with only 25 percent having less than a high school diploma, 45 percent with a diploma, and 30 percent with at least some post-secondary education. The strong focus of the program on veterans resulted in 81 percent of participants being male. Minorities made up half of participants.

*The need to balance competing objectives of the public employment program -- countercyclical, structural, and public service -- caused friction between the federal government that distributed PEP money and the local and state governments that used it.<sup>154</sup>*

*The percent of PEP enrollees previously on public assistance was low at both national and local levels.*

The city program was administered by the Civil Service Commission, which had responsibility for similar job training and work study programs. City departments interviewed applicants and placed them in positions specially created for PEP or in positions which expanded the work force of the department. Participating city departments were allowed to interview eligible applicants, although they were expected to hire workers on a "first come first serve" basis. Despite the policy of the Civil Service Commission that applicants be hired in the order referred, departments often selected the most qualified applicants, and in one department 300 applicants were screened to fill 60 positions.

While the targeting policies for selection of applicants and the jobs filled more than met the intent of the federal legislation to serve veterans, agencies were less than successful in serving the disadvantaged or "hard-core" unemployed. Compared to the national experience, the City of Milwaukee program appears to have enrolled higher proportions of veterans, minorities and men, but much lower numbers of older workers and disadvantaged populations. Some city officials reportedly were not enthusiastic about hiring welfare recipients, arguing that, *"the extensive training and supportive services needed to develop the welfare recipients constitute an effort out of all proportion to the amount of work they would subsequently do."*<sup>155</sup>

**Targeted Populations as a Percent of Public Employment Program Workers**

<u>Category</u>	<u>Milwaukee</u>	<u>National Experience</u>
Men	81%	72%
Minorities	53%	31%
Older Workers	5%	16%
Persons with Less than High School Completion	25%	25%
Economically Disadvantaged	28%	34%
Persons on Public Assistance	11%	10%
Veterans	62%	43%

The hiring policies, screening of clients and selection of PEP work projects drew considerable reaction from representatives of unemployed and low income populations. Sweat Associates, a community organization of unemployed workers, in particular criticized program operators for not serving the hard-core unemployed and for failing to provide needed services in the neighborhoods. Sweat Associates first targeted PEP hiring policies which creamed the best candidates for jobs at the expense of less skilled unemployed workers. Sweat Associates argued that high levels of education were not necessary for PEP jobs.

Unable to make progress in obtaining PEP jobs, Sweat Associates began a series of its own neighborhood public service projects in the city, including construction of tot lots, boarding up vacant buildings, and creating a "model alleys" program. Bills for the community projects were then sent to city departments. While successful in capturing the public interest through regular coverage in the local media, Sweat Associates was not able to shift the focus of the city program toward serving the hard-core unemployed.

*In reaction to city hiring policies that required college degrees for many PEP positions, "Sweat State University" was established to issue "diplomas" to unemployed workers applying for PEP positions.*

**X. CETA Public Service Employment in Milwaukee County: 1974-1982**

*56 percent of Milwaukee County CETA Title VI project directors said they could not hire high school graduates who lacked skills.*

-- 1977-78 Survey<sup>156</sup>

In the original Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) legislation was intended to assist that portion of the labor force that had barriers to employment due to inadequate education, skill deficiencies or other identified problems and public service employment (PSE) was a small component. Title II of the 1973 act provided federal funds for public service employment programs in areas of the United States with substantial unemployment. In late 1974, rising unemployment levels led Congress to increase funding for the public service employment component of CETA as a counter-cyclical effort to stimulate the economy and public service employment was expanded under Title VI to serve any unemployed persons. Appropriations for public service employment rose dramatically and quickly made up over half of the overall CETA budget as shown below. By 1979 public service employment expenditures reached \$22.4 million in Milwaukee County and \$69.7 million at the state level.

**Summary of Statewide CETA Expenditures and Participants<sup>157</sup>**

FY	MILWAUKEE COUNTY:			STATE OF WISCONSIN:		
	Total Expenses	PSE Expenses	# of PSE Participants	Total Expenses	PSE Expenses	# of PSE Participants
75	\$ 3,865,832	\$ 3,122,431	1,478	\$37,232,408	\$13,326,678	5,849
76	20,070,170	11,956,153	2,321	79,144,543	41,223,667	9,268
77	21,634,448	13,143,788	2,102	82,968,565	46,388,155	11,595
78						
79	39,165,793	22,421,965	2,708*	128,006,459	69,775,088	16,767*
80	27,604,732	11,714,548	2,111	113,456,826	47,117,476	12,100
81	19,375,742	5,821,502	1,322	88,587,611	22,229,676	5,733

\* Estimate based on six-month data. The fiscal year is from October 1st to September 30th.

Under Title VI, CETA recruitment efforts shifted from seeking adults unlikely to find employment without some assistance to locating persons who were unemployed regardless of their skill level. The broad window of eligibility for CETA placements allowed public service employers to select the most qualified individuals from the pool of unemployed workers.

Title VI public service employment projects in Milwaukee County were developed by local government agencies, community-based organizations and non-profit agencies. Jobs supported work in literacy instruction, health and nutrition education, blood pressure screening, security aides and escort services, home repair and weatherization projects, art classes, and artists-in-residence at local schools. City of Milwaukee CETA workers provided clerical assistance to departments, microfilmed police and fire department records, distributed information on building codes and sanitation regulations, and provided maintenance for public housing units. Examples of projects supported in 1977-78 are listed below.

*The Community Relations-Social Development Commission hired CETA workers to teach literacy and to prepare booklets on the state drivers' test for low-level readers.*

#### **Examples of CETA Title VI Public Service Projects: Milwaukee County<sup>158</sup>**

##### **Health, Mental Health and Rehabilitation**

- The Medical College of Wisconsin, West of the River Community Health Center, and Milwaukee Health Department conducted instructional programs in health and cardiopulmonary resuscitation.
- The women's Coalition assisted callers in crises situations.
- Big Brothers and Big Sisters Incorporated trained volunteers to assist in their program.
- West Allis conducted blood pressure screening clinics.
- Saint Camillus Health Center implemented a patients' clothing repair program.
- The Inner City Development provided emergency assistance to residents with housing-related problems and provided clients with information on social services available in the community.
- The Social Development Commission certified persons for the Women's, Infants' and Children's (WIC) Supplemental Food Program and provided nutritional education instruction.
- Esperanza Unida aided citizens with unemployment compensation disputed workers' compensation claims.
- The local branch of the NAACP investigated and followed up on discrimination complaints.

### **Public Safety and Government Services**

- Milwaukee County security aides patrolled high crime areas, served as escorts, and provided information to the community on crime prevention methods.
- The Elderly Victimization Project helped neighborhoods form block clubs and aided residents in the installation of home security devices.
- The Wauwatosa Fire Department sponsored fire safety education programs for grade school children.
- The City of Milwaukee cleaned and maintained city bridges and checked valves in the city water system.
- Clerical support was provided allowing the City of Milwaukee to organize and microfilm police and fire department records.

### **Neighborhood and Community Development**

- Sherman Park, the Social Development Commission and the Rehabilitation Council of Greater Milwaukee all contributed to home repair and maintenance work for low-income and elderly residents. Workers helped paint, provided carpentry work, aided in winterization and landscaping, and assisted in the filing for home improvement loans.
- The City of Milwaukee provided information on building codes and sanitation regulations and violations, and provided maintenance for public housing units.
- The Milwaukee Neighborhood Improvement and Development Corporation processed home improvement loans and applications for the urban homesteading program.
- The East Side Housing Action Committee provided educational seminars on home buying and established a credit union to aid homeowners in making home improvements.
- The inner City Development Project informed community members about federal and state taxes, homestead credits and emergency utility funds.
- The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee gave presentations on energy conservation and conducted public tours of a model insulation home project.
- The UWM Project Housecoping renovated the block bounded by West Auer Avenue, West Burleigh, North 25th Street and North 26th Street.

### **Education**

- The Social Development Commission's Right to Read Project worked to increase literacy skills of central city adults.
- Milwaukee Area Technical College contacted and counseled dropouts from the MATC adult high school.
- The Milwaukee Association for Urban Development held workshops on funding,

## Human Resource Development

- Arts Development Council sponsored the training of CETA participants in dance, music, theater, and arts and crafts, and in their related support duties.
- CETA participants were given training by the City of Milwaukee to provide clerical support for various city departments.
- The Social Development Commission provided training in community organization, advocacy, clerical and human relations skills.
- CETA provided clerical and labor support for post-secondary educational departments.

## Arts

- Local theater groups, including the Great American Children's Theatre, Theatre X, Friends of Mime Theatre, and PAC Players provided demonstrations, workshops and performances for community groups of various ages, including youth and the elderly.
- Classes in various areas of the visual arts were provided by the Hispanic Arts Council, the Milwaukee Inner City Arts Council, the Puerto Rican Organization, and the Milwaukee Municipal Arts Project. Both temporary and permanent exhibitions displayed the works to the community.
- The Milwaukee Art Center inventoried and catalogued portions of its permanent collection.
- Milwaukee County updated and reorganized specimens and exhibits on display at the Milwaukee Public Museum.
- Artists-in-residence offered instruction for students in Milwaukee schools.

The availability of a skilled pool of workers and the CETA policy of paying prevailing wage rates allowed employers to hire workers for positions requiring higher level skills and reduced the need for on-the-job training. Employers in government and non-profit agencies were able to expand their services by utilizing a skilled work force of public service employment workers at no additional cost to the local government or agency. As a result of these policies, few "hard core" unemployed adults gained access to PSE slots, and disadvantaged workers faced the same sort of stiff competition for PSE jobs as they were encountering in the private sector. Even Title II public service employment which was targeted for the more difficult to employ population was comprised mostly of better educated workers. By 1976 almost half of Milwaukee County PSE employees had some post-secondary education, 85 percent had at least a high school diploma, and 61 percent were white. In the rest of the state 92 percent were white and only 15 percent had less than high school diploma.<sup>159</sup>

*60 percent of CETA Title VI directors said they required that only "the best qualified people available" be hired and that the need for training be minimal. Among directors who ran projects employing predominantly laborers, only 35 percent required only "the best qualified" and provided minimal training.<sup>160</sup>*

*1978 CETA revisions were designed to increase employment of disadvantaged workers, shorten the length of PSE jobs, and reduce displacement of regular government employees.*

*Enrollment of public assistance recipients for CETA employment jumped from 6 percent in FY1976 to 42 percent in FY1981.*

Not only were CETA PSE jobs going to the better-educated portion of the unemployed population but there was also considerable concern about the use of PSE slots to subsidize positions and employees who ordinarily would have been supported with local funds. A related criticism was raised that workers were remaining in subsidized CETA jobs rather than seeking out private sector employment. Local governmental units also came under criticism for attempting to substitute PSE slots for existing positions in order to reduce local expenditures.

