The New Deal and Farm Tenancy: Rural Resettlement in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

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THE NEW DEAL AND FARM TENANCY: RURAL RESETTLEMENT
IN ARKANSAS, LOUISIANA, AND MISSISSIPPI

A Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

In the 1930's, Americans struggled with a problem that still haunts the United States today: the problem of chronic poverty. Thirty years ago, the nation focused its attention on rural poverty, not the poverty of urban ghettos. The people of rural America had known hard times in the 1920's, but the worst came after 1929. No economic group suffered more in the Depression than the nation's farmers, and no farmers were more poverty-stricken than Southern farm tenants, sharecroppers, and migrant farm workers. In reality, too many people were trying to earn a living from the land. Over a half million farm families--or two million to five million individuals--were no longer needed as cotton tenants. In the lower Mississippi River Valley, over two out of every three farmers did not own land of their own. When Franklin D. Roosevelt took the oath of office in 1933, the Southern farm tenancy system had virtually reached the point of collapse.

Initially, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration's crop reduction and acreage restriction programs hurt rather than helped tenants and croppers in the Southern cotton belt, but President Roosevelt soon embarked on a bold approach for alleviating the plight of low-income farmers.
The New Deal resettlement program took submarginal land out of cultivation, resettled farm families on land that would support a decent living, and gave them the best technical assistance available. Beginning in 1933, the Subsistence Homesteads Division of the Department of the Interior was the first New Deal agency to resettle low-income families on subsistence plots. Soon afterward, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), under Harry L. Hopkins, launched a number of community projects as part of its rural rehabilitation program. More important, the Resettlement Administration (RA), created by executive order in April, 1935, not only absorbed the subsistence homesteads and most FERA rural rehabilitation projects, but initiated a whole new series of communities located mostly in the South. Resettlement Administrator Rexford G. Tugwell set up a complex national organization with twelve regional offices and hundreds of state, district, and county offices. Two years later, operating under authority granted in the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937, the Farm Security Administration (FSA) replaced the RA, inherited its organization and most of its personnel, and completed the resettlement program.

In Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi (Region Six), the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and the Resettlement Administration together established a total of thirty resettlement projects. Some of the projects formed separate communities, others were
scattered farms, a few experimented with cooperative farming, but the vast majority operated on the familiar principle of every farmer owning his own plot and farmstead. The New Deal's ultimate solution of the problems of farm tenancy was to make independent farm owners out of tenant families. Thus the resettlement program evoked an old tenet of American agrarianism: the belief that the small independent landholder was the nation's backbone. When the resettlement program was liquidated during World War II, most of the projects were operating far in the red. Yet the resettlement agencies did succeed in giving thousands of farm families in Region Six a new start, a sense of hope, and a higher standard of living. The New Deal provided other kinds of help for farm tenants and sharecroppers, but it never came to grips with the total problem of rural poverty.
CHAPTER I

FARM TENANCY AND THE NEW DEAL

The Great Depression struck hard at tenant farmers and sharecroppers, the chronic victims of rural distress in the South. During the 1930's, the activities of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, the popularity of Tobacco Road and The Grapes of Wrath, studies made by such men as Charles S. Johnson and Arthur Raper—all helped to focus national attention on the Southern tenant problem. In 1937, the President's Special Committee on Farm Tenancy reported that sixty-four per cent of all American farm tenants lived in the South. The Southern tenancy rate had increased from more than a third of all farmers in 1880 to more than half in 1930. In 1935, there were 1,831,475

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3Ibid., 39.
tenant farmers in the South; this meant that tenancy had trapped more than eight and a half million people, or about one of every four Southerners. After 1900, the rate of tenancy among white farmers in the South increased rapidly while holding fairly steady among Negro farmers. By 1935, over forty-six per cent of all Southern white farmers were tenants compared to over seventy-nine per cent of Negro farmers, but white tenants outnumbered blacks by two to one.

Tenancy rates were highest where cotton production was most intensive, notably in the Southern Black Belt. In 1930, Mississippi had the highest rate of farm tenancy in the nation; 72.2 per cent of all farmers in the state did not own the land they farmed. Georgia was second highest with 65.6 per cent, followed closely by Alabama (64.5), Louisiana (63.7), South Carolina (62.2), and Arkansas (60.0). In all six states, nearly three out of every four cotton farms were operated with tenant labor.

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5*Farm Tenancy: Report of the President's Committee,* 99; *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1939,* p. 621.


these Americans," Franklin D. Roosevelt said in 1937, "has become a treadmill."8

The rural South had been sinking into the morass of tenancy since the Civil War. After 1865, military defeat and post-war adjustment presented Southern agriculture with a series of problems: the breakdown of the labor supply, a scarcity of money, and lack of credit. Since former slaves had no property and no credit, they needed land without having to buy it or pay cash rent. Landlords had land but not enough cash to hire laborers. Together owners and tenants evolved a form of tenancy peculiar to the South in which they substituted produce and labor for money by sharing the crop, the only thing either had of value. A few tenants were able to pay cash rent for the use of land, but most were either sharecroppers or share tenants. The sharecropper was the most disadvantaged and least secure. He had no livestock or farm equipment or any semblance of capital; all he had was his own labor and that of his wife and children to produce and harvest the crop. The landlord furnished him with land, house, mule, tools, seed, and other supplies, and in return the cropper agreed to pay as rent half of the crop he produced. The share tenant was somewhat better off since he was able to furnish more of his own needs for his share of

8Franklin D. Roosevelt to the Congress of the United States, February 16, 1937, in Farm Tenancy: Report of the President's Committee, 25, 26.
the crop. He supplied all of his own workstock and equipment as well as labor; consequently his rent was less, usually a fourth to a third of the crop. What further tightened the grip of poverty on the rural South was the crop-lien system. Because of the lack of agricultural credit, landlords depended on a local "furnish" merchant to advance supplies to the tenant and his family until the crop was harvested, and the storekeeper protected his investment by taking a mortgage or "lien" on the tenant's share of the future crop. Since merchants would risk supplies only on staples like cotton and tobacco, the one-crop system, overproduction, and soil exhaustion were more characteristic of the New South than the slave South.9

The life of tenants and sharecroppers, both Negro and white, was a miserable existence in dirt, poverty, ignorance, and disease.10 They lived in the worst houses, usually two- or three-room unpainted shacks with cotton planted right up to the front door. The monotony of their basic diet—salt pork or fatback, corn bread, molasses, and sweet potatoes—explains the high rate of pellagra among tenants; malaria

9Rupert Vance, Human Factors in Cotton Culture (Chapel Hill, 1929), Chapter III.

10In addition to the books cited in Footnote No. 1, see Agee and Walker Evans, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Boston, 1960); Howard Kester, Revolt Among the Sharecroppers (New York, 1936); Herman Clarence Nixon, Forty Acres and Steel Mules (Chapel Hill, 1941). For an Arkansas reaction, see Arkansas State Policy Committee, Agricultural Labor Problems in Arkansas, Published Paper No. 1 (n.p., October 31, 1936).
and hookworm were also common. The children went to school, if at all, three to four months a year because they were needed in the fields. Tenant wives all aged prematurely, showing up in photographs as gaunt, frightened creatures. Tenant income was below subsistence levels, even by depression standards. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the University of Arkansas, in a 1934 survey, revealed that the cash income of tenants on three Arkansas plantations was about $300 for that year.\(^{11}\) In a study in 1936, the Farm Security Administration found that 287 cotton tenants in the hill section of Arkansas had a total average cash income of $134.71 per year.\(^ {12}\) Despite lack of income, many croppers moved every two or three years; some were evicted, but others were looking for a better life that few ever found.

Everyone who traveled through the South in the 1930's to peer into tenant shacks and talk with croppers sitting on front porches was appalled by what he saw and heard. Tenants lived in such extreme poverty that many observers sensed something un-American about it. Frazier Hunt, New York World-Telegram reporter, saw groups of cotton pickers working their way across cotton fields. "In some strange way, they reminded me," he said, "of Chinese coolies working

\(^{11}\)Conrad, The Forgotten Farmers, 12, 13.

in the soya beans along the Southern Manchurian Railroad." "They seemed to belong to another land than the America I knew and loved."13 "It is in Arkansas that one finds the situation of the sharecroppers really tragic," wrote freelance author and traveler Fred Kelly. "I have never seen living conditions on lower standards, even in backward sections of Europe."14 Naomi Mitchison, an English novelist, made a visit to Arkansas in 1935. "I have traveled over most of Europe and part of Africa," she said, "but I have never seen such terrible sights as I saw yesterday among the sharecroppers of Arkansas."15 Conditions among tenants on Arkansas plantations may have been typical, but they were probably no worse than elsewhere in the cotton belt. Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace decided to take a look for himself in 1936. "I have never seen among the peasantry of Europe," he said, "poverty so abject as that which exists in this favorable cotton year in the great cotton states from Arkansas on to the East Coast...."16 Most tenants, sharecroppers, and submarginal farmers found it impossible to move out of this abject poverty and


14Quoted in "A Statement Concerning Farm Tenancy Submitted to the Governor's Commission on Farm Tenancy by the Executive Council, Southern Tenant Farmers' Union," c. 1936, Socialist Party of America Papers, Duke University Library.

15Quoted in Kester, Revolt Among the Sharecroppers, 51.

up the agricultural ladder toward ownership. They were caught in a squeeze between depression problems and certain long-range trends in cotton farming. In 1935, Charles S. Johnson, Edwin R. Embree, and Will W. Alexander published a hard-hitting little book entitled *The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy* predicting an early doom for the South's plantation type of farm organization, the one-crop pattern, and the farm tenancy system. Indeed, if it had not been for federal subsidies, they implied, cotton tenancy would have already collapsed from a series of causes: soil depletion, an abundant supply of cheap foreign cotton (and a consequent loss of world markets), competition of synthetic fabrics like rayon, and the mechanization of agriculture. What will become, they were asking, of the millions of destitute tenants and croppers and small farmers whose livelihood depend on cotton?  

When Franklin D. Roosevelt took office on March 4, 1933, he moved quickly to carry out the New Deal that he had proclaimed during the campaign. But early New Deal spending barely trickled down to the chief victims of rural distress. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), a cornerstone of the First New Deal, grew out of a conception of agricultural policy in which the central issues were prices and credit, not the relief of rural poverty. The purpose of

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the AAA was to raise prices by curtailing production. Farmers voluntarily agreed to take acreage out of production in return for "benefit payments" to replace lost income. Thus the AAA sought to restore farmers to "parity," a ratio of what farmers paid to what they received, based on farm purchasing power and prices in the prosperous period of 1909-1914. But the Agricultural Adjustment Administration's cotton plow up and acreage reduction program worked directly against tenant farmers and sharecroppers. The AAA quite obviously reflected the interests of large farmers and landlords; tenants, for example, had no place on the AAA county committees which supervised the program locally, nor did AAA cotton contracts contain adequate safeguards for the protection of their interests. As a result, many landlords accepted benefit payments for taking acreage out of production, while either cheating tenants and sharecroppers out of their rightful share of the subsidies or evicting those whose labor was no longer needed.  

In response to the landlords' highland tactics and AAA

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policies, sharecroppers in Arkansas began to organize. What aroused Arkansas croppers was the action of one man, Hiram Norcross. In 1934, Norcross issued eviction notices to about forty families on his 4,500-acre plantation near Tyronza, Poinsett County, Arkansas. In July, a group of eighteen sharecroppers, white and Negro, meeting in a school building near Tyronza, organized the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. They turned for leadership to H. L. Mitchell, former sharecropper and currently owner of a small dry cleaning shop; H. Clay East, service station operator; and J. R. Butler, saw mill hand and school teacher. The reason for forming a union was both to give sharecroppers and tenants some bargaining power with planters and to stop evictions and landlord chiseling under AAA contracts. Within a few months, the STFU had about 1,400 members in four or five northeastern Arkansas counties; by 1936, it had 50,000 members in Arkansas and parts of Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, Mississippi, and Tennessee. After watching union membership climb, landlords retaliated with a campaign of violence which dramatized the plight of Southern tenants. Planters and their allies arrested, jailed, flogged, and murdered union organizers and members; they broke up meetings by burning or shooting into homes, churches and other known union meeting places. STFU leaders adopted a policy of passive resistance, endured the attacks, and moved their headquarters across the
Mississippi River to Memphis, Tennessee.  

With the help of Socialist party leader Norman Thomas and a few quick-triggered landlords, the STFU put the tenant problem in the headlines and helped awaken the nation's conscience. Even in Arkansas there was evidence of growing concern. Arkansas Governor J. Marion Futrell declared that farm tenancy was "eating at the vitals of the South's economic structure and, whether exaggerated or not, is of such serious character as to call for immediate and exhaustive study and examination with a view to its definite settlement." On August 15, 1936, Futrell announced that he would appoint a special commission composed of impartial and fair-minded citizens to investigate conditions among tenants and sharecroppers in the state and to recommend a solution to the problem. On the commission's recommendations, the Arkansas legislature in 1939 passed legislation designed to reform some of the system's inequities.

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20 Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), August 16, 1936.

21 Ibid., August 27, 1936.

22 This was the Arkansas Land Policy Act (Act 331), approved March 16, 1939. See Acts . . . of the Fifty-Second General Assembly of the State of Arkansas . . . (Little Rock, 1939), 863-71.
More important, Thomas and the STFU put pressure on the Roosevelt Administration to offer a positive program to relieve tenant suffering. At first, however, Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace defended AAA policies. He was not blind to the plight of tenants and sharecroppers; but farm tenancy had existed for a long time, Wallace maintained, and their low standard of living was not due to the new crop reduction program. The AAA's 1934-35 cotton contract, he argued, contained protection for sharecroppers in paragraph 7, a provision that required landlords to keep the same number of tenants they had the previous year. Wallace believed that the AAA could not do any more to protect the rights of tenants.  

One group within the AAA, the urban liberals under Jerome Frank, did favor positive action to relieve the distress of tenants and sharecroppers. In February, 1934, with AAA director Chester Davis out of town, Frank circulated a directive which interpreted paragraph 7 to require that planters not only retain the same number of tenants but the same individuals as tenants. But Davis canceled the directive and, with the backing of Roosevelt and Wallace, fired Frank and most of his allies. President Roosevelt himself was sympathetic to the plight of sharecroppers, but he

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approached the problem with caution. "I know the South," he said to Norman Thomas, "and there is arising a new generation of leaders in the South and we've got to be patient." By 1935, the New Deal, while continuing acreage reduction schemes, had already started moving in the opposite direction, with programs that in effect boosted farm production by increasing the number of farmers and by making farm tenure more secure. The most controversial New Deal experiment in helping farm tenants, sharecroppers, and submarginal farmers was the rural resettlement or community program.