Major revisions in the CETA PSE program in 1978 were designed to increase the number of hard core unemployed and disadvantaged workers in the program, reduce the length of time a person could hold a PSE job, increase emphasis on placement in private sector jobs, and reduce displacement of regular government workers. Eligibility rules were tightened to require that applicants be unemployed at least 15 weeks and be economically disadvantaged. (Prior policies had required only that applicants be unemployed at least 30 days or be underemployed.) The length of time a person could remain in a PSE job was limited to 18 months and the average wage scale was reduced in an attempt to produce CETA jobs less likely to result in displacement and more likely to match the lesser skill levels of the difficult to employ populations.

Shifting concentration on the difficult-to-serve population and decreasing emphasis on more employable workers was evident in the characteristics of participants in Title IID and Title VI PSE components after the 1978 revisions of CETA regulations. Policy decisions to shift the emphasis of PSE were most dramatic in Milwaukee County where enrollment of persons with less than a high school education employed in Title IID CETA jobs rose from 15 percent in FY1976 to 57.5 percent in FY1980. The percentage of non-white CETA workers rose from 39 percent in FY1976 to about 70 percent in FY1980 and FY1981. Enrollment of public assistance recipients, perhaps the best proxy for the "hard core" unemployed, jumped from 6 percent in FY1976 to 42 percent in FY1981. This increase reflected the decision by county officials to divert much of the CETA budget to address the rising general relief caseload, as discussed below.

**Characteristics of Participants in CETA Public Service Employment  
Milwaukee County<sup>181</sup>**

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Non-Whites</u>	<u>High School Dropouts</u>	<u>High School Graduates</u>	<u>Persons with Post High School Education</u>	<u>Total</u>
76 II	607	233	592	729	1,554
76 VI	722	279	706	871	1,856
77 II	457	146	447	678	1,271
77 VI	1,114	556	820	930	2,306
79 II	1,523	761	814	1,243	2,818
79 VI	892	566	428	421	1,415
80 II	4,761	3,895	1,845	1,033	6,773
80 VI	857	379	394	456	1,229

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Percent Non-Whites</u>	<u>% High School Dropouts</u>	<u>% High School Graduates</u>	<u>% Persons with Post-High School</u>	<u>Total</u>
FY76	39%	15%	38%	47%	100%
FY77	44	20	35	45	100
FY79	57	32	29	39	100
FY80	70	53	28	19	100

Trends in other areas of Wisconsin were less pronounced than in Milwaukee County but still showed a significant shift in the characteristics of PSE enrollees. The percentage of CETA workers with less than a high school education increased from 16 percent in FY1976 to 28 percent in FY1980 in the balance of Wisconsin (outside Milwaukee County). The percent of public assistance recipients more than doubled, and non-white enrollment nearly doubled from 39 percent in FY1976 to 70 percent in FY1980.

*High school dropouts made up 53 percent of CETA workers in FY1980 in Milwaukee County and 28 percent of CETA workers in the balance of Wisconsin.*

## XI. County Work Experience and Training Program: 1969 - 1981

*The Work Assistance Program's "reported accomplishments are questioned, with many critical issues or questions left unresolved or unanswered. The program has been found to have little or no positive effect on the vast majority of participants. It has, however, been found to be successful in transferring the "financial burden" for what is commonly referred to as general assistance from a local to a state and federal tax base."*<sup>162</sup>

-- WAP Evaluation, 1980

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s there was a clear expectation that general assistance recipients find private employment, continue job searching, or work in a county subsidized job. The work requirement was made a formal condition for receipt of general relief in 1969 when a Milwaukee County ordinance required that all general assistance applicants, upon determination of financial eligibility, be referred to the County Work Experience and Training Program (CWETP), also known as the "Work for Pay" Program. CWETP placed applicants in non-civil service jobs at the county, city or Veterans Administration doing much the same work as in previous programs, including picking up litter, yard work, clerical and custodial tasks. Workers received pay checks (with social security deductions) each Friday for their hours worked. Only clients with valid medical reasons received subsidies for unworked hours.<sup>163</sup> Evidence from caseload patterns suggests that the CWETP provided an efficient "work-test," where an average of 25 percent of cases referred to "Work for Pay" were closed or suspended when the applicant failed to report for work or to accept a work assignment.

Concerns about CWETP workers displacing regular county employees were raised by the unions representing municipal employees, and, as a result, the types of jobs provided by CWETP shifted from a wide range of county and city maintenance work to nonclassified civil service positions. Non-profit agencies also operated sheltered workshops offering simple assembly work. Little, if any, training was provided, and, instead, the program focused solely on the work requirement. In 1971 GA clients in Pay for Work slots totaled 1,015.<sup>164</sup>

Work relief programs maintained the county's expectation that able-bodied adults should seek work and that adults who were less able should perform community service. Local policies toward general assistance shifted dramatically, however, in response to a Milwaukee Sentinel series in 1973, "Welfare Wasteland," which focused on client fraud and mismanagement in the welfare bureaucracy.<sup>165</sup> As a result of the series, requirements were implemented throughout 1973 designed to eliminate fraud and reduce general assistance caseloads. These included use of photo ID's, a requirement that relief checks be picked-up in person, and reinstatement of the requirement that vehicles be sold as a condition for receipt of general assistance. The county work experience and training program also continued to operate as a condition for receipt of general assistance.

By the end of 1974 the general assistance caseload had decreased significantly with officials attributing the decline to *"current economic trends, rate of unemployment and seven welfare reform actions."*<sup>166</sup> The number of jobs varied with the economy, and prior to 1977 the program provided 550 to 750 low-wage positions.<sup>167</sup> By 1977 when general assistance caseloads reached the 5,000 level, the number of clients on the waiting list for Pay for Work totaled about 2,000.<sup>168</sup>

In response to increasing caseloads, the Milwaukee County Executive initiated an agreement with the Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) to begin a "Learn to Earn" training program in job search skills in June 1977 funded under Title I of the federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). A second program, called "Handicapped Serving the Handicapped," provided work experience and public service employment in sheltered workshops using Title VI CETA funds. In early 1978, the two programs were combined and renamed the "Work Assistance Program" (WAP). Both programs were designed to use federal CETA and Social Security Act Title XX funds to reduce the amount of property taxes used to support general assistance. Wages for general assistance eligible participants in "Learn to Earn" and the Work Assistance Program were paid with CETA funds, while Title XX dollars were used to offset a portion of the administrative costs. At the end of 1977, the welfare department reported, *"The ability to place large numbers of general assistance recipients into federally-funded CETA jobs caused a drastic reduction in the general assistance caseload (from 4,879 cases on June 1st to 2,336 on December 31st) and an estimated savings in county tax dollars for 1977 of \$1,799,400."*<sup>169</sup>

The impact of the federally supported Work Assistance Program on the 100 percent county-funded general assistance program was direct and continued. Recipients were required to participate in the WAP program or have their grant reduced. The program differed from prior work relief efforts in a number of ways which eventually contributed to its demise. Reminiscent of the county experience during WPA in 1936-1942, the county used federal dollars to offset general assistance costs by paying wages for employment and training of "able-bodied" adults while the remainder of the population, "the unemployables" or persons unable to work, were supported on the county roles. However, CETA and Title XX regulations created very different standards from the 1930s WPA program and required extensive documentation, client assessments and reporting.

*"...almost 10,000 WAP participants who entered the program during the first two years were arbitrarily labelled 'mentally handicapped' to allow JVS to bill Title XX for services to the handicapped. These participants are still carrying that label on their employment records."*

-- Mary Griswold, 1981

*"In comparing the earlier swings in GA, it appears that the major intervention of WAP during 1977 may have acted to accelerate the decline in general assistance cases from a recessionary high."*<sup>170</sup>

The underlying premise of the 1930s WPA program was to provide work rather than relief for unemployed adults and only a very small portion of funding was devoted to training. Since the WPA was established to help unemployed workers through the Depression, it carried no expectation that workers would find private employment because they had participated in a WPA job. By contrast, Title II of the CETA legislation placed a strong emphasis on training, with the expectation that individuals would find unsubsidized employment as a result of their CETA placement. The CETA regulations required development of employability plans for each participant, followed by enrollment in appropriate components of education, on-the-job training, public service employment or job search.

In order to use federal CETA funds to displace county general assistance dollars, the stated goal of the county work program shifted from work relief to employment in the private sector. Additionally, the "work" provided for Work Assistance Program/CETA participants was factory-line assembly work performed under contract with private companies and taking place in sheltered workshops. Participants were required to attend an eight-week "Learn to Earn" class followed by ten weeks of intensive job search activities. A full range of education, training and supportive services were to be offered through a consortium of community agencies. County officials were clearly pleased with the very rapid decline in caseloads and costs of the general assistance program. Furthermore, program operators and county officials soon began touting the Work Assistance Program as effective in finding unsubsidized employment for participants.

The goal of requiring work for welfare had been in place as a component of the county welfare department well before "Learn to Earn" and the Work Assistance Program. Most recently, the Pay for Work program had been providing county jobs for up to 500 people a month. However, given rising caseloads, this employment fell far short for the 5,000 caseload level reached in early 1977. Meanwhile, CETA appropriations for Milwaukee County increased dramatically, providing an opportunity to place general assistance recipients in public service employment slots and to offer a full range of employment and training services.

The design of the WAP program was unique in the way it captured increasing CETA dollars and matched them with Title XX funds in order to provide job search activities and to subsidize employment and remediation for the general assistance population - which was in large part the population for which these federal initiatives were intended. However, the program showed mounting problems with the documentation and requirements associated with CETA-funded programs as well as with the large number of participants. Problems began to surface due to failure to follow the regulations prescribed by federal program requirements. A policy decision was made to categorize hard-core unemployed adults as "vocationally handicapped" in order to capture Title XX funds. CETA funds were then used to place thousands of "vocationally handicapped" workers in sheltered workshops. Sheltered workshops began performing work for private corporations, displacing regular workers and generating revenues outside of federal procedures for subsidized employment. Problems of mismanagement and misuse of CETA and Title XX funds by Jewish Vocational Service plagued the Work Assistance Program throughout its four year history.

*"The vast majority of participants in the program did not obtain employment as a result of participation in WAP and fewer still were able to obtain stable employment"<sup>171</sup>*

-- Evaluation, 1980

During 1980 while general assistance caseloads began rising as the economy took what would be a prolonged turn for the worse, federal CETA funding rapidly dried up. With CETA funding reduced by more than two-thirds, county costs for operating general relief and WAP rose dramatically. Finally, in early 1981 the county board moved to end the Work Assistance Program and to restructure the program as a county-operated work relief program.

**Work Assistance Program Participants Compared to General Assistance Caseload<sup>172</sup>**

<u>Year</u>	<u>General Assistance Year End Cases</u>	<u>Work Assistance Program Year End Clients</u>	<u>Combined Total</u>
1970	6,194	---	6,194
1971	5,935	---	5,935
1972	4,886	---	4,886
1973	3,161	---	3,161
1974	2,695	---	2,695
1975	2,960	---	2,960
1976	4,840	---	4,840
1977	2,336	945	3,281
1978	1,355	2,000	3,355
1979	1,228	1,850	3,078

*Milwaukee County "substituted approximately \$1.2 million in federal CETA funds for county funds in violation of CETA maintenance of effort requirements," enrolled WAP participants under CETA Title VI "when they were in fact ineligible under that Title," and "violated CETA regulations by paying only minimum wage and by not providing the proper benefits."*<sup>173</sup>

-- U.S. Court of Appeals

The Milwaukee County Work Assistance Program provides a painful lesson on the importance of strong program design, accountability standards for contractors, and the need to monitor compliance with federal regulations. Community organizations criticized the labeling of WAP clients as "handicapped" (for the stigma to unemployed GA recipients and for diversion of Title XX funds from the needs of handicapped persons in the community) and for failure to report payments from private employers for work paid with federal CETA wages. Over 60 complaints were filed by the Workers Alliance of Milwaukee against the WAP with the Department of Labor in 1978 and nearly a third were sustained, with penalties imposed for pay discrepancies and inadequate procedures.<sup>174</sup> Ultimately, the program was investigated by the Internal Revenue Service, the Department of Labor, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The federal court of appeals upheld an order of the U.S. Department of Labor which required Milwaukee County to provide compensation to WAP participants for \$1.2 million in federal CETA funds which had been substituted for local funding in violation of CETA's "maintenance of effort" requirements. (This requirement was designed to ensure that CETA funds create new employment and training opportunities and to prevent federal grants from being substituted for local funding of the same jobs or public services, and to guard against displacement of current civil service employees.) The Labor Department also found that Work Assistance Program had failed to pay "prevailing wages" and that records did not adequately document whether services reported had actually been provided.<sup>175</sup>

## XII. Continued Evolution of County Work Relief Programs During the 1980s

With the demise of the WAP program in 1981, the County Board approved a work relief program which shifted emphasis to a much simpler operation, with placements primarily in sheltered workshop settings performing assembly-line work. Workers not complying with the work requirement were not eligible for relief payments. The impact of the recession of the early 1980s resulted in record levels of general assistance cases. At the same time changes in the federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program resulted in learning-disabled adults being no longer eligible for the SSI program and, consequently, dependent on general assistance for relief as well. While CETA and Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) funds were used to offset some of the costs of administration, job search activities, and employment efforts, the work relief program was primarily funded by Milwaukee County property taxes. Unanticipated caseload increases together with reductions in federal funding resulted in repeated budget shortfalls for general assistance and work relief expenditures. The work relief program also received continued criticism for the quality of jobs provided, adequacy of supervision, and its cost.

In 1981 in response to rising caseloads, the county board established a work abatement program, requiring all "able bodied" GA clients to work off their grants as a condition for assistance. Under the intake system established, general assistance clients were scheduled for group intake screening and then referred to DePaul Sertoma to be screened for working at the American Reclamation Program. Those clients deemed inappropriate for DePaul were referred to group testing and individual interviews for other job slots available through the county work relief program. After demonstrating their work abilities at the recycling project, some clients were referred on to the CETA program, work relief group testing, or referred to other agencies. In Spring 1982 about 4,000 clients were assigned to work projects each week and about 1,200 were deemed unable to work. Roughly one-fourth of GA applicants failed to make scheduled appointments and initial work assignments, and about 150 clients a week were terminated for unsatisfactory work performance.<sup>176</sup>

*In 1981 the county board established a work abatement program requiring "able bodied" clients to work off their general assistance grants.*

*In 1983 the state began contributing toward general assistance grants, but not work program costs.*

The state government began contributing toward general assistance grants in 1983, although the county continued to bear full costs of work programs. County officials took several measures during this period to tighten up work requirements for the program. Recipients were suspended for thirty days for violating work rules (or sixty days for subsequent violations), private investigative services were used to verify information provided by general assistance applicants, and the general assistance and work relief administrations were combined.

In 1984 in an effort to address the basic skill deficiencies of general relief clients and to help permanently reduce the relief rolls, the program was reorganized to expand educational and training opportunities and referral services. Four populations were identified: *"those currently job ready, those who with minimal services could become job ready in a relatively short period of time, those in need of more indepth long term services, and those who were so low skilled that services would not be initially provided to them other than traditional abatement activities."*<sup>177</sup> In 1986 training and employment activities were authorized for credit in place of the work requirement.

### **XIII. Milwaukee County's Current Work Relief Program**

Milwaukee County currently operates a Work Relief/Food Stamp Employment and Training Program for recipients of general assistance which offers abatement credit for work programs, participation in employment and training activities and for appearance at scheduled appointments. The following activities may be expected of GA applicants:

1. All clients are required to attend an **orientation session** on the program, with short tests to determine initially assigned activities.
2. An **individual assessment** is prepared of each client's education and work history. Assessment activities may also include testing in reading, math and language skills, vocational testing, and workshops providing assistance in job search activities and expected on-the-job behaviors.
3. Some clients are assigned to **educational coursework** needed to pass the GED high school equivalency test; improve skills in reading, writing, communication, math and life skills; or instruction in English. Clients may also abate their general assistance grant through attendance (with passing coursework) in high school, adult basic education programs, GED instruction, English as a Second Language instruction, certified apprenticeship programs, one-year or short-term technical or vocational training programs, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation programs, or other education, training or job placement programs approved by the county.
4. Clients may be assigned to **technical skill training** in occupational areas, e.g. clerical, custodial, child care, home health care, woodworking, computerized machine operation, automotive mechanics, home rehabilitation and food service.
5. Classroom instruction is provided in **job search** activities.
6. Most general assistance recipients not enrolled in adult education are assigned to **community service work** at a private non-profit or government organization, or supportive work in a specially-structured work activity. These work assignments provide a range of employment

*"At an average of 1,600 work slots . . . at 10 hours/week, the Work Relief program provides approximately 832,000 hours of work per year in the Milwaukee community."*<sup>178</sup>

*Work assignments are established at 10 hours per week, based on dividing the maximum general assistance grant by the \$4.35/hour minimum wage.*

*The estimated value of the work performed by Milwaukee County general assistance clients is \$3.6 million per year.<sup>179</sup>*

settings based on the work readiness of participants: sheltered workshops for less able workers, labor crews performing trash pick-up for the least motivated workers, and placements in community agencies and governmental units for workers with appropriate skill levels and motivation.

7. A job placement specialist helps better skilled clients find unsubsidized employment and also develops grant diversion placements where the county provides a portion of the worker's wages for try-out employment with a private employer.

8. **Direct employment referrals** are made for applicants who already possess one or more years of post-secondary education, a certificate of completion of training, an occupational license, specific office skills or two years of continuous employment.<sup>180</sup>

Applicants may enroll in remedial education or vocational English courses 12 to 14 hours per week, and 500 to 600 general assistance recipients are enrolled at the Milwaukee Area Technical College or participating community-based organizations.<sup>181</sup> (Basic skill levels are low for most of the general assistance population. In 1993, 5,700 recipients, 68 percent of the total, had not completed high school and 2,075 recipients, 42 percent, showed less than a seventh grade reading level.) Counseling and alcohol and drug abuse services are also available for individuals through referral to contract agencies, but participation is voluntary and does not count toward the 12 to 15 hours of education/work required per week. Clients who fail to appear at scheduled appointments or work assignments, are late for work or refuse a bona fide job offer may be terminated from the program. Grant suspensions last for thirty to sixty days.

In 1994 the General Assistance caseload averaged about 6,000 cases per month. About 61 percent of these cases were identified as "able-bodied" (3,700 persons per month) and required to participate in the work relief program. The program is administered under Federal Food Stamp Employment and Training program rules and is financed by local property taxes and Food Stamp program reimbursement for about 35 percent of program costs.

As of October 1994 a total of 1,587 clients were in work programs for 10 hours per week at 4.35 per hour minimum wages. This included 446 persons in supported work, 630 workers on labor crews, 361 persons working for community-based organizations, and 150 persons working for government agencies. An additional 941 general assistance clients were in education, training and placement programs. Examples of work positions are listed below.

*Supportive work is available for persons able to work but with a physical, mental or emotional condition which limits the type of work they can do.<sup>182</sup>*

**Examples of Work Relief Jobs for Milwaukee County General Relief Clients: July 1994<sup>183</sup>**

Type of Work	Jobs Filled (Est. Total Slots)	Examples of Agency Placements*
Laborer	771 (958)	City of Milwaukee, Goodwill Industries, Milwaukee City Housing
Janitor	126 (239)	Milwaukee City Housing, Bay View Community Center, Holy Redeemer Church of God in Christ, Second Harvesters of Wisconsin, LaCausa Day Care Center, LaGuardalupana
Maintenance Helper	117 (293)	Milwaukee City Housing, Victory Outreach, SER Jobs for Progress, Milwaukee Christian Center
Security	42 (172)	Milwaukee County Mental Health Complex, Milwaukee Target Cities - South, Clinton Rose Senior Center
Clerical - No Typing	38 (113)	Williamsburg-Heights Community, Milwaukee County Sheriff Department, Wisconsin Correctional Services
Stockroom	30 (57)	Second Harvesters of Wisconsin, Casa Maria Hospitality House
Administrative Aide	26 (67)	Milwaukee County Department of Social Services, Sheriff Department, Child Support Enforcement
Tutor	25 (46)	Laubach Literacy Center
Housekeeping	23 (62)	Genesis/Next Door Foundation, Williamsburg-Heights Community, Human Services Triangle
Cook's Helper	19 (39)	St. Vincent De Paul South Side Meal Program
Home Repair	16 (32)	West End Community Association
Kitchen Help	15 (30)	Genesis/Next Door Foundation, Victory Outreach
Clerical with Typing	11 (37)	Cooperation Westside Association

\* Over 80 agencies and community-based organizations provided 1 to 100 work placements for General Assistance clients in July 1994. Other jobs include child care (70 total slots), fact finding (70 slots), food service aide (56 slots), receptionist (39 slots), recreation aide (32 slots), teacher's aide (38 slots), monitor (19 slots).