Since the New Deal launched its resettlement program before the Southern tenant problem exploded in 1934, the earliest community projects showed little concern with disadvantaged and dispossessed farmers. Instead, these communities drew inspiration from the back-to-the-land movement popular during the Great Depression. Following the 1929 crash, many Americans despaired of the city and began to talk

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26The best secondary account is Paul K. Conkin, Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program (Ithaca, N. Y., 1959); Select Committee of the House Committee on Agriculture, Hearings on the Farm Security Administration, 78th Cong., 1st Sess., 1943-1944, part III, contains a factual summary of the resettlement projects.

nostalgically of the land and of subsistence farming. A few sought escape into a pastoral utopia where men and women could get away from the materialism of industrial society and live a more fulfilling life close to the soil; but for most, subsistence farming was a means of temporary relief. Even Franklin D. Roosevelt possessed a mild form of back-to-the-landism. The President, wrote Rexford G. Tugwell, "always did, and always would think people better off in the country and would regard the cities as rather hopeless." While governor of New York, Roosevelt experimented with projects designed as a marriage of agriculture and industry in what he called "rural industrial groups"—a broad program for decentralizing industry and giving families a chance to combine the advantages of factory employment and rural living. "Suppose," asked Roosevelt in 1931, "one were to offer these [unemployed] men opportunity to go on the land, to provide a house and a few acres in the country and a little money and tools to put in a small food crop?" Thus after his inauguration he was more than receptive to plans for setting up subsistence homesteads and rural communities.

The Subsistence Homesteads Division of the Department

29Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 83.
30Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Back to the Land," Review of Reviews, LXXXIV (October, 1931), 64.
of the Interior was the first New Deal agency to work in the field of community building. During the Hundred Days, Senator John H. Bankhead of Alabama attached a $25,000,000 appropriation to the National Industrial Recovery Act providing a "blank check" for a program of subsistence homesteads. Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes assumed responsibility for the appropriation, set up a Division of Subsistence Homesteads in August, 1933, and appointed M. L. Wilson as director. A farm economist from Montana State Agricultural College with both farming experience and academic credentials, Wilson envisioned subsistence farming as a means of realizing a "better life" away from the materialism and shallowness of what he called "the jazz-industrial age." Since he possessed broad authority, he experimented with communities for stranded mine workers and full-time farm colonies to take farm families off submarginal land, but most homestead projects were for part-time industrial workers. Generally, the industrial homesteads consisted of a cluster of twenty-five to one hundred homes located near the outskirts of a city or small town; each family raised much of their own food on a five- to ten-acre tract of land, while earning cash income in nearby factories or industries established within the communities.31

In 1934, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration

31Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 86-96; Schlesinger, The Coming of the New Deal, 363, 364.
FERA), under Harry L. Hopkins, began experimenting with community projects as part of its rural relief program. Hopkins combined all FERA rural relief programs as well as those of the Civil Works Administration into the Division of Rural Rehabilitation and Stranded Populations, turning it over to Lawrence Westbrook. As relief administrator in Texas, Westbrook had taken a hundred farm families off relief rolls and resettled them on the Woodlake cooperative community near Houston. In the case of destitute farmers, both Hopkins and Westbrook desired to shift emphasis from immediate relief to long-term rehabilitation. The Rural Rehabilitation Division made loans and grants to needy farmers but also built a series of rural communities designed to take farmers off relief and put them back on farms full time. The FERA community program was slow to get off the ground; during the FERA's lifetime, Westbrook completed only two of the twenty-eight projects he initiated. Although the FERA communities were more relevant to the problems of the rural poor than those of the Subsistence Homesteads Division, the New Deal by 1935 had accomplished little toward relieving the distress of farm tenants, sharecroppers, and submarginal farmers.32

On April 30, 1935, soon after the end of the "reign of terror" against the STFU in eastern Arkansas, Roosevelt

32Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 131-34; Lawrence Westbrook, "The Program of the Rural Rehabilitation Division of the FERA," Journal of Farm Economics, XVII (February, 1935), 89-100.
created the Resettlement Administration (RA) to take over both rural rehabilitation and the subsistence homesteads.\textsuperscript{33} Rexford G. Tugwell, the new Resettlement Administrator, had long been a spokesman for the disadvantaged farmer in the AAA, and he had persuaded Roosevelt to bring together all rural poverty programs in a new, independent agency.\textsuperscript{34} The Resettlement Administration functioned through a balanced and coherent program aimed at stopping the waste of both human resources and natural resources.\textsuperscript{35} Rural rehabilitation was the emergency phase of the RA program and, though less spectacular, involved more money and more people than the better-known community projects. The Rural Rehabilitation Division made loans and grants to individual families to help them become self-supporting farm owners, sponsored rural cooperatives for purchasing farm machinery and equipment, and helped work out satisfactory debt adjustments between distressed farmers and their creditors. In the Land Utilization program, Tugwell sought to improve submarginal land through soil conservation, reforestation, and flood control and to convert it to nonagricultural uses. The Resettlement


\textsuperscript{34}See Rexford G. Tugwell, "The Resettlement Idea," \textit{Agricultural History}, XXXIII (October, 1959), 159.

Division, Tugwell's special concern, completed most of the old subsistence homesteads and the FERA projects, and initiated a new series of communities located largely in the South. Tugwell favored the suburban or greenbelt towns near major cities, but he also approved infiltration or scattered farm projects and distinct farm communities for low-income farmers.  

In 1936, a presidential election year, the landlord-tenant controversy continued to be a source of embarrassment to the Roosevelt Administration. During May and June, the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union organized a general strike which idled 5,000 sharecroppers in northeast Arkansas, and violence again broke out. Strikers were harassed, beaten, arrested on vagrancy charges, and some were forced at gun point to return to work in the fields. When five or six unidentified men seized Little Rock, clergyman Claude Williams and Willie Sue Elagden, both STFU members, and flogged them, the incident appeared in national publications (this was "true Arkansas hospitality" implied Time).  

A "March of Time" newsreel flashed the story of the strike

36Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 153-60.


across the nation's theatre screens. But President Roosevelt, even though in Little Rock on June 10 to celebrate the centennial of Arkansas' statehood, made no public mention of the strike.39

Yet sharecropper unrest in Arkansas and STFU agitation apparently had some effect on the Roosevelt Administration's decision to take additional steps to attack the tenant problem, although the President himself made no public move until after his reelection. On November 16, 1936, he appointed a special presidential commission to study farm tenancy.40 Under Henry Wallace's chairmanship, it turned out a report in February, 1937, recommending that Congress set up a new agency to continue Resettlement Administration programs and to implement an expanded loan program to assist tenants toward landownership.41 Senator Bankhead and Representative Marvin Jones of Texas, who had sponsored an unsuccessful farm tenancy bill in 1935, now introduced a new bill which followed the committee's recommendations. In July, 1937, Congress passed the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act placing the entire New Deal rural poverty program for the first time

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40 Farm Tenancy: Report of the President's Committee, 25.

41 Ibid., 17, 18.
on a firm legislative foundation. On September 1, acting under authority granted by the Bankhead-Jones Act, Wallace abolished the Resettlement Administration (Tugwell had resigned in December, 1936), created the Farm Security Administration (FSA), and assigned it the task of carrying out the new tenancy program.

"The FSA," writes William E. Leuchtenburg, "was the first agency to do anything substantial for the tenant, the sharecropper, and the migrant farmer." The Farm Security Administration embodied the final phase of the New Deal attack on rural poverty; in reality it was the Resettlement Administration under a new name with the same personnel (including Tugwell's successor, Will W. Alexander, as administrator). As a result Farm Security was the depository for a diversified collection of rural welfare programs. Alexander assumed responsibility for the RA's land utilization, resettlement, and rural rehabilitation activities; but the latter, as in the RA, was his chief concern. He also administered the Bankhead-Jones tenant purchase program, a loan program enabling qualified tenant families to purchase family-size farms on forty-year notes at three per cent.


43 Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 185.

interest. As evidence of its receptivity to new approaches, the FSA experimented with migratory labor camps, medical-care cooperatives, and prefabricated housing. Yet nothing the FSA or RA did stirred up more controversy and suspicion than the community program. The resettlement projects offered a dynamic approach to rural poverty with their use of cooperative enterprises, long-term leases rather than fee simple ownership, and detailed social planning. In 1937, however, Congress directed the FSA to complete the projects already underway or for which the RA had purchased land but to make no effort to add new communities.45

In *Tomorrow a New World*, Paul K. Conkin argues that the development of the New Deal community program was "one of the most open breaks with the individualistic tradition in American history." The term "community," he says, "became a synonym for a form of collectivism and an antonym of individualism. These communities were to be examples of a new, organic society, with new values and institutions."46 What should also be emphasized about the overall community program is its debt to traditional agrarian values. The Farm Security Administration was eventually responsible for more than 150 resettlement projects, but only a handful of these operated as actual collective farms or otherwise attempted to form a


new society with collectivist values and institutions. The majority drew their inspiration from the individualism of the family-size farm. Quite obviously, as Conkin points out, not all resettlement projects were organized as communities, but neither did every community make a "conscious break with individualism." 47

The most important question is how many resettlement projects were based on the family-farm type of agriculture. In 1943, Joseph W. Eaton, head of the Rural Settlement Institute of Chicago, published a study of the FSA's "co-operative group farms," which he defined as "an association of members of farm families who operate jointly a large scale farming enterprise and who equitably share the returns of their group effort." According to Eaton, there were twenty-seven such communities; for the remaining projects, "the traditional family farm pattern" was the predominant type of organization. 48 The same year, C. B. Baldwin, Alexander's successor as Farm Security Administrator, speaking before the Senate Committee on Appropriations, stated that his agency had managed 195 projects, including only

47 Ibid., p.

48 Joseph W. Eaton, Exploring Tomorrow's Agriculture (New York and London, 1943), 66, 67, 62. Eaton wrote, "All except about 750 full-time farm families resettled by the FSA are on family farm units. The 750, or 2 per cent, who do not conform to this traditional pattern are settled on co-operative corporation farms. . . ." Page 42.
thirteen cooperative farm communities. "Over 97 per cent of the project units," he said, "are operated on an individual, family-farm basis."\textsuperscript{49} A. Whitney Griswold, in 1948, placed the number of "cooperative cooperation farms" at fifteen. "The great majority of the projects," he said, "consisted of groups of small, individually leased and operated family farms on government-owned tracts of land."\textsuperscript{50}

As generally defined, the family farm was a farm of forty to sixty acres on which one family, without hired help, could do all the work and earn an adequate income. The family farm began with the earliest settlements in North America; the sturdy yeoman, whose independence and individualism had supposedly helped make America great, had his roots in a small homestead. In the nineteenth century, Jefferson's dream of a republic of small independent freeholders became part of the Garden of the World myth. The Ordinance of 1785, the Premption Act of 1841, the Homestead Law of 1862, and the Federal Farm Loan Act of 1916 all favored individual ownership of small farms. In the 1930's, unemployed urban workers, hoping for a better life in pastoral surroundings

\textsuperscript{49}U. S. Senate, Agricultural Subcommittee on the Committee on Appropriations, \textit{Hearings on the Agricultural Appropriations Bill for 1944}, 78th Cong., 1st Sess., 1943, pp. 624, 630.

\textsuperscript{50}A. Whitney Griswold, \textit{Farming and Democracy} (New York, 1948), 167; see Richard S. Kirkendall, \textit{Social Scientists and Farm Politics in the Age of Roosevelt} (Columbia, Mo., 1966), 129.
than in dirty cities, drifted "back to the land" to look for subsistence plots. Most of all, farm tenants and sharecroppers were obsessed with the idea of owning their own land.51

Nothing was deeper rooted in the minds of American farmers than the mystique of private ownership of small family farms. With few exceptions, farm leaders in the Roosevelt Administration shared the enthusiasm, and they evoked it instinctively when discussing solutions for tenancy.52 Perhaps the strongest voice for the family farm within the New Deal was that of Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace. "I know of no better means of reconstructing our agriculture on a thoroughly sound and permanently desirable basis," wrote Wallace in 1935, "than to make as its foundation the family-size, owner-operated farm."53


M. L. Wilson, who after service in Subsistence Homesteads replaced Tugwell as Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, was another "deep believer in farm ownership by the family who operates the farm." The rapid increase of tenant farmers during the past half century," said President Roosevelt himself in 1936, "is significant evidence that we have fallen far short of achieving the traditional American ideal of owner-operated farms." The reports of the President's Special Committee on Farm Tenancy and the Arkansas Farm Tenancy Commission, while aware of the complexity of rural poverty and the limitations of any one solution, both assumed that ownership of family farms was the basic answer to the problem of tenancy. The Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937 primarily sought to reestablish a Jeffersonian pattern of small farms tilled by their owners. Finally, the Farm Security Administration stressed cooperative enterprises and long-term leases, not because of any philosophical distaste for competitive individualism or traditional land tenure policy, but to help groups of small farmers operate with the efficiency and security of large commercial farmers.


55 Franklin D. Roosevelt to Henry A. Wallace, November 16, 1936, in Farm Tenancy: Report of the President's Committee, 25.

56 Ibid., 12, 13; Arkansas Gazette, December 13, 1936.

57 Alexander, "Rural Resettlement," 536; Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 189.
On the other hand, the cooperative projects differed radically from the traditional family farm. The cooperative farming movement in the New Deal centered around Rexford G. Tugwell, Wallace's Under Secretary of Agriculture and Resettlement Administrator. A critic of competition and individualism in American economic life, Tugwell questioned the agrarian devotion to the family farm. In an economy based on large-scale units, he argued, the independent family farm was an anachronism. The rise of commercial agriculture employing tractors and other farm technology on hundreds of acres had outdated the forty-acre, one-horse farm. Above all, Tugwell envisioned a future based on economic planning and cooperation, and the depression gave him an opportunity to put his ideas to work. As RA chief, his job was primarily resettlement—taking farmers off worn out land and resettling them on good land where with the proper help they could make a new start. But Tugwell believed that rural resettlement would work best on large community-type projects stressing mechanized farming and cooperative organization.58

While Resettlement Administrator, Tugwell approached the problem of rural poverty with the conviction that security was a better goal for tenants than ownership. Anxious to

58 Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 149, 159, 160; Schlesinger, The Coming of the New Deal, 369-71; Kirkendall, Social Scientists and Farm Politics, 112, 113; Bernard Sternsher, Rexford Tugwell and the New Deal (New Brunswick, N. J., 1964), 265-68.
attack poverty as its sources, he argued that ownership could be just as bad as tenancy. "One trouble with tenancy is landlordism," wrote Tugwell in 1937, and "one trouble with ownership is the mortgage." Small owners were no better off than tenants, he contended, if they carry the weight of mortgage, high interest rates, and face foreclosure. What they needed more than immediate ownership was health care, better diets, clothes, livestock, seed, fertilizer, and competent supervision.

Like Tugwell, the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union disagreed with the "farms for tenants" slogan. The union complained that the Bankhead-Jones Act pointed backward and not forward, leading toward a subsidized peasantry in America. Representing the union's views, W. L. Blackstone, member of the President's Committee on Farm Tenancy, filed a minority report urging that the Federal Government stress cooperative farming communities as a realistic alternative to small homesteads. Although the committee was sufficiently impressed to suggest their initiation "on an experimental scale," this approach was well outside the framework of agricultural


60"A Statement Concerning Farm Tenancy Submitted to the Governor's Commission on Farm Tenancy by the Executive Council, Southern Tenant Farmers' Union," c. 1936, Socialist Party of America Papers, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.
orthodoxy. The New Deal community program would never fully satisfy STFU demands; instead, most resettlement projects were based on the family farm ideal.