## Appendix A

### Relationship Between Unemployment and County General Relief Caseloads

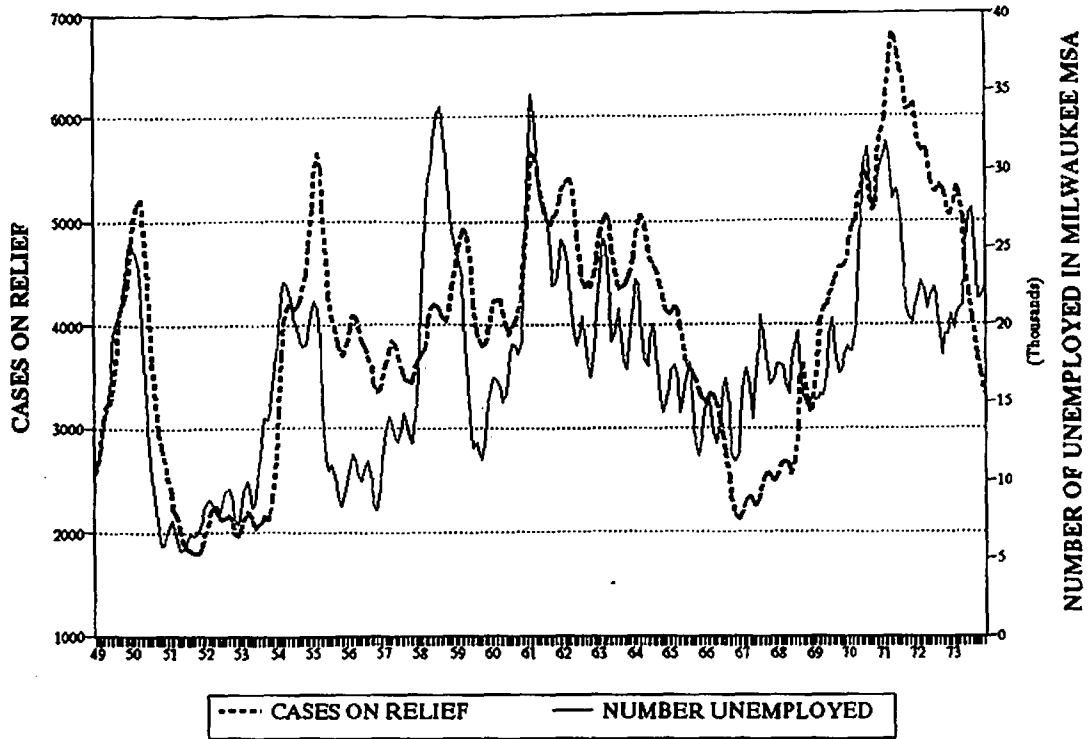
Throughout most of the last sixty-five years Milwaukee County has operated a relief program for financially needy individuals and families not covered by other types of state and federally supported public assistance (e.g. unemployment compensation, Aid to Families with Dependent Children for single-parent families and two-parent families with an unemployed breadwinner, Supplemental Security Income for aged, blind and disabled persons). At times a work requirement has been imposed as a condition for receiving county relief, used both as a mechanism for determining whether adults are "truly needy" and for preserving and encouraging the work ethic. Up until the late 1960s, the philosophy of the county Department of Public Welfare toward workers was to assist needy individuals and families in finding employment while providing financial or in-kind assistance during economic downturns or periods of illness or disablement. The Milwaukee County population receiving general assistance has consisted primarily of less skilled workers ineligible for unemployment compensation. These individuals are arguably the least employable of the unemployed population relative to unemployment levels of the time.

County welfare officials have tracked the impact of changes in the economy on general relief caseloads since the 1940s. Beginning in 1948 local unemployment statistics became available for the Milwaukee area. While the collection and reporting of unemployment data has improved over time, historical unemployment rates provide a rough gauge of the health of the local economy and show the impact of economic changes on general assistance caseloads.

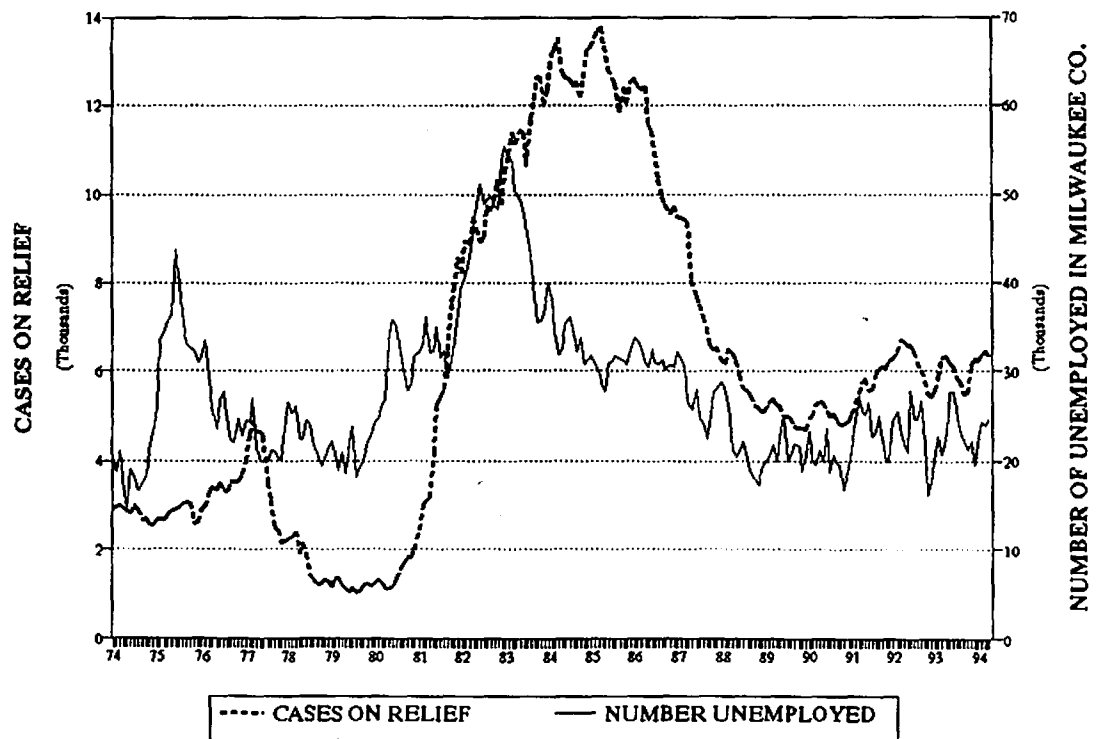
An analysis of economic conditions and general assistance caseloads clearly demonstrates the relationship between the health of the local economy and the number of persons on relief.<sup>184</sup> During periods of high unemployment, increased general assistance caseloads have placed strains on the annual county budget. With the onset of World War II and expansion of the wartime economy, the general relief caseload and number of workers on relief finally showed significant declines, down to a low of 1,252 cases on relief and 182 workers on WPA as of May 1945. Caseloads remained at this level until the 1949-50 recession when the number of cases rose to 5,000.

*The local economy showed a direct impact on the caseload throughout the 1950s and 1960s, supporting the viewpoint of Department of Public Welfare officials that "clients in large number seek and secure employment when it becomes available."*

**GENERAL RELIEF AND UNEMPLOYMENT  
MILWAUKEE COUNTY 1949-1973**



**GENERAL RELIEF AND UNEMPLOYMENT  
MILWAUKEE COUNTY 1974-1994**



Unemployment levels throughout the 1950s and 1960s revealed a clear and immediate impact of economic downturns on general assistance. Caseloads during the 1970s and 1980s mirrored unemployment levels, but the impact was lagged during periods of severe recessions, when large numbers of laid off workers were initially protected by unemployment compensation extended coverage which delayed their movement onto relief rolls. The prolonged recession of the early 1980s ballooned relief rolls to their highest levels since the Depression. The number of officially unemployed workers in the county rose to well above 50,000 and relief cases remained over 12,000 in the years following.

Unemployment compensation claims tracked over time show a similar relationship between claims and general assistance rates. Unemployment compensation is designed to provide relief for workers who are laid off and temporarily unemployed. Not all workers are covered by unemployment compensation, however, and benefits usually terminate after 26 weeks. (In some cases benefits have been extended for longer periods during severe downturns in the economy). Consequently, unemployment compensation payments provide financial support for only a portion of the unemployed adult population. In addition, some workers may not have accumulated enough weeks of work to be eligible for complete coverage. Unemployment compensation policies have also changed over time, influencing the duration and amount of coverage.

During extended periods of high unemployment or repeated recessions many workers exhaust their unemployment compensation benefits. Individuals who end up on general assistance during and after downturns in the economy are for the most part low-skilled workers who are more difficult to place in jobs. Furthermore, structural shifts in the economy during the 1970s and 1980s resulted in a reduction of jobs, particularly in the manufacturing sector, for low-skilled and semi-skilled workers. Temporary and permanent shifts in the Milwaukee labor market increasingly affected lower skilled workers throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

*During the 1958 recession, applicants for general assistance were "younger, more inclined to be married and raise families, and in spite of economic problems, more anxious to get off assistance."<sup>185</sup>*

-- Milwaukee County Department of Public Welfare, 1958 Annual Report

*Unemployment compensation extended coverage softened the impact of the severe recessions of the 1970s and 1980s on Milwaukee County relief rolls.*

## Summary of Early Work Relief Patterns for Milwaukee County

The Milwaukee economy began a rapid decline during 1930 which lasted for over ten years and ended only with the onset of World War II. Massive unemployment hit male workers particularly hard in the durable manufacturing and construction sectors which provided almost half of jobs held by men in 1930. The number of city wage earners in manufacturing dropped 44 percent from 117,656 in 1929 to 66,000 in 1933.<sup>186</sup> While an upturn in the economy brought the number of manufacturing jobs in the city up to 97,686 in 1937, a subsequent downturn dropped the level to 80,255 by 1939. This loss of 40,000 to 50,000 manufacturing jobs was directly reflected in the number of workers' families who were on relief or supported by federal work programs -- numbers which hovered around 40,000 for much of the ten-year Depression. High unemployment levels persisted throughout the 1930s.

*Monthly general relief caseload data for Milwaukee County show the impact of the Depression and the scale of federal relief assistance provided through three major federal work programs designed for workers on relief.*

The severity of the Depression and the importance of local, state and federal programs can be seen in the following graph which tracks the number of Milwaukee County cases on relief and in work programs through the period from 1930 to 1943. County relief caseloads first showed a dramatic increase in 1931 when the number of families on direct relief increased four-fold from 2,500 in 1930. By 1933 almost 40,000 cases were on relief in the county.

During the first three years of the Depression, the federal government did little to relieve the tax burden resulting from local and state economic conditions. In the absence of an early federal response to the massive unemployment and relief costs precipitated by the Depression, Milwaukee city and county officials initiated their own emergency work programs and absorbed most of the expenses for direct relief. By 1932 conditions in many Wisconsin communities had worsened, exhausting local funds earmarked for relief.

State and federal assistance for direct relief costs began in 1932. In January 1932 the state passed legislation which provided first time financial assistance for county relief efforts. In September 1932 Wisconsin also began taking advantage of federal Reconstruction Finance Corporation loans for unemployment relief. By January 1933 Wisconsin had borrowed \$5 million from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation -- loans which were subsequently waived by the federal government.

In late 1933 the first federal work relief program, the Civil Works Administration, provided funding to continue and expand work projects already initiated by the city and county. Although short-lived, the CWA provided work for up to 26,000 men at its peak. Begun as a short-term counter-cyclical program and implemented in a remarkably short period of time, CWA provided the first federal experience with large-scale work relief programs. CWA provided a \$8.9 million for work program wages during the winter of 1933-34.

The second federal attempt to provide massive work relief programs began a few months after CWA ended with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) work program. FERA provided direct work for the population of "employables" on relief. The Federal Emergency Relief Act began absorbing most costs for direct relief and work relief. By May 1935, FERA had reimbursed Milwaukee County for \$12.4 million out of \$14.4 million of its relief costs.

Federal policies toward relief shifted again in 1935 when the WPA (Works Progress/Work Projects Administration) began operating large-scale work relief programs and the federal government discontinued reimbursing local direct relief costs.<sup>187</sup> Expenditures for direct relief and work relief programs in Milwaukee County totaled \$26 million in 1938 when WPA funding reached its highest level. That year payments for old age assistance, aid to dependent children (ADC), and aid to the blind had risen to \$3 million. While the federal government financed most of the costs of public assistance through emergency work programs, Milwaukee County remained responsible for local relief cases not covered by WPA or categorical funding.

In spite of federal programs, fluctuations in federal funding as well as downturns in the local economy resulted in increasing Milwaukee County caseloads and costs for direct relief. As the Depression worsened, state and federal programs picked up much of the cost of relief programs. Despite massive infusions of state and federal dollars, the local costs for relief placed an increasing burden on Milwaukee County. By 1939 county expenditures for general assistance had risen to \$7 million, more than eight times the 1930 level.

*From 1930 to 1939, expenditures for direct relief totaled \$67 million in Milwaukee County, of which the county paid \$34 million (50 percent). Work relief programs totaled \$77 million, of which the county contributed \$2.7 million (3.5 percent).*

*In 1937 Milwaukee County male relief workers included: skilled workers (28% of the total), laborers (25%), semi-skilled workers (21%), clerks (10%), professionals and managers (6%), and new workers (5%).*

*Women in emergency work programs included semi-skilled workers (36%), clerical (33%), servants (7%), professionals (5%), and new workers or no listed occupation (17%).<sup>188</sup>*

As the Depression continued throughout the 1930s reliance upon federal work programs increased. By Fall of 1937 the number of unemployed persons in Milwaukee County had more than doubled from 1930 levels with 35,571 workers listed as totally unemployed, an additional 14,741 as partly unemployed (i.e., working part-time but wanting full-time employment) and 15,858 on WPA and other emergency work relief projects. The majority of unemployed persons and emergency workers had previously worked in lesser skilled jobs in manufacturing or construction sectors, with the hardest hit group of workers from semi-skilled machine operators and assemblers. These workers made up 30 percent of the totally unemployed population while unskilled laborers and new entrants into the labor market comprised 33 percent. Additionally, over one-half of the population of partly unemployed workers and over one-half of WPA workers were laborers and semi-skilled workers. In 1940 Milwaukee County still had 36,406 unemployed workers and 17,448 more on WPA. Only with the onset of World War II did conditions improve.

By 1940, 19 percent of the city male labor force and 14 percent of the female labor force was either unemployed or working on a public WPA, CCC or NYA job. Hardest hit were young workers and minorities who experienced unemployment at levels more than double those of white men and women of prime working age (25 to 54 years). Unemployment and emergency work program rates by age groups showed 16 percent of men and 9 percent of women ages 25 to 54 years unemployed or on a publicly created job, compared to 56 percent of male teens (ages 16 to 19) and 41 percent of female teens. Young adults, ages 20 to 24, also showed unemployment and emergency work employment rates more than double those of men and women of prime working age (25 to 54 years). Minorities showed very high levels of joblessness, with 21 percent of African American men and women unemployed and 30 percent on public emergency jobs, for a combined rate of 51 percent unemployed or in emergency work programs.<sup>189</sup>

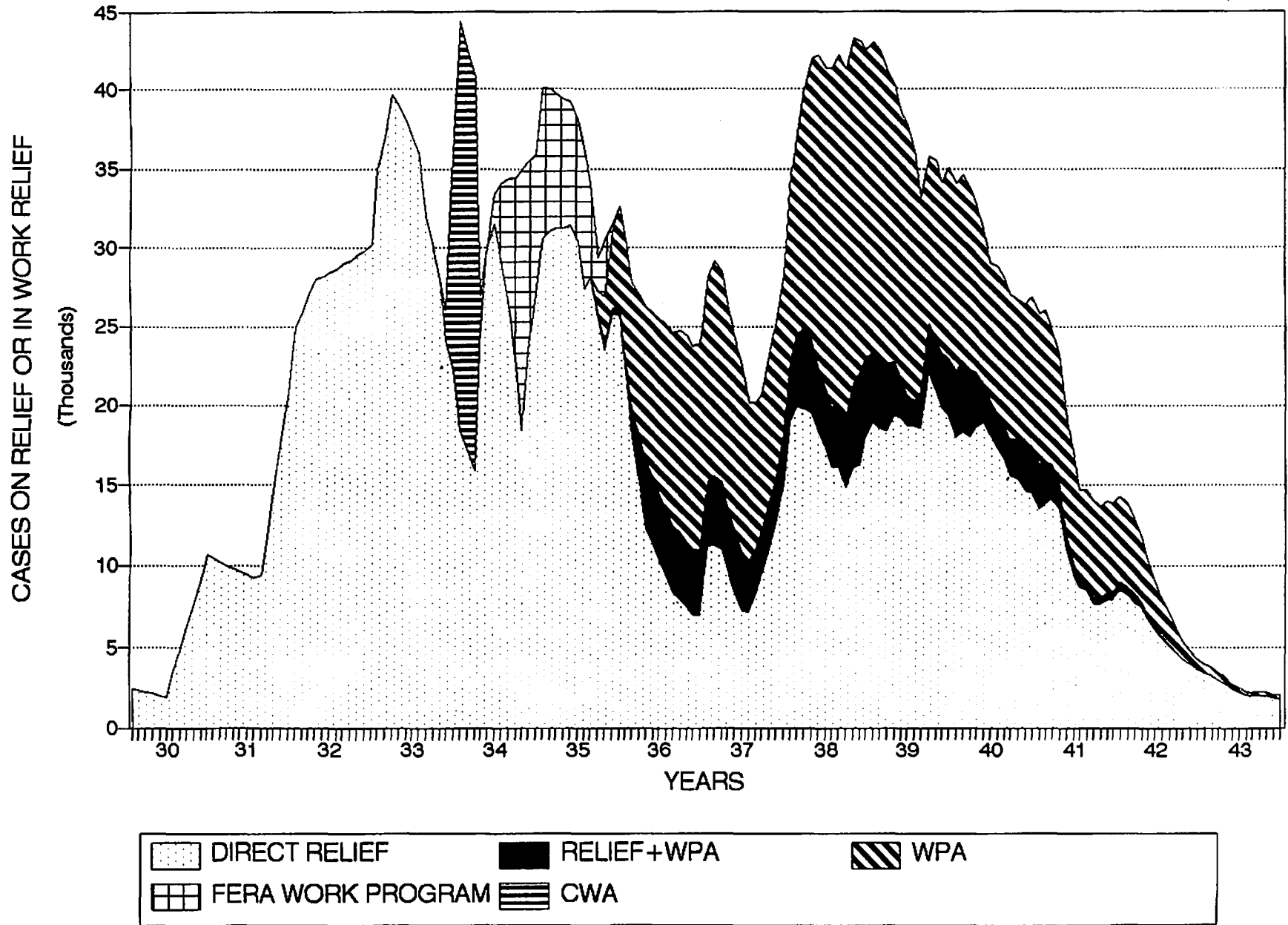
**EXPENDITURES FOR CATEGORICAL AID IN MILWAUKEE COUNTY: 1930-1939**

	TOTAL EXPENDITURES				NON-COUNTY REVENUES				COUNTY SHARE				County Total
	Old Age	ADC	Blind	Soldiers	Old Age	ADC	Blind	Old Age	ADC	Blind	Soldiers		
1930	\$70,687	\$421,334	\$56,791	\$130,057		\$5,972	\$7,971	\$70,687	\$415,382	\$48,820	\$130,057	\$684,926	
1931	\$134,156	\$623,965	\$80,235	\$195,834	\$18,263	\$6,168	\$7,849	\$115,893	\$617,797	\$52,386	\$195,834	\$981,910	
1932	\$186,278	\$725,699	\$81,169	\$137,720	\$32,939	\$6,950	\$7,760	\$153,339	\$718,749	\$53,409	\$137,720	\$1,083,217	
1933	\$225,170	\$703,047	\$64,569	\$5,211	\$36,507	\$7,640	\$7,271	\$188,683	\$695,407	\$57,298	\$5,211	\$946,579	
1934	\$261,943	\$738,337	\$73,456	\$4,899	\$41,188	\$87,677	\$8,784	\$220,755	\$670,660	\$64,672	\$4,899	\$980,986	
1935	\$377,615	\$818,920	\$82,635	\$4,937	\$41,798	\$9,555	\$8,237	\$335,817	\$809,365	\$74,398	\$4,937	\$1,224,517	
1936	\$976,927	\$901,229	\$89,529	\$4,420	\$842,132	\$529,936	\$73,659	\$134,795	\$371,293	\$15,870	\$4,420	\$526,378	
1937	\$1,548,494	\$1,017,235	\$92,456	\$2,604	\$1,218,578	\$582,483	\$80,460	\$329,916	\$454,752	\$11,998	\$2,604	\$799,268	
1938	\$1,900,826	\$1,155,067	\$100,060	\$2,621	\$1,508,944	\$575,998	\$78,159	\$391,682	\$579,069	\$21,901	\$2,621	\$995,273	
1939	\$2,345,696	\$1,262,377	\$110,226	\$2,477	\$1,872,510	\$635,021	\$87,651	\$473,186	\$627,356	\$22,575	\$2,477	\$1,125,594	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$8,027,592</b>	<b>\$6,367,210</b>	<b>\$791,126</b>	<b>\$490,780</b>	<b>\$5,612,859</b>	<b>\$2,407,400</b>	<b>\$367,801</b>	<b>\$2,414,733</b>	<b>\$5,959,810</b>	<b>\$423,325</b>	<b>\$490,780</b>	<b>\$9,288,648</b>	