61 Farm Tenancy: Report of the President's Committee.
Rexford G. Tugwell set up eleven regional offices to supervise the field activities of the Resettlement Administration. He created Region Six out of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, three states with similarities that made them a natural unit. Covering 144,296 square miles of land area, the region virtually dominated the lower Mississippi River valley. The alluvial delta soil and a favorable climate made Region Six potentially one of the most wealthy agricultural sections in the nation, but much of the rural population in 1935 was living at or below poverty levels. The three states of the region suffered from the characteristic agricultural problems of the South: the prevalence of tenancy, an excessive reliance on cotton, a large number of Negroes at the bottom of the economic ladder, and extensive absentee ownership of farm land. Farm tenancy was perhaps the most serious social and economic problem directly affecting the region's farmers. Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas ranked first, third, and sixth, respectively, in the national farm tenancy rate. By 1935, there were 477,700
farm tenants in the region compared to 255,206 farm owners; almost two out of every three farms in the region were tenants.¹

Mississippi was the most agricultural state in Region Six. In 1930, almost sixty-eight per cent of the total population lived on farms, and more people were gainfully employed in agriculture than in all other occupations combined.² Cotton production was the state's major agricultural enterprise, contributing from seventy-five to eighty per cent of the gross farm income. The Mississippi and Yazoo River deltas were the most intensive cotton farming areas. Where cotton was secondary, farmers relied on fruit, vegetable, and livestock production. Mississippi had the highest rate of farm tenancy not only in Region Six but in the nation. About three out of every four Mississippi farmers did not own the land they farmed, and nearly half were sharecroppers who owned neither land nor equipment. Out of a total of 311,683 farmers, Mississippi had only 93,224 farm owners in 1935. Mississippi was the only state in the region with more Negro farmers than white; in 1935, there were 169,006 Negro farmers in the state, and of these 147,693 were


tenants. By contrast, only 69,871 out of 142,677 white farmers were tenants.  

Economically, Louisiana was the most diversified of the three states, possessing the largest non-farm population and the only major metropolitan center (New Orleans) in Region Six. More Louisiana people worked at non-farm occupations than did citizens of the other states. In 1930, only about forty per cent of the total population lived on farms; about a third of the total land area of Louisiana was in farms compared to two-thirds in Mississippi and a half in Arkansas. Except for New Orleans, however, Louisiana was still largely rural in the 1930's. Cotton was the principal cash crop of Louisiana farmers, especially in the fertile bottomlands along the Mississippi and Red rivers. Grown as a feed crop, corn was second in importance. The sugar cane industry centered in the south central part of the state and rice in the southwest. The fourteen parishes bordering the Gulf of Mexico produced the major portion of the United States sugar cane crop. Farm tenancy in Louisiana was only slightly less prevalent than in Mississippi; nearly two out of three Louisiana farms were tenant-operated. Negroes accounted for more than half of the tenants and over three-fifths of all sharecroppers in the state. In most delta

\[3\text{Resettlement Administration, Information for Prospective New Farmers in the State of Mississippi, Resettlement Information Service Bulletin No. 10 (Washington, 1937), 1-3; Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1939, p. 623.}\]
parishes, Negroes predominated in the farm population and, in certain northeastern sections, comprised nearly four-fifths of the total. ⁴

Unlike Mississippi and Louisiana, Arkansas possessed large areas of mountainous country, the Ouachita and Ozark ranges, that were poorly suited for farming. Additionally, much of the land in Arkansas was in forest, with lumber and wood-products the major non-agricultural industries in the state. But like the other states, Arkansas agriculture was primarily based on cotton production; cotton was the major cash crop in sixty-two out of the seventy counties, although farmers also engaged in commercial production of certain grains, forage, and livestock. In the Mississippi and Arkansas river bottoms along the entire eastern side of the state, cotton was the primary source of income on more than ninety per cent of all farms. The prevalence of tenancy was characteristic of Arkansas cotton regions. Tenants operated about sixty per cent of all farms in Arkansas, and in some delta counties farm tenancy was as high as seventy to ninety per cent. In the Red River delta and the southern part of the Mississippi River delta, most of the croppers and tenants were Negroes; however, in the delta north of the southern boundary of Tennessee, there were many areas with a higher

proportion of white tenants.\textsuperscript{5}

Although Region Six contained some of the richest farm land in the United States, the high rate of tenancy was due in part to a lack of opportunities for ownership. Large planters and absentee landlords held much of the more fertile land in large units, and they were rarely willing to break their large holdings into small farms to be sold to individual farmers. The amount of land actually under cultivation was relatively small in all three states, but the presence of millions of acres of land not used for agriculture did not suggest many opportunities for new farmers. In Region Six, most of the vast acreage of undeveloped land was not suitable for growing crops because of unproductive soil, rough topography, erosion, poor drainage, or floodings. About 22.4 million acres in Mississippi and two-thirds of Louisiana were in cut-over land, forest, pasture, swamp; and in Arkansas much of the land area consisted of forest or mountainous terrain.\textsuperscript{6}

In 1937, the Resettlement Administration published three bulletins for "prospective new farmers" in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, stressing that ownership was

\textsuperscript{5}Resettlement Administration, \textit{Information for Prospective New Farmers in the State of Arkansas}, Resettlement Information Service Bulletin No. 9 (Washington, 1937), 7.

\textsuperscript{6}Resettlement Administration, Region Six Annual Report As of December 31, 1936, Record Group 96, Records of the Farmers' Home Administration, National Archives (to be cited hereafter as R.G. 96, National Archives).
becoming more difficult for farmers of limited means. The initial investment needed to set up a farm in Region Six was prohibitive for most small farmers. According to Resettlement Administration farm management studies, sixty acres was the minimum size which should have been considered for a family farm in the cotton areas of Region Six. During the mid-1930's, the current selling price for improved farm land was between forty-five and seventy dollars per acre in Mississippi and between thirty-five and fifty dollars in Arkansas and Louisiana. So for land alone, a sixty-acre farm meant an investment of $3,000 to $4,000 in Mississippi and $2,500 to $3,000 in Arkansas and Louisiana, dependent upon location, productivity, and number of cleared acres. In Louisiana, sugar cane land was selling for forty to seventy-five dollars per acre; and since about thirty-five acres of cane land was needed to support a family, there was no substantial difference in cost between farms in sugar cane and cotton areas. (A small farmer could buy undeveloped land for twelve to fifteen dollars per acre, but it was less productive, and the cost of clearing the land drove the price back up to around fifty dollars per acre.) To build a small cottage and the minimum of farm buildings and to buy the necessary livestock and equipment required an additional

7 See Footnotes 3, 4, and 5.

8 Information for Prospective New Farmers in the State of Louisiana, 18-21.
investment of $1,500 to $2,000, probably more. Thus RA experts estimated that the total investment for a family farm would run between $4,000 and $5,000. This price was far beyond the means of croppers and share tenants or even most cash tenants. 9

II

The Division of Subsistence Homesteads and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration began resettling low-income farmers in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi two years before the three states became Region Six. To carry on their community building programs, both agencies set up relatively simple administrative structures, compared to that used by the Resettlement Administration. Under M. S. Wilson, a series of homestead corporations organized on each project became the action arms of the Division or Subsistence Homesteads. The local corporations possessed full authority to own property, enter into contracts, borrow money, construct the homesteads, and manage the completed project. 10 Shortly before Wilson left Subsistence Homesteads in 1934, however, a Federal Subsistence Homesteads Corporation assumed complete

9Ibid., 8, 9; Information for Prospective New Farmers in the State of Mississippi, 6, 7; Information for Prospective New Farmers in the State of Arkansas, 24-26.

control over the local corporations. The Rural Rehabilitation Division of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration distributed its funds through state rural rehabilitation corporations. Operating under the state Emergency Relief Administration, each state corporation dealt directly with distressed farmers and enjoyed a wide latitude in handling its own rural relief work; some states, for example, chose not to undertake a community building program at all.11

The Division of Subsistence Homesteads made plans to establish industrial-type projects in all three Region Six states. The subsistence homesteads program in Louisiana never got off the ground. Although Bossier City was considered, Morehouse Homesteads near Bastrop was the only Louisiana project ever to receive approval.12 By contrast, the Arkansas program was more ambitious and seemed to have a promising future. Glenn E. Riddell, secretary of the Arkansas State Housing Board, worked closely with Bruce Melvin of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads to locate homesteads in the state. "In general," Melvin wrote Riddell in 1933, "we are trying to establish projects near industrial

11Ibid., 134-36.

centers where people may receive part-time employment."  

While touring Arkansas in February, 1934, Melvin showed interest in the homestead possibilities of Fort Smith, West Helena, Camden, Huttig, Warren, and Pine Bluff. In March, the Division approved plans for Fort Smith, West Helena, and Camden. The Division of Subsistence Homesteads allotted about $317,500 for the four Arkansas and Louisiana projects, but spent a total of only $108 before transferring them to the Resettlement Administration.

Mississippi was the only state in the region where the subsistence homestead program paid off. In December, 1933, the Division approved five industrial-type homestead projects near McComb, Laurel, Tupelo, Meridian, and a full-time farming project near Richton, Mississippi; in January, 1934, it gave approval for another industrial-type project at Hattiesburg. The industrial projects each contained

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13 Bruce L. Melvin to Glenn E. Riddell, November 17, 1933, R. G. 96, National Archives.

14 Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), February 26, 1934; Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), February 22, 1934.

15 Glenn E. Riddell to Bruce L. Melvin, March 1, 1934 (two letters), March 7, 1934, April 9, 1934, R. G. 96, National Archives; U. S. Department of the Interior, Division of Subsistence Homesteads, Monthly Project Report, April 26, 1935, ibid.; Resettlement Administration, First Annual Report, 144. The abandonment of the Arkansas subsistence Homesteads was reported in Arkansas Gazette, January 7, 1936.

twenty to twenty-five homesteads located on five-acre tracts; they were designed to give families an opportunity to farm and to work part time in factory jobs. By the end of 1934, construction had begun on all but Laurel and Richton. When the Resettlement Administration took over the subsistence homesteads program in 1935, Tugwell reconsidered the Division's plans for Fort Smith, West Helena, Camden, Bossier City, Bastrop, and Laurel. The RA's Management Division took over the projects near or actually under construction: Tupelo, Meridian, McComb, Hattiesburg, and Richton. The RA completed the latter projects but dropped the others.\(^7\)

The Federal Emergency Relief Administration did not undertake a comprehensive program of community building in any Region Six states. The Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation began construction work on only one project during the lifetime of the FERA. In 1934 W. R. Dyess, Emergency Relief Administrator of Arkansas, conceived the idea of building an agricultural community as a means of getting relief clients "back to the soil." Under his supervision, the Arkansas RR Corporation acquired 17,500 acres of wilderness and swamp land near Wilson in Mississippi County, divided it into 500 units of about twenty acres each, and

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\(^7\)The Resettlement Administration and Its Work, September 10, 1935, Official File 1568, Box 1, FDRL; Thomas H. Hibben, Memorandum to R. G. Tugwell, June 29, 1935, R. G. 96, National Archives; R. G. Tugwell, Memorandum to John S. Lansill, July 10, 1935, ibid.; Tugwell, Memorandum to Harry L. Hopkins, July 18, 1935, ibid.; Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, ill.
built a community center complete with post office, cafe, stores, school, hospital, and cotton gin. Dyess colony, as it was named after its founder's death in an air crash, was the largest of all New Deal farming communities.  

Under Resettlement Administration control after 1936, the Arkansas RR Corporation went on to develop other large tracts of land it held under lease or had purchased with its trust fund. In 1935 and 1936, the corporation developed St. Francis River Farms and Trumann Farms, both located in Poinsett County, the home of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. The two projects together consisted of 6,195 acres of land divided into 143 units to enable tenant farmers to become owners of family-type farms. The Arkansas corporation owned two projects in the southeastern part of the state, Chicot Farms in Chicot and Drew counties and Kelso Farms in Desha County, which it leased to the War Relocation Authority for use as a Japanese relocation center during World War II. Chicot, the second largest community project in the region, covered 13,781 acres broken up into 241 family farm units and included the entire town of Jerome, Arkansas. Kelso was not developed as a farming project before being turned over to the WRA. Central Arkansas Valley Farms consisted of

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18 Arkansas Emergency Relief Administration, Traveling Recovery Road: The Story Of Relief, Work-Relief, and Rehabilitation in Arkansas, August 30, 1932 to November 15, 1936 (Little Rock, 1936), 153-57; Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 137, 138.
eighty-five individual farm units widely scattered throughout nine counties in northern Arkansas. The Mississippi Rural Rehabilitation Corporation purchased 5,404 acres of land for Hinds Farms near Terry, Mississippi, but the RA and FSA developed the project. The Louisiana RR Corporation operated the Terrebonne project near Schriever for two years (1937-1938) but never initiated any resettlement projects of its own.19

III

In 1935, the Resettlement Administration brought new enthusiasm and new direction to a New Deal resettlement program that was beginning to stall in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Under Tugwell, the RA set up a decentralized administrative structure with major control of resettlement and rural rehabilitation in the hands of regional offices.20 Tugwell originally planned to have two directors in each

19Resettlement Administration, Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Division, Annual Report 1936, December 30, 1936, R. G. 96, National Archives; Resettlement Administration, Yearly Report of the Custodian of Corporations Division [December, 1936], ibid.; Select Committee of the House Committee on Agriculture, Hearings on the Farm Security Administration, 78 Cong., 1 Sess., 1943-1944, pp. 1038-49, 1071-75; U. S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Security Administration, "Resettlement Projects, Land and Source of Acquisition, Also Status of Unit Development, Vendor, Acreage and Number of Units Developed or Undeveloped, Region Six," January 1, 1941, mimeographed, R. G. 96, National Archives; Philip B. Fleming, Memorandum for Edwin G. Arnold, January 19, 1937, ibid.  

20Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 155.
region, each with complete authority over their respective divisions, but together constituting the regional leadership. For Region Six, he selected T. Roy Reid to direct rural rehabilitation and resettlement, and Buford M. Gile to handle the land utilization program. Reid assumed responsibility for the rural relief work of the FERA, the state rural rehabilitation corporations, and the subsistence homesteads program in the three states. Gile, who was already working in the field of land use as head of the Land Policy Section of the AAA's Division of Planning, merely transferred his activities into the Resettlement Administration's regional office. But Tugwell dropped this dual arrangement in November, 1935, and designated Reid as regional director in charge of both land utilization and rural resettlement and rehabilitation; Gile stayed on as assistant regional director.