**EXPENDITURES FOR WORK RELIEF AND PUBLIC ASSISTANCE IN MILWAUKEE COUNTY: 1930-1939**

	DIRECT RELIEF			WORK PROGRAMS		TOTAL EXPENDITURES		GRAND TOTAL
	Total Cost	County Share	State/Federal Share	Fed CWA and Payrolls	County Contribution	Milwaukee County	Federal and State	
1930	\$853,744	\$853,744	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$853,744	\$0	\$853,744
1931	\$2,697,802	\$2,697,802	\$0	\$0	\$213,155	\$2,910,957	\$0	\$2,910,957
1932	\$7,268,319	\$2,991,122	\$4,277,197	\$0	\$74,905	\$3,066,027	\$4,277,197	\$7,343,224
1933	\$8,088,215	\$1,887,103	\$6,201,112	\$1,896,843	\$180,191	\$2,067,294	\$8,097,955	\$10,165,249
1934	\$11,821,388	\$2,244,094	\$9,577,294	\$7,050,936	\$333,029	\$2,577,123	\$16,628,232	\$19,205,355
1935	\$14,326,509	\$1,862,834	\$12,443,675	\$2,524,321	\$205,439	\$2,088,273	\$14,967,997	\$17,056,269
1936	\$4,716,363	\$4,486,593	\$229,770	\$17,582,522	\$207,915	\$4,694,507	\$17,812,293	\$22,506,800
1937	\$4,460,658	\$4,438,158	\$22,500	\$12,791,482	\$248,965	\$4,687,123	\$12,813,982	\$17,501,105
1938	\$5,818,564	\$5,531,100	\$287,464	\$19,667,534	\$552,213	\$6,083,313	\$19,974,998	\$26,058,311
1939	\$7,172,952	\$7,083,102	\$89,850	\$15,893,097	\$744,013	\$7,827,115	\$15,982,947	\$23,810,062
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$67,224,514</b>	<b>\$34,095,652</b>	<b>\$33,128,863</b>	<b>\$77,426,737</b>	<b>\$2,759,824</b>	<b>\$36,855,476</b>	<b>\$110,555,600</b>	<b>\$147,411,076</b>

# MILWAUKEE COUNTY CASES ON RELIEF OR IN FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS 1930-1943



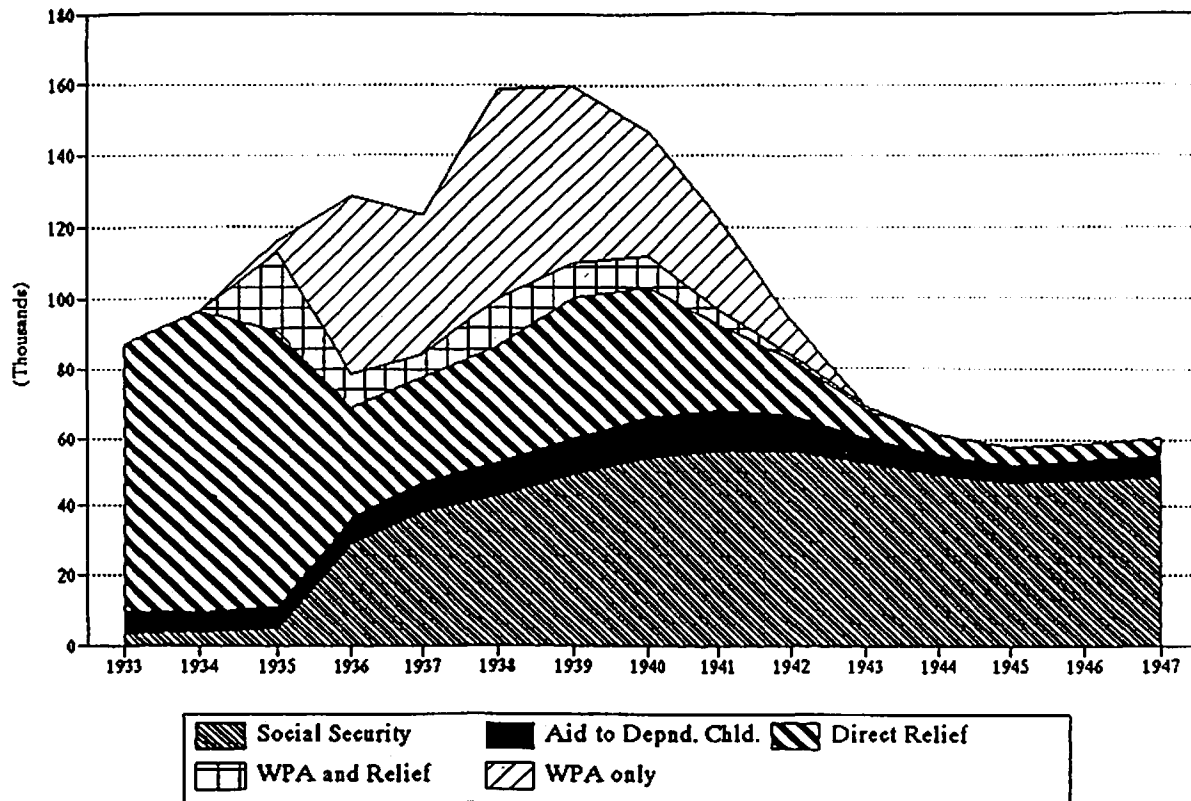
## Government Relief for "Unemployable" Populations

Well before federal categorical aid programs were initiated, the State of Wisconsin and Milwaukee County operated public assistance programs for adults who were blind or elderly and for dependent children. Increased coverage provided under the federal version of these programs absorbed most of the costs and expanded coverage, particularly for needy elderly persons. Caseloads and expenditures for aid to dependent children and old age assistance rose steadily until 1936 when eligibility for old age assistance was lowered from 70 to 65 years and Social Security expenditures more than doubled. By 1939 old age expenditures had doubled again. The availability of increased coverage for Social Security together with categorical aids for dependent children and the blind kept county general relief rolls from climbing even further. Federal participation in financing these programs reduced the burden to county taxpayers even as local relief caseloads were expanding.

Over the period from 1930 to 1939, total ADC payments in Milwaukee County tripled from \$421,000 to \$1,262,000. Aid to the blind, a much smaller program, nearly doubled, from \$56,000 to \$110,000. The biggest expenditure increases were in old age assistance which rose from a modest \$70,800 old age program and \$130,000 for soldiers' and sailors' pensions in 1930 (all paid by the county) to \$2.3 million in 1939 (with the state and federal governments paying 80 percent of costs).

*From 1930 to 1939, total payments for old age assistance, aid to dependent children, and aid to the blind in Milwaukee County increased more than ten-fold.*

State of Wisconsin Relief Population: Average Caseloads by Program, 1933-1947



## Characteristics of Workers on Relief

*"Direct relief work...played an important role in the black community between 1933 and 1939, yet these helpful programs simply underscored the critical depths to which the black population had plunged....By 1935, the Sixth ward, center of black residence in the city, registered 36 percent of its population in receipt of general relief compared to 14.4 percent for the city as a whole."*<sup>190</sup>

--Joe William Trotter, Jr.,  
Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat

*County workers classified adult applicants for relief as "employable," "limited employable," and "unemployable."*

In 1937 the federal government conducted a census of U.S. workers who were totally unemployed, partly employed, or employed on emergency relief programs (including WPA, Civilian Conservation Corps, and National Youth Administration jobs). Men were almost two times as likely to be working on WPA and other relief programs than women, with 27 percent of unemployed or underemployed men on emergency work programs compared to 15 percent of unemployed and underemployed women. African Americans constituted 3.7 percent of City of Milwaukee population out of work and appeared to be in WPA and other emergency work programs at higher rates. African American workers made up 6.2 percent of male relief workers. African American women comprised 6.3 percent of unemployed and underemployed women in the city labor force, and 11.3 percent of emergency work program participants.<sup>191</sup>

The occupational characteristics of male relief workers for the most part matched the unemployed male population. In Milwaukee County middle-aged men (ages 35 to 54) were most likely to be employed on WPA and other relief projects (constituting 34 percent of the unemployed/underemployed population). Less than 15 percent of unemployed and underemployed young men (under age 25) were in WPA, CCC NYA or other emergency work.

As the Depression worsened lower-skilled and older workers were hit hardest. County intake workers assessed the job skills of applicants for relief to determine the ability of individuals to work using the following classifications: "employable," "limited employable," and "unemployable." Family "heads" who were considered employable were referred to WPA and the balance of cases placed on direct relief. Given very high levels of unemployment, the definition of "unemployable" changed to encompass not only blind and disabled adults but also workers over 55 years of age whom employers were least likely to hire. With the onset of World War II, however, local employment levels began to increase and relief rolls showed dramatic declines not only for the category of "employables" but for persons deemed "unemployables" as well. By 1943 none of the "employables" were reported on relief or WPA. The definition of "employable" was expanded and the population of adults considered "unemployables" dropped from 4,400 in 1940 to 600 in 1944.

The emergency relief work force in 1937 was made up of about one-third skilled workers, one-third semi-skilled workers and one-third unskilled laborers or new entrants into the labor force. As the second World War began and WPA rolls declined, the remainder of workers on relief were almost all unskilled laborers or new entrants. With the introduction of unemployment compensation for unemployed workers, increasingly the population on work relief in the post-war 1945 to 1994 period was more likely to include adults who in the 1930s would have been considered to be unemployable or with limited ability to be employed.

*Throughout the period 1945 to 1994 individuals on work relief have tended to be those lesser skilled men who during periods of higher unemployment were the least likely to be competitive and, as a result, more likely to be dependent on relief.*

### **Changes in Labor Force Participation Rates Since the 1930s**

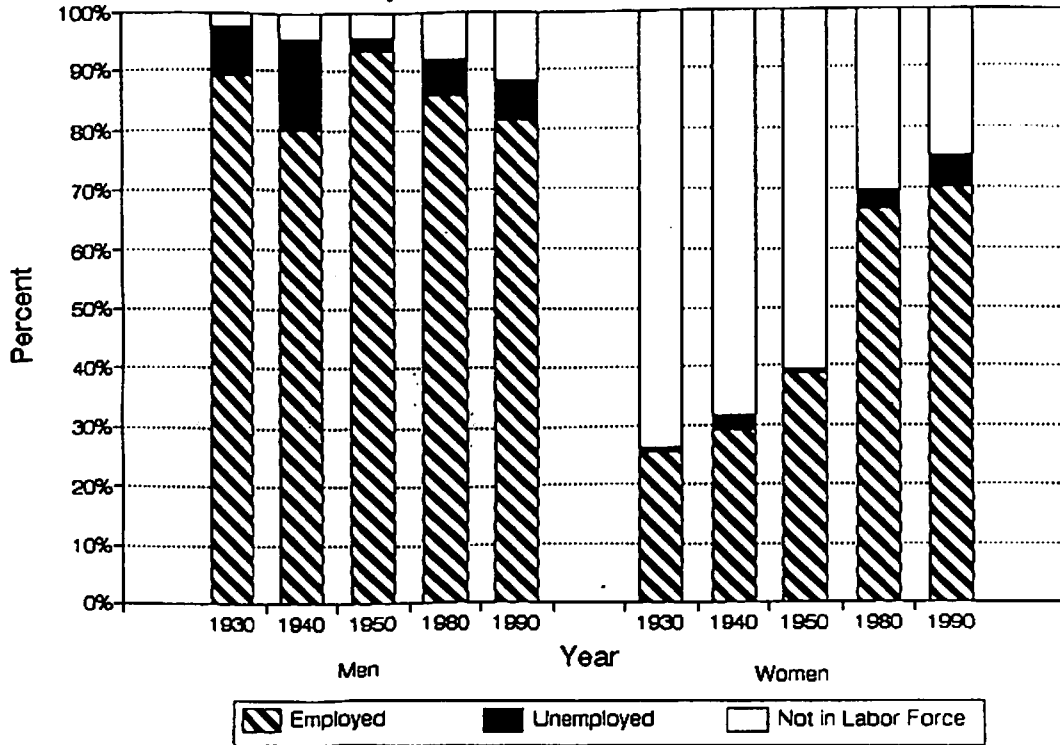
The economic turmoil of the 1930s contributed to changes in the labor force participation rates for Milwaukee men and women which have continued over time. During the Depression, when the male "head of the household" was unable to find employment, other family members began looking for work. The war years brought additional women into the labor force. In the City of Milwaukee, the number and percentage of employed women of prime working age (25 to 54 years) has increased dramatically over the last sixty years. A total of 31,975 city women were employed in 1930; 40,146 in 1940; 55,840 in 1950; 77,581 in 1980; and 93,090 in 1990. The proportion of women in the work force increased substantially during the war and continued to increase so that by 1990, three-fourths of city women ages 25 to 54 were in the labor force.

*"When the depression caused a falling off of family income, other members than the father sought part-time or full-time jobs. This tended to change the old idea of family, and develop a practice that each year throws people into the labor market who ten years ago would never have sought jobs."<sup>192</sup>*

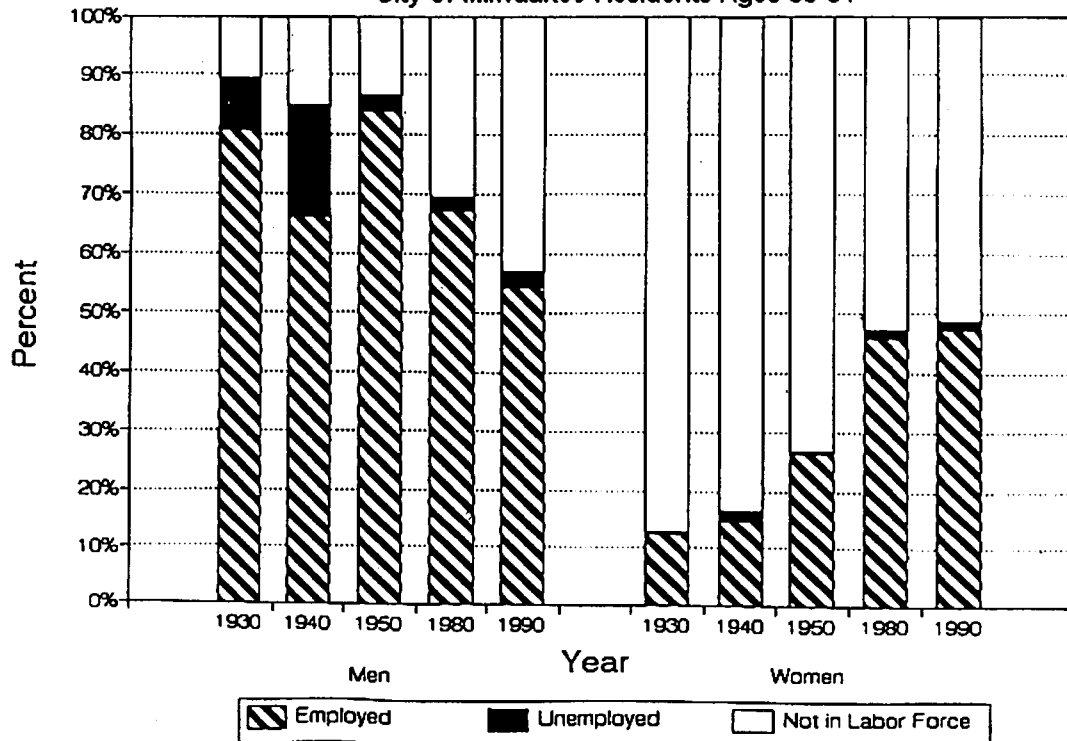
For Milwaukee men ages 25-54 the picture was quite different, with a gradually decreasing number and percentage of men in the work force. The proportion of city men in the labor force dropped from 98 percent in 1930 to 88 percent in 1990. The number of employed men dropped dramatically from the 1930 level of 120,796 to 109,485 in 1940. Only in 1950 did the number rise to 126,025. A decreasing proportion of men in their prime working ages have been employed since 1950. In 1990 only 81 percent of city men ages 25 to 54 years were employed. By contrast, for the population of city women of prime working age (25 to 54 years), women have shown dramatic increases in labor force participation rates. By 1990 the percentage of city women in the work force had tripled from 1930 levels.

-- Citizens' Committee on Public Welfare, 1937

Characteristics of the Labor Force  
City of Milwaukee Residents Ages 25-54



Characteristics of the Labor Force  
City of Milwaukee Residents Ages 55-64



Dramatic changes in the composition of the City of Milwaukee labor force have also occurred in the level of labor force participation among older workers. Women ages 55 to 64 years showed labor force participation rates of 13 percent in 1930, and participation doubled to 27 percent by 1950. By 1990, nearly half (49 percent) of older city women were in the labor force. Meanwhile, the labor force participation rate for City men ages 55 to 64 years dropped from 90 percent in 1930 to 87 percent in 1950. By 1980 their rates had further declined to 70 percent. In 1990 only 57 percent of older city men were in the labor force. The withdrawal of older men from the labor force accounts for an official 1990 unemployment rate of 4.8 percent for the age group even though only 54 percent of older city men were employed.

Economic downturns in the manufacturing sector in the 1970s and 1980s took a heavy toll just as they did during the 1930s. Skilled workers as well as laborers showed continued employment declines from an all-time high in 1960 to an all-time low in number of employed men in 1990. For women the picture was very different, with more than double the number of women employed since 1930, mostly in white collar occupations of sales, administrative support, and professional specialty occupations. Downturns in the manufacturing and construction sector in both the 1930s and 1980s account for much of the unemployment among the male population. By 1937 over 70 percent of unemployed men were skilled or semi-skilled factory workers. By 1990 half of unemployed men remained in this category.

### **1990 Full-Time Employment Rates for Central City Milwaukee Residents**

The central city area of the City of Milwaukee has been particularly hard hit by economic restructuring which has taken place in the last twenty years. For the area served by the Community Development Block Grant program (Census Bureau Public Use Microdata Area 2203), labor force participation rates for white and minority males were higher in 1970, with about 80 percent of men in these populations employed full time. By 1990 the rate of full-time employment in the Milwaukee area outside the city was at 90 percent for men of prime working age (25-54 years). However, rates for full-time employment for the central city area were 60 percent for white males and around 40 percent for African American males (ages 25-54 years). Declines in full-time employment were most dramatic for older central city workers. Less than 30 percent of white and 15 percent of African American males ages 55 to 64 were working full time in 1990, down from the 1970s when 70 percent of these groups were employed full time.

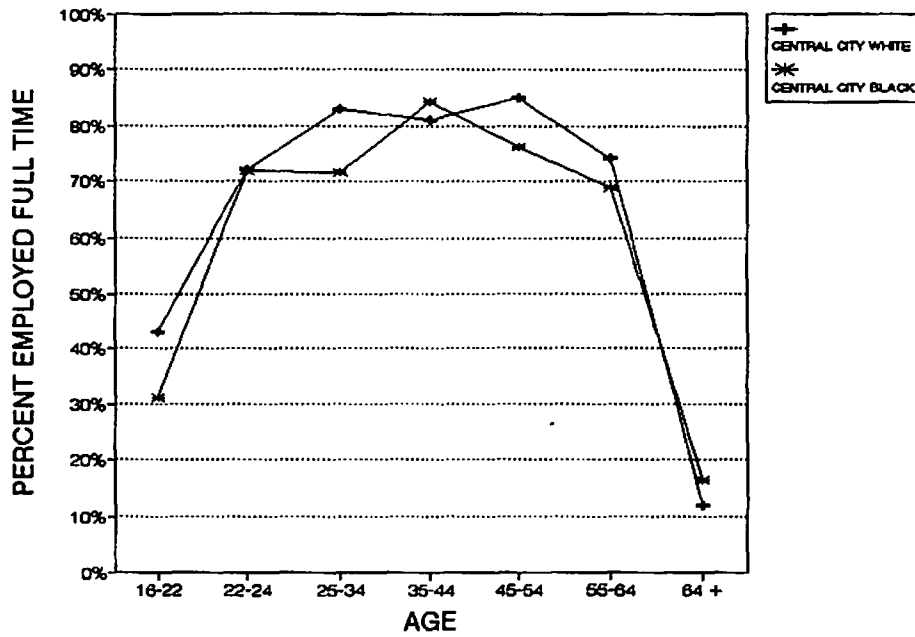
*The manufacturing sector has been the key to the health of the labor market for men in the City of Milwaukee.*