From the beginning, Reid had had the primary task of setting up the entire administrative organization of Region Six from the regional office down through state, district, and

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T. Roy Reid possessed a broad background of educational and agricultural experience. He was born on a farm in Greenville County, South Carolina. Deciding not to become a farmer himself, he attended Clemson College for his undergraduate education and went on to the University of Wisconsin for a Master of Science in agriculture. Reid started out as a teacher; he gained experience teaching in rural schools before and during his college years. From 1912 to 1913, he taught science and economics at Clinton College, Clinton, Kentucky; and from 1913 to 1917, he taught agriculture at Arkansas A&M College at Monticello. At the time of his appointment as regional director of the Resettlement Administration, he was serving as assistant director of the Arkansas Extension Service. His connection with extension work dated back to 1917, when he served a year as county agent in Drew County. In 1918, he joined the state extension in Little Rock as assistant agent in 4-H Club work and later became a specialist in livestock and marketing. Reid became assistant director in 1923. Prior to 1935, he had taken an active part in New Deal programs by serving on the board of directors of the Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation and as AAA director in Arkansas. In 1941, when he went to

23 Rexford G. Tugwell to B. M. Gile (telegram), November 15, 1935, ibid.; Carl C. Taylor to Harry Wise, July 26, 1935, ibid.
Washington to serve as special assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture, A. D. Stewart took his place as regional director.\(^2^4\)

Taking a year's leave of absence from the Arkansas Extension Service (he later resigned), Reid stepped into his new job on July 1, 1935. No announcement had been made, however, about the location of the regional office. The \textit{Arkansas Gazette} expected Fayetteville to be chosen.\(^2^5\)

Fayetteville, after all, already claimed the regional office of the AAA's Land Policy Section, the Extension Service, and the College of Agriculture. But on July 17, Carl C. Taylor, head of the Resettlement Division in Washington, wired Reid to establish in Little Rock both his own headquarters and the offices of the three state directors for Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas.\(^2^6\) Lessie S. Read, editor of the \textit{Fayetteville Daily Democrat} (in his words, "an original Roosevelt and pro-administration [and] anti-Long newspaper"), warned Tugwell that this decision would lose support for the


\(^2^5\)\textit{Arkansas Gazette}, July 2, July 3, 1935.

Roosevelt administration since it came at a time when W. H. "Coin" Harvey was opening a Huey Long Headquarters near Fayetteville. Dan T. Gray, dean of the College of Agriculture at the University of Arkansas and Director of the Extension Service, also regretted the move to Little Rock; he wanted the regional office located at his own institution. Probably the Resettlement Administration turned Fayetteville down because northwestern Arkansas was rather inaccessible from the rest of the state and from the entire region, and because Little Rock would be closer to most resettlement projects and other activities. Another reason may have been that Reid made his home in Little Rock.

The regional office was a kaleidoscope of shifting organization. Following the pattern of the Washington office, Reid divided his staff into a series of co-ordinate divisions: rural resettlement, land utilization, management, finance, personnel, information, business management, legal, and labor relations. The actions divisions, however, were land utilization, rural resettlement, and management. B. M. Gile's Land Utilization Division consisted of a project planning section, a land acquisition section, farm development,
and project development sections.\textsuperscript{30} For regional chief of rural resettlement, Reid chose E. B. Whitaker, formerly head of the FERA's Rural Rehabilitation Division in Arkansas. Whitaker's division, the largest in the region, not only had the biggest budget, it was also the one about which the general public knew most.\textsuperscript{31} Besides the resettlement program itself, the Rural Resettlement Division originally included all rural rehabilitation work, a community and cooperative staff, and a farm debt adjustment section. The Management Division chief was James B. Lawson, a transfer from the Mississippi subsistence homesteads program, where he had developed Tupelo.\textsuperscript{32}

In 1936, Reid created three assistant directorships to take charge of the growing resettlement, rehabilitation, and management programs. He gave rural rehabilitation full divisional status in recognition of its importance, naming T. P. Lee division chief. Rehabilitation embodied the RA's rural relief work with loans to individuals and cooperative groups, farm debt adjustment, home and farm management work, and later the FSA's new tenant purchase program. Whitaker's Resettlement Division now supervised all projects, both land

\textsuperscript{30}Warren Bruner to James H. Wells, October 30, 1935, R. G. 96, National Archives.

\textsuperscript{31}Resettlement Administration, Annual Report Region VI As of December 31, 1936, \textit{ibid}.

\textsuperscript{32}E. E. Agger, Memorandum to Will W. Alexander, October 18, 1935, \textit{ibid}.
use and rural resettlement, and handled most of its own
development work, including architecture and engineering,
land analysis, surveys, and purchase, and project construc-
tion. In Management, Lawson was responsible to the regional
director for managing the completed projects, collecting rent,
maintaining the property, and for such social service func-
tions as family selection. This organization remained
essentially the same under the Farm Security Administra-
tion.33

Next to Reid, E. B. Whitaker became the most important
man in the regional office. He was a native of Mississippi
and a graduate of Mississippi State College at Starkville.
He did graduate work in agriculture at the University of
Wisconsin, but never earned a graduate degree. Like Reid,
He was with the Arkansas Extension Service when he went into
federal employment. In 1934, W. R. Dyess made him director
of rural relief. In the Resettlement Administration,
Whitaker started out as state director of rural resettlement
for Arkansas and in rapid order became regional chief of the
Rural Rehabilitation Division and then assistant regional
director in charge of resettlement.34 As the process of

33Resettlement Administration, Annual Report Region
Six As of December 31, 1936, ibid.; Region Organization
Chart, M.A., ibid.; George S. Mitchell to T. Roy Reid, May 9,
1939, ibid.

34E. B. Whitaker, interview with the author, January
19, 1968; James H. Wells to Warren Bruner, October 9, 1935,
R. G. 96, National Archives.
expansion, consolidation, and musical chairs continued in
the regional office, Reid tended to rely more and more on
Whitaker's ability as an administrator. In 1937, he combined
the Resettlement and Management divisions under Whitaker; in
1938, Reid returned to Whitaker most of the responsibilities
he had had in his original Rural Resettlement Division. The
purpose of these moves seems to have been for Whitaker to
take control of all phases of the regional resettlement pro­
gram. In May, 1940, Whitaker became assistant regional
director without special designation but in direct charge of
resettlement, farm management, home management, cooperative
services, and community and family services. More than any
other one man, he was the resettlement program in Region Six.

In addition to regional headquarters at Little Rock,
the Resettlement Administration maintained offices on state,
district, county, and project levels. When Carl Taylor
notified Reid of the Little Rock decision, he also issued
instructions for "completely regionalizing the three states
of region six." Reid was to arrange office space at Little

35E. B. Whitaker, interview with the author, January
19, 1968; Reid to Will W. Alexander, February 17, 1937, R. G.
96, National Archives; Reid to Alexander, March 31, 1938,
ibid.; Lewis E. Long to E. R. Henson, August 7, 1937, ibid.

36T. Roy Reid to Will W. Alexander, May 25, 1940, ibid.;
Resettlement Administration, Region Six, Quarterly Report,
July-September, 1940, ibid.

37Carl C. Taylor to T. Roy Reid (telegram), July 17,
Rock, Arkansas. "RRA KEPT OUT OF LONG'S CLUTCHES," declared the Gazette headline. 38 Throughout the summer of 1935, Senator Huey P. Long had been engaged in a running battle with the Roosevelt administration, including especially Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes. Long wanted to control all federal money spent in Louisiana and had rammed bills through the state legislature at Baton Rouge to accomplish this purpose. In response, Ickes threatened to stop all PWA work in Louisiana; and in July, about the time Taylor informed Reid of the location of Region Six headquarters, Ickes did so, ruling out any future projects unless state laws regulating the expenditure of federal funds were repealed. 39 When asked, Reid declined to comment on the reason for establishing the state offices in Little Rock. 40

The Resettlement Administration's thorough organization at the grass roots existed mainly to conduct the rehabilitation program, which involved extensive supervision of loan clients and educational work in every rural county in the region. The state offices for Louisiana and Mississippi were eventually moved out of Little Rock and located at New Orleans (later Alexandria) and Jackson. Each state office contained a rural rehabilitation director and his staff and

38Arkansas Gazette, July 22, 1935.


40Ibid., July 22, 1935.
later a state farm debt adjustment committee and an FSA advisory committee composed of important state leaders. The state directors and their offices were under close supervision from Little Rock and possessed no authority to take any initiative in policy matters. In all three states, there were four district offices, each covering a number of counties or parishes; the typical district office combined a district rehabilitation supervisor and a home management supervisor and their staffs. The county officers consisted of rehabilitation and home management supervisors, a county farm debt adjustment committee, a county rural rehabilitation committee, and later a county tenant purchase committee. Committee membership was made up of local citizens who helped make decisions about who should get loans or whose debts should be scaled down and by how much. The project officers handled the resettlement projects. The community or project manager reported directly to the regional office, skipping the county, district, and state offices.41

"The men placed at the head of these Resettlement Programs," wrote Mississippi State Senator James C. Rice in 1939, "are broken down Ford dealers, junk men, or airplane builders—or just anybody but someone who has actually made

a living out of farming."\textsuperscript{42} He was complaining because too many FSA employees, in his view, were book farmers with college degrees; this much, at least, was accurate. The most essential qualification for all supervisory positions was a degree in agriculture. Reid recruited most of the top personnel in both the regional and field offices from either the Extension Service or federal agencies. In 1935 and 1936, the highest officials of the regional office were on leave from the University of Arkansas' College of Agriculture.\textsuperscript{43} Many others came to the Resettlement Administration with the AAA's Land Policy Section, the FERA's state rural rehabilitation divisions, or the Division of Subsistence Homesteads.

Regional information chief George Wolf wrote in 1939, "We now have in the region 1,879 employees, making us by far the largest agricultural agency in the three states."\textsuperscript{44} Located on the fourth floor of the Donaghey Trust Building, the Little Rock office was the largest in the region. At first, the \textit{Gazette} reported plans for it to employ between seventy-five and eighty persons.\textsuperscript{45} At the end of 1937, the regional office contained 216 employees; by 1941, it had

\textsuperscript{42}James C. Rice to Theodore G. Bilbo, April 7, 1939, R. G. 96, National Archives.

\textsuperscript{43}Dan T. Gray to Raymond A. Pearson, April 20, 1936, \textit{ibid.}; \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, November 20, 1936.

\textsuperscript{44}Personnel Report, Region VI, December 31, 1939, R. G. 96, National Archives.

\textsuperscript{45}George Wolf to John Fischer, April 10, 1939, \textit{ibid.}
expanded to 559. Resettlement and Farm Security personnel went into every nook and cranny of the three states. In 1937, the FSA had 185 employees stationed in Louisiana, 285 in Mississippi, and 309 in Arkansas, based on the proportion of farms in each state compared to the entire region. In 1939, there were twelve district offices and 201 county offices with a combined total of 1,102 employees; 709 were rehabilitation and home management supervisors and 393 were clerks.

Reid ran a large and complex bureaucratic structure in Region Six, and he contended with the problems that plague any such organization. Some of his problems were mundane: acquiring more office space as his regional staff grew, keeping new employees supplied with appropriate government procedure manuals, or setting up a badly needed stenographic pool to handle the flood of paperwork. A more serious problem, however, was rivalry between the three states. In 1937, Congressman Overton Brooks of Louisiana inquired about current charges that his state was being

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46Arkansas Gazette, July 20, 1935.


48Baldwin to Brooks, December 2, 1937, ibid.

49T. Roy Reid to Division Heads and Section Chiefs, April 30, 1940, ibid.; James H. Wells to Warren Bruner, August 30, 1935, ibid.
discriminated against in favor of Mississippi and Arkansas.\textsuperscript{50} True, said assistant administrator C. B. Baldwin, Louisiana had only 23.7 per cent of all Region Six employees headquartered outside the Little Rock office; but the state, he reasoned, had only twenty-three per cent of the total farms in the region.\textsuperscript{51} In 1941, twenty per cent of the employees in the regional office itself were natives of Louisiana.\textsuperscript{52} Yet, evidence did exist to indicate discrimination at least in the resettlement program. When all community building stopped in 1941, Louisiana had only four resettlement projects compared to ten for Mississippi (including five subsistence homesteads) and sixteen for Arkansas. The amount of funds spent in Louisiana was similarly disproportioned.\textsuperscript{53}

Reid's more serious administrative problems included defining the authority of the regional office \textit{vis-à-vis} state, district, and county office, and wielding all parts of the three-state organization into a smooth and efficient

\textsuperscript{50}Overton Brooks to Will W. Alexander, October 5, 1937, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{51}C. B. Baldwin to Overton Brooks, December 2, 1937, \textit{ibid.} See Brooks to Alexander, October 5, 1937, \textit{ibid.;} A. D. Stewart to C. B. Baldwin, October 24, 1941, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{52}A. D. Stewart to C. B. Baldwin, August 20, 1941, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{53}Farm Security Administration, "Resettlement Projects," \textit{ibid.} Originally, there were a total of fifty-two resettlement projects proposed for Arkansas alone. E. B. Whitaker to T. Roy Reid, August 14, 1935, \textit{ibid.;} see Rexford G. Tugwell to William J. Driver, June 15, 1936, \textit{ibid.}
operation. "There is a lack of coordination," wrote Missis­sippi director George M. Reynolds in 1935, "both in the region and the state offices, which is due to the fact that there is no centralization of authority over the entire pro­gram, either in the region or the state." His solution was to abolish the dual regional directorship and to put the entire resettlement program in charge of one general regional director; however, he also favored giving state directors, like himself, the same power in their states as the regional director possessed in the region. Region Six's early diffi­culties, wrote two Washington officials, were "attributable in no small degree to the strong attitudes of state directors who desired to operate programs with little control from the regional office."^55

From 1936 to 1939, Reid considerably strengthened regional control; for example, he took the authority to approve loans and grants out of the state offices and placed it in the regional office. At the same time, he reduced state office functions to directing the work of district and county supervisors and managing the work of the state rural rehabilitation corporations (the office of regional Custodian of Corporations soon took away the latter function). In

^54George M. Reynolds to Will W. Alexander, November 15, 1935, ibid.

^55C. B. Baldwin and Robert W. Hudgens to Will W. Alexander, November 18, 1939, ibid.
addition, he concentrated in his assistant regional director Whitaker almost every activity related to resettlement, again preempting the authority of the state directors.56 Now there were complaints of too much centralization. In 1939, George S. Mitchell, trouble shooter for the Administrator's office, wrote Reid that "the extreme concentration of functions in your Assistant Regional Director is thought unwise." More authority should be delegated to community managers.57 Mercer G. Evans, another Washington representative, commented on "a tendency on the part of the regional office not to delegate authority and responsibility to subordinate field offices." This criticism applied especially "to the programs under Whitaker."58 John Fischer, Washington Information director, complained about the resettlement program in Region Six. "... [T]here is little written material available for reference in the regional office and ... Mr. Whitaker keeps most of the pertinent facts in his head."59

56Resettlement Administration, Region Six Annual Report As of December 31, 1936, ibid. See A. D. Stewart to C. B. Baldwin, August 18, 1941, ibid.

57George S. Mitchell to T. Roy Reid, May 9, 1939, ibid.

58Mercer G. Evans, Memorandum for George S. Mitchell, April 15, 1939, ibid.

59John Fischer, Memorandum to George S. Mitchell, April 6, 1939, ibid.
Reid quickly threw his organization into action against rural distress. During the eighteen months from July 1, 1935 to December 31, 1936, rural rehabilitation and land utilization activities had the largest impact on the region. By July, 1936, Region Six was leading all other eleven regions in rehabilitation loans with 45,497 low-income farm families borrowing $6,186,442. The Land Utilization Division had optioned 590,630 acres of land unfit for agriculture at a total purchase cost of $3,248,268, and had employed about 4,300 men to develop the land for forestry, pasture, game refuges, and recreation. This effort also led the nation.  

During the same period, Reid launched the resettlement program, but none of the projects initiated by the Resettlement Administration in Region Six were completed until 1937. By December, 1936, Whitaker had plans for eighteen resettlement projects, sixteen active projects and two on which activity had already been suspended. According to early estimates, these projects would ultimately resettle 2,574 farm families and cost about $4,110,000.  

60 Times-Picayune (New Orleans), June 23, 1937; Madison Journal (Tallulah, Louisiana), July 3, 1936; Rexford G. Tugwell to T. Roy Reid, February 2, 1937, R. G. 96, National Archives.

61 Resettlement Administration, Annual Report of Assistant Regional Director, in Charge of Rural Resettlement [E. B. Whitaker], ibid.
resettlement program involved months and months of detailed planning on the part of most divisions and sections in the regional office. The Management Division, for example, took over the unfinished work of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads and began preparations for transferring four Mississippi projects to local homestead associations (Richton had to be developed from scratch). Management also began investigating and selecting families for occupancy on both inherited and new community projects.\(^{62}\) (At this time, family selection was the only function the RA assumed at Dyess colony; the WPA managed the project until 1939 and then turned it over to the Farm Security Administration.)

At the end of 1936, the Land Acquisition Unit of the Land Utilization Division had appraised 419,225.76 acres in Region Six for resettlement purposes.\(^{63}\) The Architectural and Engineering staff's field survey teams began marking out boundaries and subdivisions at project sites and locating future roads, bridges, and drainage ditches. Their job also included preparation of all blueprints and sketches, building specifications, and estimated costs for forwarding to Washington.\(^{64}\) As 1936 closed, the Construction Division was

\(^{62}\)Region Six Management Division, News Letter, July 1, 1935 to January 1, 1937, Region Six, \textit{ibid.}

\(^{63}\)Region VI Progress Report, Land Utilization Division, Period ending December 31, 1936, \textit{ibid.}

\(^{64}\)Report of the Architectural and Engineering Staff, Region VI, July 1, 1935—December 31, 1936, \textit{ibid.}\)
just beginning work on the first resettlement projects in Arkansas.65

Between November, 1935, and February, 1936, the Resettlement Administration gave approval for all resettlement projects it initiated in Region Six.66 After 1937, the Farm Security Administration continued the resettlement program but barely finished many projects before having to start their liquidation. No two projects were exactly alike, but they all had basic similarities. Some were agricultural communities formed by breaking up one or more large plantations; others consisted of single, isolated farms or clusters of farms scattered throughout several counties. Some were Negro projects, others were for whites only, and still others were mixed, though always the races lived separately. Most projects centered around a cooperative association which subleased land to its members in family-size units for individual operation. What gave unity to the overall resettlement program in Region Six was this emphasis on the family farm. When project construction ended in the region, Whitaker

65Resettlement Administration, Construction Division, Progress Report for Projects in Development and Planning, July 1, 1936 to August 1, 1936, ibid.; Resettlement Administration, Region VI Annual Report, As of December 31, 1936, ibid.; Rexford G. Tugwell to T. Roy Reid, February 2, 1937, ibid.

66Farm Security Administration, "Resettlement Projects," ibid.; Resettlement Administration, Annual Report of Assistant Regional Director in Charge of Rural Resettlement, July 1, 1935 to December 31, 1936, ibid.
had charge of a total of thirty resettlement projects. Two communities and part of another broke with tradition and experimented with communal farming. But the remaining twenty-eight projects were all based on the family farm ideal. By 1940, there were about 175 families living on the cooperative projects, but about 2,500 families occupied projects where they had a chance to become owners of their own farms. Essentially, the rural resettlement program in Region Six sought to stabilize tenancy by taking low-income farmers off poor land and helping them get a new start as independent farmers with better land. The Region Six projects reflected the same overwhelming emphasis on the family farm that existed nationally in the community program.

Since projects were developed as funds became available from Washington, Whitaker had construction in progress constantly from 1936 to 1940. In 1935, Tugwell gave approval for work to start as early as possible on five projects: Plum Bayou, Lakeview, and three farm tenant security projects. Plum Bayou, an agricultural community type project near Wright, Arkansas, was the first Resettlement Administration project to be completed in the United States. In 1935 and 1936, the RA purchased 9,854 acres of river bottom land in Jefferson and Arkansas counties and divided it into 200 farm units averaging forty-two acres each. Plum Bayou's primary

67 Farm Security Administration, "Resettlement Projects," ibid.
purpose, as a Gazette editorial noted, was "to demonstrate the feasibility of land ownership by young farmers and young farm wives following a 'live at home' program."\(^6^8\) A cooperative association provided such community services as a general merchandise store, repair shop, feed mill, cotton gin, livestock breeding, and heavy equipment. But every Plum Bayou farmer did his own farming and owned his own land. At Lakeview, an 8,163-acre project in Phillips and Lee counties in eastern Arkansas, the RA developed 142 units for Negro sharecroppers and farm laborers. The Camden and West Helena subsistence homesteads were to be for Negroes, but they never got beyond the planning stage.\(^6^9\) The Resettlement Administration was the first community-building agency to show effective concern for Negro farmers in Region Six.

In contrast to Plum Bayou and Lakeview, the RA undertook three "farm tenant security" projects, one in each of the three states. These differed from the community projects since they resettled farm families on units scattered or infiltrated into existing farming districts, although some tracts were large enough in themselves to become separate communities. The Louisiana Farm Tenant Security project, for example, consisted of nineteen tracts of land totaling 7,165 acres; fourteen tracts each contained eight units or

\(^6^8\)Arkansas Gazette, November 20, 1936.

\(^6^9\)Glenn E. Riddell to Bruce L. Melvin, March 1, 1934, R. G. 96, National Archives.
less, but one tract, the Millsaps plantation at Crew Lake in Richland Parish, contained 2,947 acres. Thus the farm tenant security projects shared features of both the community projects and the Bankhead-Jones tenant purchase program. The Crew Lake community closely resembled Transylvania or Mounds, but the development of most of the other units did not differ essentially from the tenant purchase units.70

Lake Dick, Terrebonne, and Marcella were the only projects in Region Six which ran counter to the traditional pattern of individually-owned family farms.71 The Lake Dick project near Altheimer, Jefferson County, Arkansas, consisted of 4,529 acres of sandy loam and buckshot soil lying in a basin between the Mississippi and Arkansas rivers. At Lake Dick, the Resettlement Administration experimented with a pattern common in European agriculture where farmers lived in villages and went out to work in surrounding fields. The Lake Dick homes and most of the community and cooperative buildings formed a village around the banks of a horseshoe-shaped lake in the middle of the project. A cooperative association, Lake Dick Farm, Inc., rented the land and facilities from the FSA and carried on the farming operations;

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70 Hearings on the Farm Security Administration, 1062; Farm Security Administration, "Resettlement Projects," R. G. 96, National Archives.
through membership in the association, the project families collectively "owned" the land, their homes, the community center, school, cooperative store, dairy, cotton gin, and barns. As individuals, they owned only their "children and chickens." Members worked as day laborers for wages paid at the end of each week and shared annually in the associations' profits (if any) on a patronage basis. They received their homes and garden plots rent free. In 1939, the FSA developed four sugar cane plantations in Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana, into one large collective farm of seventy families. At Terrebonne, each farmer rented a six-acre homestead unit; his home occupied two acres, but he could use the other four to grow food for his family's own use or for sale as supplemental income. Despite plans for cooperative ownership, the FSA divided Terrebonne into forty-acre units, perhaps an indication of growing doubt about the practicality of cooperative farming. Less important, the Marcella project was a 2,686-acre collective farm in Holmes County, Mississippi, but it never had an independent existence. Marcella was part of Mileston Farms, the only project in Region Six that the FSA was solely responsible for initiating, planning, and developing. Constructed in


73 Item-Tribune (New Orleans), June 25, 1939.
1939 and 1940, Mileston was a community type project of 9,350 acres and 106 units, only thirty-six of which were operated collectively.74

Beginning about 1938, Whitaker launched a final round of project building. Most of the early projects had been located in Arkansas, but now Louisiana and Mississippi received more attention.75 Transylvania Farms, in East Carroll Parish, was a 10,725-acre community type project designed to provide 160 low-income farm families in the Louisiana delta with family-type farms and a chance to obtain an adequate living. In 1938, Transylvania Association, Inc., taking a ninety-nine-year lease on the land, developed the project with funds borrowed from the government. Whitaker created the Mounds project nearby because the Transylvania purchase had displaced many Negro families. He purchased an additional 11,896 acres in East Carroll and Madison parishes and developed the land into 145 family-type farms. The Mounds project did not differ at all from Transylvania except in the color of the clients.

Except for Transylvania, Mounds, and Terrebonne, the Farm Security Administration's late projects were somewhat

74 Eaton, Exploring Tomorrow's Agriculture, 142, 1515; Hearings on the Farm Security Administration, 1072, 1073; Farm Security Administration, "Resettlement Projects," R. G. 96, National Archives.

75 T. Roy Reid to the Employees of the Farm Security Administration in Region Six, July 6, 1938, ibid.
more improvised than those well underway by 1936 or 1937. The FSA, for example, developed Northwest Arkansas Farms in Benton and Washington counties to provide farms for families being displaced from submarginal purchase areas in the Ozarks. Northeast Mississippi Farms—an infiltration type project covering Choctaw, Clay, Kemper, Lowndes, Noxubee, Oktibbeha, and Winston counties—offered opportunity for similar families in the north Mississippi hills. The FSA inherited 5,744 acres of cut-over land in George and Green counties, Mississippi, built a community center and other facilities at Lucedale, and developed ninety-three family-type farms. Unlike most resettlement projects, Lucedale relied on income from truck crops, grain, and livestock. In 1939, the Farm Security Administration created five separate projects out of land originally purchased for an older project known as Arkansas Delta Farms.76 Biscoe, Clover Bend, and Lonoke were for white families; Desha and Townes were for Negroes. These were essentially infiltration type projects, but they differed from the farm tenant security projects by utilizing larger tracts of land. They actually included many plantations of 1,000 or more acres scattered throughout the delta. The total project acreage usually ran from 3,000 to 5,000 acres and contained between fifty and 100 units. Since they were developed late, they

76T. Roy Reid to Will W. Alexander, May 17, 1939, ibid.
did not always have the variety of community facilities characteristic of early projects.77

Despite differences among the projects, the resettlement program possessed a basic continuity, especially after 1935. The RA and FSA were identical organizations, with the latter incorporating the RA's entire staff from the regional office down to the lowest level. With one exception, the FSA did not initiate any new resettlement projects in Region Six, but completed those it had inherited, using the RA's plans. How projects were planned and developed will be discussed in the next chapter.

77Farm Security Administration, "Resettlement Projects," ibid.; Hearings on the Farm Security Administration, 1038-49, 1074, 1075.
"There are in one sense," wrote M. L. Wilson in 1940, "two polar extremes of thought in respect to the direction agricultural development should follow in the future." One school would stress greater technological efficiency, mechanize farming on a huge scale as rapidly as possible, and put surplus farm workers into industry. But Wilson objected: as long as unemployment was high, industry could not provide employment for surplus rural people. The second school of thought favored breaking up agriculture into small units, turning away from modern technology and specialization, and returning to "subsistence practices that were common before the industrial revolution." Again Wilson objected: specialized, large-scale agriculture had become absolutely necessary to supply raw materials for industry and to feed the industrial population of the cities. Why go to either extreme? he asked. Why not combine both modern farming techniques and small subsistence farms? All agriculture need not be commercial, and subsistence farming did not necessarily mean going back to the Middle Ages; it could be
as modern as any large-scale farm.¹

As chief of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads in 1933 and 1934, Wilson followed this middle course. He experimented with subsistence farming, but he did not seek to form enclaves where homesteaders could escape modern problems and retreat to a simpler life near the soil. Nor did he want to use subsistence homesteads as a defeatist attempt to reverse progress. In the South, Wilson established a few colonies for stranded workers, as at Arthurdale, West Virginia, the first and best-known subsistence homestead project. He also built a few all-rural colonies for submarginal farmers, but for the most part he concentrated on homesteads for part-time farmers near industrial employment. In Mississippi alone, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads planned five industrial-type projects and one rural colony. Also taking a middle course, Mississippians saw them primarily as a means of promoting home ownership.²

The industrial projects became the best examples of what subsistence homesteads were supposed to be. A subsistence homestead, according to an official definition, was "a house and out buildings located upon a plot of land on which can be grown a large portion of the foodstuffs required by


²See Daily Register (Clarksdale, Mississippi, May 1, 1934).
the homestead family." The homesteader produced only for home consumption and not for commercial sale. "In that it provides for subsistence alone, it carries with it the corollary that cash income must be drawn from some outside source. The central motive of the subsistence homestead program, therefore, is to demonstrate the economic value of a livelihood which combines part-time wage work and part-time gardening or farming."³ Except for their small size, the Mississippi projects were probably typical of most industrial-type subsistence homesteads. They all contained between 100 and 300 acres of land broken up into twenty to twenty-five units, with an average of four to seven acres per homestead. They were all located within about five miles of a small town with industrial jobs available. The Division of Subsistence designed them to take up the slack of seasonal employment in cotton gins, textile mills, and other industries common in small Southern towns. These projects offered opportunities both for industrial workers to practice subsistence farming and for farmers to earn cash income as part-time industrial workers.⁴

The Division of Subsistence Homesteads announced plans for industrial-type projects at McComb, Laurel, Tupelo,


⁴Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 105, 106, 110, 111.
Meridian, and Hattiesburg, Mississippi. None of these towns were urban centers, but they all possessed economic potential. In 1935, Meridian had the largest population (31,954), with Hattiesburg (18,601) and Laurel (18,017) almost equal; McComb (10,057) and Tupelo (6,361) were considerably smaller. Meridian, Mississippi's second largest city, was located in the east-central part of the state, a region famous for yellow pine, hardwood, cotton, livestock, and dairying. Timber was practically the only natural resource of this region; but lumber companies had already stripped the best virgin forests by 1930. The most important railroad center in eastern Mississippi, Meridian was the junction of the Mobile and Ohio, the New Orleans and North Eastern, the St. Louis and San Francisco, and several smaller lines. Meridian's cotton mills produced more cotton oil for sale in Europe than did any other city in Mississippi, but a shirt and garment factory and three hosiery mills made the city an important textile town as well. In the northeastern part of the state, Tupelo was one of the first TVA cities and perhaps Mississippi's best example of the "New South." Like many other Southern towns, Tupelo took its first step away

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from the land with the cotton mill; but three garment factories soon became the city's major industry.\(^6\)

McComb, Hattiesburg, and Laurel all lay within the coastal plain. At one time, this region had consisted of thick forests of long-leaf yellow pine; but in the thirties, it too was mainly cutover land with little or no marketable timber left. In addition, southern Mississippi was a truck farming area specializing in corn, sweet potatoes, oats, tobacco, sugar cane, garden vegetables, pecans, and peanuts. For both truck farming and industry, McComb occupied a favorable geographical position as the largest town along the Illinois Central railroad between New Orleans and Jackson. McCombians found industrial opportunities in Illinois Central repair shops, an ice company, sawmills, textile mills, and a woodworking plant. Once a mere sawmill camp, Hattiesburg had become an important manufacturer of naval stores, railroad center, and college town. Twenty-five miles north, Laurel was still primarily a lumber town on the extreme northeastern edge of the yellow pine forest.\(^7\)

The Mississippi industrial-type homesteads all followed the same basic stages of development; they were also virtually identical as completed projects. First, the


\(^7\)Ibid., 396, 417, 222-27.
Federal Subsistence Homestead Corporation organized the five projects into separate subsidiary corporations, assigned each a general or project manager, and released an allotment to cover development and management costs. Subsistence Homesteads officials worked closely with chambers of commerce and other local "sponsors" in selecting land for each project. Next, the general manager began clearing and surveying the land and opened bidding on the homesteads and outbuildings. As originally planned, each homestead would cost between $2,500 and $2,800, including land and all improvements. The general manager also supervised the work of selecting homesteaders, breaking the land up into individual subsistence plots, and building roads. Since the projects were all close to town, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads planned no community facilities for project residents.