*In 1990 only 60 percent of white males and 40 percent of African American men of prime working age (25 to 54 years) in the central city neighborhoods of Milwaukee were employed full-time.*

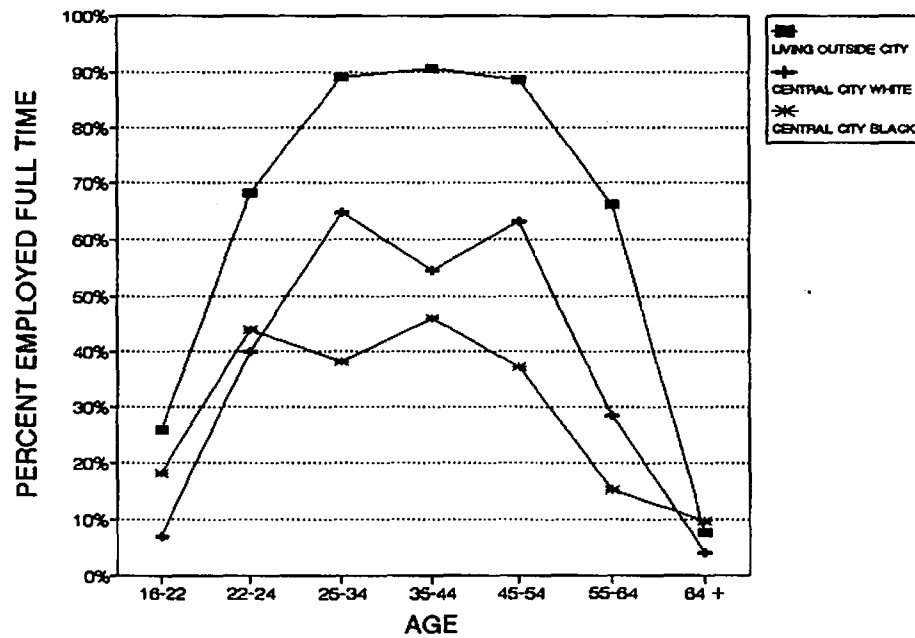
# FULL TIME EMPLOYMENT

## MALES AGED 16 AND OVER

1970 CENSUS



1990 CENSUS



## Appendix B

### Theories Underlying Early Wisconsin Work Relief Programs

At the time of the Great Depression, municipalities and counties assumed responsibility for providing relief to the poor. In Wisconsin the state legislature had identified three classes of needy persons for whom relief was mandatory: soldiers, sailors and marine veterans who had served during wartime; blind persons; and dependent children whose parent or guardian petitioned the court for aid. In addition, the state contributed about one-fifth of funds for those counties providing old age assistance. Policies toward assisting all other persons were determined by the local governments.

During the Depression localities responded to the needs of the unemployed through general relief programs supported by local property taxes. Costs of general relief placed a tremendous burden on local communities, with payments for general relief in Wisconsin increasing from \$1.2 million in 1929, \$2.2 million in 1930, \$7.6 million in 1931, to a staggering \$43.7 million in 1935.<sup>193</sup> In 1931 Wisconsin became the first state to provide unemployment work relief, using a two cents a gallon increase in the state gasoline tax to support a statewide work program eliminating railroad grade crossings. In 1932 Wisconsin enacted the first state unemployment compensation law.

The Wisconsin Industrial Commission, which was responsible for administration of state relief funds and federal monies granted to states for relief, encouraged local communities to develop work programs for families on relief. In 1932 the Commission prepared policies to guide municipalities and counties in establishment of these programs. The Commission addressed many of the issues still debated today, including whether work programs should be mainly disciplinary to discourage "undeserving" persons from receiving direct relief, designed to give the community a return in labor for their relief dollars, or provided to preserve the morale of persons involuntarily unemployed. The Industrial Commission's bulletin, excerpted below, advised local governments on the competing purposes of work relief programs, suggested standards for allocating jobs for workers, and recommended standards for wage payments.<sup>194</sup>

### Theories Underlying Work Relief Programs: 1932

**First:** Persons should be made to work before they receive any direct aid. This policy is based somewhat on the theory that unemployment is synonymous to vagrancy, and the problem is that of making work for tramps and making tramps work, hence the "wood-pile" test. Persons who hold to this theory feel that "those who will not work shall not eat"; that if a person is really desirous of working, he can find a job, or if he can find no job, it is up to the community to furnish him one before giving him any direct aid. It is a disciplinary attitude which requires that the unemployed demonstrate their willingness to take any work that is offered to them.

**Second:** The second theory is the expression of the average taxpayer who feels that the community should get some return for the money expended; that if money must be given out for direct aid, the community deserves some service in return. As a result of this belief, some communities have undertaken quite ambitious public work programs during times of unemployment. So long as these public works have been necessary and would have been undertaken sooner or later anyway, the advantages are very apparent. However, the returns so far as unemployment relief is concerned are somewhat disappointing. This is due to several reasons:

- To get the work done right, experienced men must necessarily be used. These men are not always the ones who need relief most; thus the poor relief departments are not relieved of much of their burdens by employing these skilled mechanics.
- A large proportion of the expenditure for public works goes for materials, administration, etc.
- If the work is let to a private contractor, some of the expenditure necessarily goes for profit.
- Quite frequently a public works project gives work to machines and not to men.

In spite of these disadvantages, however, public works, if carefully selected and administered, can perform the dual purpose of aiding unemployment and giving the community something of value in return for money expended. Obviously this means that those types of public works must be chosen which require the greatest amount of hand labor and where the least amount of profit goes to private individuals and companies.

**Third:** The third theory is that work should be provided in order to preserve the morale of persons unwillingly thrown out of their regular jobs; that the giving of direct relief is humiliating and will soon become demoralizing to those who must receive it. Holders of this theory recognize that work-relief is more costly than the handing out of groceries, but they maintain that this extra cost is justified on spiritual grounds. Experience has proven that the majority of unemployed would rather have work than direct relief; in fact, they will fight and lie to get a chance to work. Work relief programs based on this theory are undertaken with the full knowledge that it is not a money-making scheme for the community; in fact, that such a public project will cost more than if undertaken under normal conditions. This is unavoidable since inexperienced men are not as efficient as those trained for public works, and dividing up the working day or week into several crews is not as efficient as keeping the one crew regularly at work. The benefit to the community is not measured in dollars and cents, but in the maintenance of the morale and self-respect of those given work.

The issue of what level of wages to pay relief workers was debated throughout the Depression years. The Commission recommended paying prevailing wages, particularly for skilled construction workers, while limiting the number of days of employment for higher paid workers. The Commission also strongly recommended that workers be paid in cash rather than in commodities or vouchers, except in situations where they needed to be protected from creditors or where a government operated commissary could reduce grocery costs.

The Commission encouraged local governments to use the local relief agency or a trained employment agent rather than aldermen or county supervisors when distributing jobs among eligible unemployed workers. They also stressed the importance of coordinating efforts of the employment office and relief agency so that persons did not receive both wages and direct relief.

### 1932 Standards for Establishing Wage Payments

1. The prevailing rate of wages within the community should be paid on work-relief projects. If a work-relief project tends to a general lowering of wage rates within a community, the long-time effect on the standard of living is likely to prove more detrimental than the giving of temporary jobs to the unemployed. Also, wage differentials; that is, if carpenters, pipe fitters, electricians, etc., are following their own trades on a work-relief project, the going rate of wages for these trades should be paid. This does not mean, however, that the skilled mechanics should not work on common labor at the common labor rate when that is the only work available. Neither does it mean that skilled mechanics, when working at their own trade, should make more per week than other laborers. Weekly earnings are controlled by the number of days a person is permitted to work. If, for example, a standard of \$12 a week shall be the basic wage, common laborers receiving fifty cents per hour would work three eight-hour days. A carpenter at \$1.00 an hour would work just half the number of days.

2. Whether or not a person engaged on work-relief projects should be paid in cash or by voucher is a disputed question. There is no question but that the large majority of families who have managed their own affairs hitherto are perfectly able to spend wages received on work-relief to the best advantage to their families. Furthermore, if there is no difference made between those receiving direct relief and those who work for their relief; that is, if both types of disbursement is by grocery order, the work-relief defeats its own purpose, so far as the morale and self-respect of the individual is concerned. It would seem fairer in most cases to pay in cash for work done.

However, certain conditions might make it more advisable to pay by grocery order; for instance, if the community has its own commissary where groceries are bought at wholesale prices, it is much cheaper to give the workers grocery orders on the commissary. Also, many persons previous to getting employment have run into debt. Their creditors might make unreasonable demands on the limited wages when paid in cash.

## 1932 Standards for Allocation of Jobs for Workers

1. Obviously able-bodied persons who are already on the poor relief lists should be given jobs on make-work programs. However, jobs should not be confined to those already receiving public aid. Sometimes it is more advisable to give jobs to those who have not yet been compelled to ask for aid but are nearing the end of their resources, thus making it unnecessary for them to submit to the humiliation of asking for public relief.
2. There should be no discrimination on grounds of race, nationality, religion or politics. All legal residents should participate even though they have not become naturalized. It seems fair that a community should exclude persons who have not acquired a legal residence, but it is foolish to discriminate against persons who must otherwise be looked after by the relief agency on the grounds that they are not naturalized citizens.
3. Preference should be given to heads of families with dependents. Single men and women who have persons entirely dependent upon them for support should be classified the same as heads of families. It is well, however, for the community to recognize a responsibility toward its single men in order to keep them from becoming professional tramps. Some communities have worked on the plan of giving heads of families four or five days' work a week and single men two days' work.
4. In determining the actual need of the family, resources should be interpreted as immediately available resources. The home or small farm owner who can neither sell, rent, nor borrow upon his property and who is behind on tax and interest payments, is for all practical purposes resourceless.
5. Ordinarily not more than one person from the same household should be employed on work-relief projects.
6. The city or county planning the work-relief project should be very careful that such project will not deprive regular workers of their jobs; for instance, if a city is performing certain regular services, such as street cleaning, and has a crew of workers, it is not helping the situation to displace these regular workers with those who are unemployed. Only such additional work as would not normally be undertaken and be considered as work-relief.
7. Whether or not the same crew should be kept reasonably well employed or whether the work should be distributed over a larger number is a disputed question. Much is to be said in favor of not spreading the work too thin so that no one is able to make a reasonable living. Many persons feel that is better to keep a certain group permanently off the poor relief than to distribute the work over a larger number, all of whom will have to go on poor relief intermittently. The reaction of those who would not get any work under this plan, however, should not be ignored. Even a few weeks' work on a work-relief program during a period of prolonged unemployment tends to save a person's morale and ambition.

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