At first, McComb set the pace for the subsistence homesteads program in Mississippi. During a visit to McComb, 

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9Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 106, 107. Besides the industrial projects, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads announced a full-time farm colony at Richton, Mississippi, purchased 7,753 acres of farm land for $36,753.24, and made plans to divide it up into about 310 farm units. But the Resettlement Administration inherited Richton in 1935 as a completely undeveloped project. U. S. Department of the Interior, Division of Subsistence Homesteads, Monthly Project Report, April 26, 1935, R. G. 96, National Archives.
on December 26 and 27, 1933, I. R. Bradshaw, Mississippi field representative for the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, and N. A. Keller, land clearing specialist of the Department of Agriculture, revealed unofficially that the city had won approval for a subsistence homestead project.\textsuperscript{10} The people of the city responded with enthusiasm. In fact, a special committee of the McComb Chamber of Commerce had already been lobbying for a project. To business men, a homestead project meant more than merely homes for twenty or twenty-five families; it meant employment for laborers, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, and other workers who would develop the homesteads. Within a week after Bradshaw and Keller left, a group of McComb people decided to ask Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt to dedicate the project; knowing her interest in the subsistence community idea, they also wanted to name the project the Eleanor Roosevelt Homesteads.

Edgar G. Williams, chairman of the Mississippi State Democratic Committee, agreed to present their invitation to the first lady at the White House; and Senator Pat Harrison set up the appointment with Mrs. Roosevelt. Did she know Edgar G. Williams? he asked. "Oh, I remember him," she replied. "He's the gentleman from way down in South Mississippi who wore a silk suit and a red necktie to the inauguration."

When Williams called at the White House, he found her \textsuperscript{10}\textit{McComb Enterprise}, December 29, 1933.
posted on the plan of a subsistence homestead project at McComb." She was pleased with the invitation, he reported, but she could not give a definite answer since the Division had not officially approved McComb for a project.\textsuperscript{11}

On December 29, 1933, the Federal Subsistence Homesteads Corporation, the action arm of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, formed McComb Homesteads of Mississippi, Inc.\textsuperscript{12} Organized under Delaware law, McComb Homesteads was a subsidiary corporation with responsibility for developing and operating the McComb project. Rather than set up a regional or state-by-state organization, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads virtually operated its entire program through such local corporations, setting up one for every homestead project. A legal device, McComb Homesteads of Mississippi would borrow money from the parent corporation, hold title to the land, buildings, and other property, enter into contracts with architects, contractors, and building supply companies, make all expenditures, and issue purchase contracts to individual homestead families. Once construction work was over, McComb Homesteads would manage the project. As on all subsistence

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., January 5, 1934; January 19, 1934.

homesteads, the corporation officers were prominent citizens of the local community. In early 1934, Edgar Williams, state Democratic committeeman, became president of the corporation. J. O. Emmerich, editor of the *McComb Enterprise*, took over as general or project manager, while Xavier A. Kramer, mayor of McComb, W. M. Webb, and J. C. Flowers, both businessmen, rounded out the board of directors.13

On January 18, Senator Pat Harrison and Congressman H. D. Stephens and Russell Ellzey wired Emmerich: "MCCOMB HAS BEEN SELECTED A SUBSISTENCE HOMESTEAD SITE[,] ANNOUNCEMENT BY DIRECTOR OF SUBSISTENCE HOMESTEADS TO BE MADE TODAY."14 A few days later, M. L. Wilson officially gave the board of directors of McComb Homesteads of Mississippi full authority to go ahead with plans for developing a project. Then on February 1, the board announced the purchase of a 364.04-acre tract of land three miles southeast of the city. McComb Homesteads of Mississippi paid John O. Lanier, a local landowner, $2,200.00 for the undeveloped land.15 Almost as soon as the purchase was made, engineer Jimmie Barnes had

13 *McComb Enterprise*, January 5, 1934; February 2, 1934. In May, 1934, however, Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes federalized all subsistence homestead projects, abolished the control of the subsidiary corporations, and placed the entire program directly under the Federal Subsistence Homesteads Corporation. See Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 120-23.

14 *McComb Enterprise*, January 19, 1934.

two crews of men on the project drawing contour maps of elevations, streams, and other land marks, while a third crew under Walter Fitzgerald was locating the legal boundaries. In the meantime, the board of directors began working on plans for the project with agricultural engineers, horticulturalists, and the state extension service.\textsuperscript{16}

Within a few weeks, Homestead officials had drawn up building plans for an initial group of twenty-five homes, with a total of thirty-seven homes planned for future development. On March 5, a capacity crowd of prospective homesteaders and other interested people jammed the McComb City Hall auditorium where Emmerich outlined the corporation’s plans for "Eleanor Roosevelt Homesteads." Since the engineering work had been completed, he explained, actual construction awaited Washington’s approval of final building plans. Emmerich had already submitted these plans to Bradshaw; he in turn had approved them, Emmerich said, and sent them on to Washington. "The program," he wrote later, "will carry out a dream of President and Mrs. Roosevelt to provide modern homes in ideal surroundings near a city for part-time industrial workers."\textsuperscript{17}

On April 24, McComb Homesteads held a ground-breaking ceremony, an event that put it ahead of all other subsistence

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{McComb Enterprise}, February 9, 1934.

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, March 9, 1934.
homesteads projects in Mississippi. A. B. McKay, state horticulturalist, and J. T. Copeland, state agricultural engineer, had both participated in planning the project; now they turned over the first spade of earth on the site of the first homestead.\textsuperscript{18} This ceremony did not actually launch the building program at McComb. Emmerich had already started construction on three homesteads; he added five more within a week and planned to keep enlarging the construction program until all twenty-five houses were underway at once. Between April and September, 1934, Emmerich completed twenty homesteads. The McComb houses were all frame clapboard structures except for two frame shingle structures; eight had four rooms, ten five rooms, and one six rooms. The original project plan called for equipping them with running water, indoor toilets, electric lights, gas for cooking and heating, and telephone service; but electricity, gas, and telephones were later dropped due to high installation costs. Emmerich's engineers divided the 364 acres into different sized plots. Nineteen homesteads ranged from four to fourteen acres each, and one had a twenty-four acre plot. In addition to the dwelling, each unit contained a garage and well-house and a combination cow stall, chicken house, and store room. All of the homesteaders had some wooded land, a truck garden, and an orchard, as well as the use of a thirty-seven acre

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., April 27, 1934.
community pasture. Emmerich let contracts for drilling a well for each unit, and for installing individual septic tanks. Each homesteader had his own sow, milch cow, mare, twenty-five to fifty hens, and essential farm equipment. FERA labor built dirt roads through the project connecting the homesteads with each other and with existing roads. For recreation, homesteaders had a seventeen-acre park and a thirteen-acre lake, but no other community facilities were provided.19

As early as January, Emmerich called for applicants even though he had not yet received the proper application forms. He invited all interested persons to leave their names and addresses with the McComb Chamber of Commerce.20 When application forms came in, they could fill them out and make formal application. Within two weeks, 232 people had applied for homesteads; by April, the number had risen to 518.21 To handle family selection, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads set up a series of four committees from local to national level. First, a committee of McComb citizens interviewed all applicants and drew up a list of the most likely families. Then the board of directors of

19 For the floor plans see ibid., March 15, 1935; Re-settlement Administration, "Project Description Book," March-December, 1936, R. G. 96, National Archives; see also McComb Enterprise, January 18, 1935.

20 Ibid., January 5, 1934.

21 Ibid., January 19, 1934; April 6, 1934.
McComb Homesteads formed a selection committee of its own membership, reviewed the citizen committee's list, and in turn made its recommendations to a state committee. This committee served as a clearing house for family selection on all Mississippi subsistence homesteads; its members, Miss Ann Jordan of Mississippi State College and I. R. Bradshaw, went over the choices again and passed the revised list on to Washington. Mrs. Charlotte Smith of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads headed the national committee which made the final selection for all projects in the nation. The Division of Subsistence Homesteads was looking for thrifty, industrious, honest people who had already proven themselves reliable. The most preferred families were those who earned part of their income in local industrial work. Heads of families had to be under fifty years of age, possess a reputation for good character, and show ability to pay for the homestead.\textsuperscript{22}

By April, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads had approved nine applicants: a linotype operator, railroad switchman, brakeman, truck driver, cotton mill worker, blacksmith, restaurant cook, printer, and mechanic.\textsuperscript{23} Their

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{22}Ibid., April 6, 1934; John B. Holt, \textit{An Analysis of Methods and Criteria Used in Selecting Families for Colonization Projects}, Social Research Report No. 1 of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Security Administration, and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics (Washington, 1937), 36, 37.
\item \textsuperscript{23}McComb Enterprise, April 6, 1934.
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average annual income ran between $1,000 and $1,200. The McComb project probably attracted these people because of the security and stability they believed it would afford. Most homestead families were interested above all in home ownership. In the Subsistence Homestead Division's plan, each homesteader occupied the homesteads under "temporary licensing agreements," a contract calling for monthly rental payments based on the size and cost of each unit. The homestead corporation would later offer each family a sales contract with payments amortized over a thirty-year period at three per cent interest. What each family had paid as licensees would apply to reduce the final purchase price of their homestead unit. As permanent residents, they would continue making monthly payments.24

Emmerich planned for families to occupy the homesteads as they were completed. In early June, 1934, Guy A. Betz, a mechanic and night watchman, took the first homestead.25 Two other families, those of J. R. Butler and M. T. Rhodes, soon followed. Emmerich initially advised them that the homesteads would each cost $2,500, more or less; he could not determine the exact price until construction was further advanced. But somewhat later, he presented the three families with licensing agreements based on a purchase cost of

24Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 127.

25*McComb Enterprise*, June 8, 1934.
$3,200. Betz refused to sign, and so did Butler and Rhodes, objecting that the price was unreasonably high. On instructions from Washington, Emmerich ordered them to vacate their homesteads. For the time being, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads decided not to move any more families into the project. The Betz episode may have contributed to the decision, but it was not the only reason. McComb Homesteads of Mississippi had wired the finished houses for electricity, but then decided the cost of extending power lines to the project was too high. Thus the McComb homesteaders were without lights; and since all well pumps were electric, they were also without water.26

In early 1935, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads came up with a plan for reorganizing McComb. After a re-study of the project, Charles E. Pynchon, Wilson's successor as head of the Federal Subsistence Homesteads Corporation, proposed to construct ten more houses, bringing the total to thirty-five, and to reduce the larger homestead plots. Although he contemplated spending an additional $26,000 at McComb, Pynchon pointed out that these changes would lower the average cost of each homestead from about $3,800 to $2,865—a price that he hoped would attract settlers to the project. Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes gave

approval, then apparently changed his mind. After February, 1935, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads suspended all activity at McComb except for such work as planting trees along project roads. Since no permanent residents were on the project and no effort was being made to find any, McComb Homesteads went into a kind of limbo until the Resettlement Administration took it over three months later.\(^\text{27}\)

Soon after construction started at McComb, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads launched building programs at Tupelo, Hattiesburg, and Meridian. Tupelo Homesteads of Mississippi purchased a 171-acre tract for $6,259.37, built twenty-five clapboard homes of English and colonial American design, and leased them primarily to low-income families employed in the textile industry. Tupelo had three parks and a six-acre lake with a community pavilion. The Wilson Dam power plant of the Tennessee Valley Authority supplied electricity for the project, and all occupants had one-party telephone service.\(^\text{28}\) Magnolia Homesteads, near Meridian, consisted of 233 acres of land in three tracts costing a total of $5,325.00. Mrs. L. C. Gray, general manager of

\(^{27}\)Charles E. Pynchon, Memorandum to the Secretary of the Interior, February 5, 1935, Record Group 48, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, National Archives (to be cited hereafter as R. G. 48, National Archives); \textit{McComb Enterprise}, January 18, 1935.

\(^{28}\)Resettlement Administration, "Project Description Book"; Mississippi Projects, June 1, 1935, R. G. 96, National Archives.
Magnolia, was the only woman in the nation to manage a subsistence homesteads project. The homes at Magnolia were bungalow-type frame structures, with electric lights but no gas or telephone service. Like McComb and Tupelo, Magnolia had a park and lake for recreational purposes. Hattiesburg Homesteads invested $2,379.20 in a mere 129-acre-tract, the smallest project in the state. Hattiesburg had twenty-four frame clapboard houses, a park but no lake or other community facilities and no utilities at all. At Laurel, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads purchased a 183-acre tract costing $2,010.33, but the Laurel project never even got as far as construction.

The Division of Subsistence Homesteads, in fact, did not exist long enough to complete any of the Mississippi projects. In late April, 1935, President Roosevelt reorganized the New Deal community program and abolished the Division of Subsistence Homesteads after an existence of twenty-one months. The new Resettlement Administration

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29Project Analysis Questionnaire, Magnolia Gardens, Meridian, Mississippi, R. G. 207, National Archives; Thomas K. Shuff, Memorandum to Lee Pressman, July 15, 1935, ibid.


31Mississippi Projects, June 1, 1935, R. G. 96, National Archives; Report of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads and Federal Subsistence Homesteads Corporation, June, 1934, ibid.
inherited the subsistence homesteads program on May 15, 1935.\textsuperscript{32} As Resettlement Administrator, Rexford G. Tugwell assigned the five Mississippi industrial-type projects to the Suburban Resettlement Division; but in August, he transferred them to the Management Division, which would assume responsibility for completing and then operating them.\textsuperscript{33}

One of T. Roy Reid's first tasks as director of Region Six was the unfinished business of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads in Mississippi. After examining the status of each project, he decided to drop Laurel, since it was so far from completion; but he went ahead with McComb, Tupelo, Hattiesburg, and Meridian. With one exception, no major construction was undertaken on any of the projects beyond finishing what had already been started. The Construction Division built ten additional houses at Tupelo, bringing the total number of units to thirty-five and making it the largest of the Mississippi projects. James B. Lawson, chief of the regional Management Division, made only minor repairs at Hattiesburg and Meridian, as some of the homes were badly deteriorated. At McComb, Lawson redivided the land and enlarged some of the homestead tracts, erected more


\textsuperscript{33}Rexford G. Tugwell to Harry L. Hopkins, July 18, 1935, R. G. 96, National Archives; R. R. Ehrlish, Memorandum to R. K. Straus, October 17, 1935, \textit{ibid.}
outbuildings, and installed gasoline well pumps. In addition, the Management Division investigated and selected families for all twenty units at McComb, and filled the vacancies at Tupelo, Hattiesburg, and Meridian.  

Beyond this point, the Resettlement Administration program differed slightly from that of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads. Once each project was fully occupied, the regional office organized the families into a local homestead association, the same kind of organization that the Resettlement Administration used for operating all of its own community projects. At first, both old homesteaders and new families remained under the terms of their old licensing agreements. When the new homestead association took over, the Resettlement Administration offered them a chance, after a one-year trial period, to enter into a Tenure Form A contract, a forty-year purchase agreement. Those not wanting to purchase their homesteads could take a Tenure B contract, a monthly lease based on the unit's selling price. The Resettlement Administration required occupants to follow a live-at-home program of home management in order to help them reduce their living expenses.


35 Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 215, 216.
For the next five years (1935 to 1940), the Resettlement Administration and then the Farm Security Administration struggled unsuccessfully with the problem of the Mississippi subsistence homesteads. At McComb, Lawson quickly ran up against the project's old nemesis. "The selection of families and the filling of the houses on the McComb project are progressing in accordance with our anticipation," he wrote in November, 1935, "that is, we are having trouble in getting the houses filled. . . ." Families who could qualify, he reported, refused to accept the properties under the terms of the temporary licensing agreements.\(^{36}\) By June 15, 1935, however, Lawson had filled nineteen out of the twenty homesteads, using basically the criteria drawn up by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads.\(^{37}\) A year later (the probation period), the regional office incorporated McComb Homesteads Association under Mississippi law on January 12, 1937, for a period of fifty years. The association had authority to issue 250 shares of common stock with a par value of three dollars per share. According to the Charter of Incorporation, the McComb Homesteads Association was to "participate in the


\(^{37}\)Rexford G. Tugwell to Dan R. McGehee, June 30, 1936, \textit{ibid.}
establishment, maintenance and development of a community at McComb Homesteads . . . for the mutual benefit of the members of such community; to engage in activities designed to rehabilitate such members and make them self supporting; and to do and perform all acts and things necessary, convenient, useful or incidental to the accomplishment of these purposes." 38

The regional office next drew up plans for selling the project property and assets to the association for $44,360.00, less credits of $2,250.17 for rent paid, leaving a net price of $42,109.83. In contrast, the total estimated cost of the McComb project was $110,088.00. Homesteaders would pay an average of $2,218.00 for their units, with monthly installments over a forty-year period at three per cent interest. 39

Despite the $65,728 write off, the Resettlement Administration's plans for a homestead association at McComb failed miserably. The new project manager, John S. Grant, offered each family the option of signing a Tenure A purchase contract with the association or staying for a reasonable length of time under the old agreement while looking for a new home. Most took the latter course. In July, 1938,


39Edward Stone, Memorandum to Donald MacGuiness, March 17, 1937, R. G. 207, National Archives; Mastin G. White, Memorandum for the Secretary of Agriculture, July 18, 1938, ibid.
there were only five families in occupancy, all under temporary licensing agreements. The McComb project experienced difficulty keeping occupants because of its distance from the corporate limits of McComb, its lack of utilities, and its generally poor soil. Like all subsistence homesteads in Mississippi, McComb also suffered from the lack of employment opportunities in nearby towns.40

After conferring with local citizens of McComb, regional officials decided to scrap the plan for a homestead association. If the units were simply offered at an average price of $1,200 per unit at six per cent interest with a twenty-year term, McComb citizens contended, then enough interest could be aroused to fill the project. Although such an arrangement would come close to eliminating government control over the project, the Farm Security Administration went ahead. In July, 1938, FSA officials made an outright sale to individual clients, giving a deed to each homesteader and taking a mortgage and promissory note. Homesteaders agreed to repay the purchase price in equal monthly installments amortized over twenty years at five per cent, with average monthly payments of $14.25. At $1,200, the government lost $3,114.00 per unit, or a total

40Milo Perkins, Memorandum for the Secretary of Agriculture, July 14, 1938, Record Group 16, Records of the office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives (to be cited hereafter as R. G. 16, National Archives); J. O. Walker, Memorandum for the solicitor [Mastin G. White], April 15, 1938, R. G. 207, National Archives.
or $62,292.00. At last, the Farm Security Administration had little trouble finding occupants for the project.\(^{41}\)

Hattiesburg and Meridian were the only two projects in the nation that defaulted after being organized into homestead associations. On September 30, 1936, the Resettlement Administration sold the Meridian project to the Meridian Homesteads Association for $60,000, less $2,424.67 in credits for rent paid.\(^{42}\) Hattiesburg Homestead Association acquired the Hattiesburg property and assets on October 1, 1936, for $49,720.00, minus credits of $3,473.61.\(^{43}\) Meridian had cost $92,488.20, Hattiesburg $91,035.36. The Meridian homesteaders bought their individual units for an average price of $2,400.00, with an average monthly payment of $18.64, while at Hattiesburg each unit sold for an average of $2,075.00, with an $18.08 monthly payment. At both Hattiesburg and Meridian, regional officials and interested local citizens had agreed that the price represented not only the fair market value of the homesteads; it was also in line with

\(^{41}\)Mastin G. White, Memorandum for the Secretary of Agriculture, July 18, 1938, \(\text{ibid.}\); T. Roy Reid to Rexford G. Tugwell, September 4, 1936, R. G. 96, National Archives; Leon Shiman, Memorandum to Edward Stone, September 11, 1936, \(\text{ibid.}\).

\(^{42}\)\(\text{ibid.}\); Milo Perkins, Memorandum for the Secretary of Agriculture, July 18, 1938, R. G. 16, National Archives.

\(^{43}\)Milo Perkins, Memorandum for the Secretary of Agriculture, July 14, 1938, \(\text{ibid.}\); E. E. Agger to T. Roy Reid, January 22, 1937, R. G. 96, National Archives. See \textit{Hattiesburg American}, December 9, 1936.
real estate values in the locality and imposed no undue burden on the homesteaders.\textsuperscript{44}

The Resettlement Administration found it difficult to attract families at either project and almost impossible to keep them once they came. For one reason, the regional office built up a heritage of misunderstanding when it tried to purge both projects of undesirable occupants before offering purchase contracts. After the cooperative associations were organized, other residents withdrew voluntarily because they felt themselves unable to make the necessary payments. At Hattiesburg, especially, the homesteaders were not satisfied with the terms and conditions of the Tenure A contracts. "The chief reason," Reid reported, "probably is that the total monthly outlay under Tenure Form 'A' is a few dollars more than it was under the Temporary Licensing Agreement."\textsuperscript{45} They also objected to the cooperative association; "that is," Reid wrote, "some of the individuals feel that they should be allowed to purchase directly from the Government and not through the association, thereby relieving them of any responsibility in connection with the balance of the property." In addition, some felt they should not bear

\textsuperscript{44} Milo Perkins, Memorandum for the Secretary of Agriculture, July 14, 1938, R. G. 16, National Archives; Milo Perkins, Memorandum for the Secretary of Agriculture, July 18, 1938, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{45} T. Roy Reid to Rexford G. Tugwell, November 4, 1936, R. G. 96, National Archives.
any of the management expense; and some were worried about the forty-year clause, although none of them could make a substantial down payment. "I believe," Reid wrote, "that all of the above reasons are due primarily to the lack of business experience of a group of people such as we have on the project. . . ." 46

From 1934 to 1938, Hattiesburg experienced a ninety-two per cent turnover. By July, 1938, there were only six families in occupancy. 47 Meridian's record was similar. Neither association could make their first payment when it came due on October 31, 1937, and neither ever met any future payment on their obligations. In 1938, after reappraising the project, the Farm Security Administration lowered monthly charges to $16.24, an amount based on an average selling price of $1,840.00; at Hattiesburg, the new figures were $14.74 per month and $1,578.42 per unit. 48 This reduction made the projects more attractive, but it was not a permanent solution. In March, 1941, acting regional director T. B. Fatherree wrote: "The affairs of the Magnolia and Hattiesburg Homestead Associations are so badly

46 Ibid.
involved as to be considered insolvent, and to all purposes are looked upon as such by those of us responsible for their operation."\textsuperscript{49}

Tupelo was the last project to be conveyed to a homestead association. The Resettlement Administration formed the Tupelo Homestead Association on May 17, 1937, and approved the sale of the $149,290 project for $110,000.\textsuperscript{50} The Tupelo Homesteaders did not wait until after the project had been sold before they started voicing complaints. When the new board of directors put the questions of sale to a vote, the homesteaders turned it down cold. The Resettlement Administration had not taken into consideration recent changes in Tupelo real estate values. In April, 1936, a tornado had swept through the city killing 201 people, injuring more than 1,000, and causing considerable property damage. As a result, building activity increased sharply and peaked in early 1937. By May, there were more rental apartments and homes in Tupelo than before the tornado, and the new buildings were superior to the ones lost. The RA's Land Utilization Division, with the assistance of local

\textsuperscript{49}T. B. Fatherree to C. B. Baldwin, March 22, 1941, R. G. 96, National Archives.

citizens, reappraised the project and recommended that the price be dropped to $95,557.50, making a net loss of $53,732.50. The board of directors favored the offer, but the homesteaders still objected strongly. After the regional office reappraised the project a second time, the association finally agreed on October 1, 1938 to purchase the project for $73,182.00. Tupelo could still not look forward to a stable future. Since a large number of the families were Tennessee Valley Authority employees, not Tupelo natives, they were not interested in purchasing their homes.51

In Region Six, the Farm Security Administration started its liquidation program with the Mississippi subsistence homesteads. For practical purposes, McComb had been in a state of liquidation ever since the project had been opened for sale to homesteaders in 1938. On October 31, 1940, according to a memorandum of understanding between the Secretary of the Interior, the National Park Service took over the Tupelo project and made it part of its Natchez Trace Parkway system.52 In December, 1941, both Hattiesburg and Meridian homestead associations transferred all assets,

51Mastin G. White to Brooks Hays, September 21, 1938, R. G. 207, National Archives; Hays to White, September 29, 1938, ibid.; Report of Examination, Tupelo Homestead Association, For the Period November 15, 1934 to October 10, 1940, R. G. 96, National Archives; Deed of Trust Note, dated October 1, 1938, ibid.

52Frank W. Hancock to John E. Rankin, December 4, 1944, ibid.; John O. Walker to T. Roy Reid, October 5, 1940, ibid.
real and personal property, to the United States Government, and then voluntarily dissolved. The Bureau of Plant Industry had already taken over five units at Meridian for its Horticulture Field Station there. But now the Farm Security Administration sold the remaining homes to individual purchasers, either current homesteaders or new families who filled the unoccupied units. As World War II stimulated employment, FSA officials found it less difficult to obtain occupants than ever before, especially since they were now offering these units at ridiculously low prices.

On October 1, 1942, Farm Security Administrator C. B. Baldwin transferred to the Federal Public Housing Authority all resettlement projects on which clients did not earn their principal income from agriculture. The Mississippi subsistence homesteads came under this classification. Alexander T. McCurdie opened an office for the Federal Public Housing Authority in Hattiesburg and operated the three remaining projects, McComb, Hattiesburg, and Meridian, throughout World War II. McCurdie, who had been one of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads' project managers in

53C. B. Baldwin, Memorandum to the Secretary of Agriculture, March 8, 1942, ibid.; D. L. Hopkins to E. G. Benser, July 20, 1943, ibid.

54John O. Walker to T. Roy Reid, July 30, 1940, ibid.

55Mason Barr to A. D. Stewart, September 30, 1942, ibid.
Mississippi, functioned chiefly as a rent collector. After the end of the war, he handled the liquidation of the Mississippi projects. Under the Federal Public Housing Authority, occupants could receive quitclaim deeds to their homesteads when they had paid twenty per cent of the purchase price of their units, signing a note and mortgage as security for the balance. By June, 1946, McCurdie had sold all units on the three projects and issued the homesteaders quitclaim deeds. On June 28, he closed his Hattiesburg office. That was the end of government responsibility for managing the Mississippi subsistence homesteads.

With a minimum of prior experience, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads launched a rather ambitious program of industrial-type projects in Mississippi. Like many of the division's projects, the Mississippi subsistence homesteads possessed an amateurish quality; and in the long run, they were among the most unsuccessful of all projects in Region Six. Mississippi officials located the projects on rather poor soil, did not always insure sufficient employment opportunities for occupants, and sometimes furnished rather haphazard management. Despite such mistakes, McComb, Tupelo, Hattiesburg, and Meridian all blazed trails that the Resettlement Administration and the Farm Security Administration

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56 Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 231, 232.

57 Oliver C. Winston, Memorandum to John P. Broome, May 1, 1946, R. G. 207, National Archives; A. T. McCurdie, Memorandum to Arthur Taylor, June 5, 1946, ibid.
would profitably follow, if they avoided the pitfalls. In fact, T. Roy Reid's regional organization cut its teeth on the Mississippi subsistence homesteads. The Management Division, for example, gained its first practical experience in the management of resettlement projects when it took over the subsistence homesteads program. One of the family selection unit's first assignments was to fill the vacancies at McComb. In addition, the regional office had its first chance to experiment with cooperative associations in Mississippi, and later it first confronted the problems of liquidation on these projects. If the Division of Subsistence Homesteads had not pointed out some of the hazards, or if the Mississippi projects had not provided an opportunity for "practice," perhaps the Resettlement Administration would have made more mistakes than it did in launching, developing, and operating its own resettlement program.
CHAPTER IV

DYESS COLONY: A FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ADMINISTRATION COMMUNITY

Soon after dark on January 14, 1936, the Southerner, a Douglass twin-motor American Airlines plane, took off at Memphis, Tennessee, for Little Rock. John T. Shea, a passenger who had just left the plane, noticed that one of the Southerner's motors did not "sound right." At 7:18, veteran pilot Jerry Marshall, flying at 3,000 feet twenty-five miles west of Memphis, reported scattered clouds at 4,500 feet and a fifty-five degree temperature. That was the last contact with the Southerner. Beyond Forrest City, the night fog was already hanging over the eastern Arkansas swamps. At about 7:20, two farmers near Goodwin saw the plane flying low over the woods, with an engine popping and missing. Helplessly, they watched the plane disappear into the trees and fog, heard a terrific crash, and then silence. George Jones, another farmer, walked to a nearby store and reported that he had heard a deafening roar to the northeast. The Southerner crashed of unknown causes in four or five feet of water in a swamp two miles from the Little Rock-Memphis highway, killing all seventeen persons aboard. At the time,
it was the worst tragedy in American aviation history. Among the dead was William R. Dyess, Works Progress Administrator for Arkansas and founder of the largest of all New Deal farm colonies.\(^1\)

W. R. Dyess was six feet tall, slender, prematurely gray, and, at the time of his death, forty-one years of age.\(^2\) Born in Hazelhurst, Mississippi, and educated at Mississippi State College, he became a successful farmer and contractor specializing in levees, railroad beds, and gravel roads. He first came to Arkansas in 1926 with a contract to improve the levees on the Mississippi and White rivers. In 1930, Dyess bought a large Mississippi County plantation, in north-east Arkansas, and made Osceola his home. Three years later, he entered public service as head of the Mississippi County Committee on local relief. In August, 1933, Harry L. Hopkins, Federal Emergency Relief Administrator, appointed Dyess FERA state director for Arkansas. Governor J. Marion Futrell had strongly backed Dyess for the job,\(^3\) perhaps as a political pay-off for the latter's support during the 1932

\(^1\)Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), January 15 through 18, 1936.

\(^2\)For brief biographies of Dyess, see Arkansas Gazette, January 15, January 16, 1936; Osceola Times, January 17, 1936.

\(^3\)J. M. Futrell to Harry L. Hopkins, June 20, 1933, Record Group 69, Records of the Works Projects Administration, National Archives (to be cited hereafter as R. G. 69, National Archives); Aubrey Williams to Harry L. Hopkins, August 9, 1933, ibid.
gubernatorial campaign. Even though he had no social work experience of any kind, Dyess made a favorable impression on Aubrey Williams, Hopkins' right-hand man. "Dyess is a young chap of thirty-eight," Williams wrote Hopkins, "a big planter, college man, and does not have any employment . . . which I figure should make for [financial] independence." In November, 1933, he became Civil Works Administrator; when the FERA was revived in April, 1934, he returned as Emergency Relief Administrator. From July, 1935, until his death, he was WPA director for Arkansas.

After his appointment as Emergency Relief Administrator, Dyess wasted no time in setting up a state relief organization. He named Floyd Sharp as Director of operations and executive secretary. Sharp was thirty-seven years old, a University of Arkansas Law School graduate, and a member of the state Committee on Unemployment. (As the number-two man in the Federal relief organization, he took Dyess' place as administrator in 1936.) Under Dyess, the Arkansas Emergency Relief Administration consisted of two assistant directors of operations, two assistant comptrollers,

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4Aubrey Williams to Harry [L. Hopkins], August 6, 1936, ibid.


social service field representative, and seven divisions: works, rural rehabilitation, auditor, commodities, research and statistics, transients, and education. Dyess' job was to channel Federal relief funds into the hands of needy Arkansans. The Emergency Relief Administration and its successor agencies stressed work relief in preference to the "dole." Thus Arkansas relief workers built roads, streets, airports, water plants, schools, sewers, hospitals, public buildings, recreational facilities, canning plants, utility systems, libraries, levees, light plants, and other such projects.7

Since Arkansas was an agricultural state, one of Dyess' most important tasks was rural rehabilitation. Following the lead of most FERA state directors, Dyess placed all rural relief work under a state rural rehabilitation corporation. A Delaware corporation formed on May 30, 1934, the Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation was a device to handle certain legal and financial problems. Using Federal funds, the Arkansas RR Corporation loaned money to relief clients, purchased land for rehabilitation purposes, and established a revolving trust fund to insure the corporation's existence after the FERA was abolished. Unlike later cooperative associations set up under the

7See Arkansas Emergency Relief Administration, A Review of Work Relief Activities in Arkansas, April 1st, 1934, to July 1st, 1935 (Little Rock, 1935); Arkansas Emergency Relief Administration, Traveling Recovery Road: The Story of Relief, Work-relief, and Rehabilitation in Arkansas, August 30, 1932 to November 15, 1936 (Little Rock, 1936).
Resettlement Administration, the Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation limited its membership to a small circle of stockholders. No rehabilitation client was eligible to purchase stock in the corporation.8

Dyess relied on the Rural Rehabilitation Division to administer the actual rural rehabilitation programs. In late 1933, Dyess recruited E. B. Whitaker from the Extension Service and made him head of rural relief in Arkansas. During the next eighteen months, Whitaker developed the same kind of program that he would later operate for the Resettlement Administration and Farm Security Administration. In 1934, according to ERA estimates, there were over 30,000 farm families in Arkansas eligible for rural rehabilitation. They included a wide variety of groups: landowners who had lost all of their equity in their farms, former landowners and share tenants who were unable to get credit to make a crop, sharecroppers who had been displaced from the land, and even mill workers and coal miners who had rural backgrounds and wanted to get back to the farm. The ultimate aim for all rural rehabilitation clients was independent land ownership. Whitaker rehabilitated some clients where they were, if the

8M. J. Miller to Aubrey Williams, November 10, 1934, R. G. 69, National Archives; Audit Report on Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, May 28, 1934 to June 30, 1935, ibid.; Miller Memorandum to Williams, October 1, 1934, Record Group 96, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, National Archives (to be cited hereafter as R. G. 96, National Archives); see Blytheville Courier News, October 16, 1934; Osceola Times, May 25, 1934.
land they owned or rented was good enough. In the case of families stranded in submarginal areas, he resettled them on better land. The rehabilitation division repaired the homesteads or erected low-cost houses, mapped out a farm and home management plan for each rehabilitation client, and loaned him the necessary capital for equipment, workstock, and subsistence. Thus the Emergency Relief Administration stressed long-term rehabilitation rather than merely immediate relief.9

A planter and humanitarian, W. R. Dyess was especially interested in rural relief. As the depression wore on, he apparently reacted as did many Americans: people, the saying went, had to get "back to the land." Dyess wanted to develop a farm colony, a complete community, for relief clients. "He conceived the idea of building an agricultural community," wrote assistant ERA director of operations H. C. Baker after Dyess' death. "A colony of five hundred homes—homes which were to be modern, liveable homes with electricity, running water, private sewage systems and other advantages usually associated only with urban communities, and which would raise the standard for farm homes to a high level. He conceived in his plan a hospital, schools, churches, in fact a new order of things for those who through no fault of their

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9 Plan of Work for Rural Rehabilitation in Arkansas, 1935, Mimeographed, R. G. 69, National Archives.
own found it almost impossible to make their way." It was hardly an original idea, either in American agricultural history or in the early New Deal. The Division of Subsistence Homesteads had already launched its community program for part-time industrial workers. In 1932, Lawrence Westbrook had built a French-style farm community near Houston, Texas; and, as assistant Federal Emergency Relief Administrator, he favored more such projects. What made Dyess successful was that he possessed executive ability and experience in both construction and agriculture. More important, he had the ability to sell his ideas to Federal authorities. In early 1934, Dyess personally submitted his plan to Harry Hopkins. According to ERA assistant director Baker, "Mr. Hopkins listened attentively." More likely, Westbrook was the one who did the listening and urged approval. At any rate, Hopkins did agree to Dyess' plans and released federal funds for the project. That was the beginning of Dyess Colony.11

Dyess had already picked out a location for his colony. He hoped to acquire a total of about 20,000 acres in separate but adjacent tracts from the Creamery Package Company, Drainage District Number Nine, and Lee Wilson and Company; but he was only partially successful.12 In early 1934, the

10 Traveling Recovery Road, 153. 11 Ibid.
Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation purchased 15,144 acres of unimproved cutover timber land ten miles from Wilson, Arkansas, and about twenty miles from Osceola, Dyess' home town. Geographically, the tract lay in Township 11 and 12 North, Range 8 and 9 East, with the Tyronza River cutting through it from northeast to southwest. A lumber company had previously owned part of the land, cut the best timber, and when the Depression hit forfeited it for taxes. Dyess was able to purchase it for an average of $2.50 per acre. Payment of state taxes, redemptions, and purchase of state title raised the average cost per acre up to about eight dollars. Even during the Depression, improved land of comparable quality brought sixty to one hundred dollars per acre. Contemporary newspaper reports said only that Dyess had bought about 16,000 acres at an average of $2.50 per acre without specifying the total amount paid or the total acreage. In 1936, however, Russell Brown and Company, Certified Public Accountants of Little Rock, audited the colony's books and reported the total cost of land to have been $136,994.48.13

The selection of this particular land, wrote H. C. Baker, was a demonstration of "rare judgment." He doubted

13Ibid.; Osceola Times, May 25, 1934; Traveling Recovery Road, 153, 154; A Review of Work Relief Activities in Arkansas, 130; Dyess Farms, Arkansas: The First Experiment with a New Kind of Rural Community, dated, May 7, 1941, R.G. 96, National Archives; Audit Report, Dyess Colony, Incorporated, Dyess Arkansas, February 29, 1936, ibid.
that "anywhere in America could land of greater potential possibilities have been chosen."\textsuperscript{14} Until about 1900, much of the northeast Arkansas Delta, including Mississippi County and the Dyess Colony land, was largely swampland and dense, almost tropical, forest. By 1920, army engineers had built levees and drained the swamps, while lumbermen had removed most of the virgin timber: white, black, and red oak, ash, elm, maple, gum of several varieties, cottonwood, and cypress. What they revealed was a fabulously rich agricultural region. The Mississippi River had spent centuries building up the alluvial soil, a black loam running from forty to several hundred feet deep. Fertilizer was practically unknown. The climate, too, was perfect for agriculture, with a growing season of seven and a half months free from frost. After large planters moved in, Mississippi County gained a reputation for growing more cotton than any other county in the nation. In 1930, cotton was not only the dominant crop; it was virtually the only crop. Ninety per cent of the farmers of the county depended almost solely on cotton for their income. But nine out of ten farmers were either tenants or sharecroppers. They needed land to farm and credit to finance their farming operations; the

Depression made both difficult to get.\textsuperscript{15}

In May, 1934, Dyess launched "Colonization Project No. 1," the colony's original designation. Construction crews literally had to hack and chop the colony out of a veritable jungle. After the virgin timber had been removed, Baker recalled, "dense impenetrable underbrush had taken its place. Trees left at the time of the original cutting had grown to enormous size, and the whole area was almost in a wilderness."\textsuperscript{16} O. G. Norment, construction supervisor, was a member of the first crew that invaded this wilderness. With a truck, tractor, and other equipment, he and his men entered the project through a winding trail that reminded him of an Indian path. "I shall never forget what a seeming\[ly\] unsurmountable [sic] task we had before us the first morning I arrived . . . ." he wrote later. "Practically the entire acreage consisted of cut-over hardwood timber land. . . . There were a few cleared spots where old logging camps had been established, most of these grown up, however, into a mass of bushes and small saplings. . . ."\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15}A Review of Work Relief Activities in Arkansas,\textsuperscript{120922; Dyess Farms, Arkansas: The First Experiment with a New Kind of Rural Community, dated May 7, 1941, R. G. 96, National Archives; Mabel F. Edrington, History of Mississippi County, Arkansas (Ocala, Florida, 1962), 75-87, 91, 92, 378, 382.  

\textsuperscript{16}Traveling Recovery Road, 154.  

\textsuperscript{17}O. G. Norment to R. G. Tugwell, January 15, 1936, R. G. 96, National Archives.
A few squatters lived in small log or box shacks on small patches of cleared land. Otherwise, the colony land was uninhabited, inhospitable, and forbidding.

Cone Murphy was the over-all construction supervisor. After gathering 115 logging mules, wagons, and equipment at the northeast corner of the project, he put several hundred unskilled men to work felling trees, while a force of skilled laborers set up two or three saw mills. To hold costs down, Dyess' plan called for using lumber cut and sawed on the colony's own land for as much construction work as possible. In a few weeks, Murphy had seven saw mills in operation, one a large steam-powered mill, the others gasoline-powered including two portable mills. Their combined daily capacity was about 65,000 feet of lumber.18

By June 15, Murphy's men had completed the first buildings on the project, a temporary headquarters complex including administrative building, barracks, kitchen, and mess halls. The barracks consisted of four screened and electrically lighted bunk houses with accommodations for about 400 men. Before their living quarters were finished, workmen came from Osceola by truck every day; afterward, almost the entire labor force lived a kind of camp life on

the project itself. Each man slept on an iron cot, cotton mattress, feather pillow, with clean sheets and blankets. The kitchen served three mess halls, two for white workers and one for Negro. The workmen were housed and fed for about seventy-five cents a day, which was deducted from their wages. By mid-summer, the temporary headquarters consisted of more bunk houses, barns, stables, blacksmith shop, supply depot, general office building, payroll building, first-aid building, dynamite building (more than a mile away), two shower bath houses, and various store houses.  

From July to September, 1934, Murphy consistently had 1,400 workers under his supervision. Most of them came off relief rolls. Dyess obtained common labor through the Mississippi County office of the National Reemployment Service and skilled labor from the state office. Using the National Recovery Administration's wage scale for timber and mill workers, he paid skilled labor three to five dollars a day and unskilled labor slightly less, both roughly the

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190. G. Norment to R. G. Tugwell, January 15, 1936, R. G. 96, National Archives; A Review of Work Relief Activities in Arkansas, 132, 136; Osceola Times, June 22, 1934; Arkansas Gazette, June 17, 1934.

prevailing rates for northeast Arkansas. But when Blytheville labor union leaders protested in early July, Nels Anderson of the American Federation of Labor and George D. Babcock, United States District Engineer, investigated the colony's labor practices. As a result, they recommended a higher wage scale for all workers. On July 7, the National Reemployment Service ordered Dyess to begin paying common labor thirty cents an hour and skilled carpenters from seventy-five cents to a dollar an hour, while shortening the work-week to thirty-six hours. Dyess argued that this change would interfere with his desire to keep the investment as low as possible for families who would occupy the farm units. The higher wage scale both increased expenses and momentarily slowed up construction, with unexpected results. Since the men could work only six hours a day, they now had lots of leisure time on their hands. After several fights broke out at the colony, officials organized boxing matches in order to let the men work off excess energy and to accommodate those wanting to fight somebody. Boxing became a regular Saturday afternoon diversion and almost the only available form of recreation. Soon, colony officials furnished material for building two boxing rings, and matches were held at night as well.

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22 A review of *Work Relief Activities in Arkansas*, 122, 132, 136.
With preliminary construction out of the way, Murphy began building the farmsteads on July 13. On these sample farmsteads, he personally supervised a crew of twenty-five carpenters, and then put each one in charge of their own crews for erecting the rest of the farmsteads. Little Rock architect Howard Eichenbaum designed the basic plans for three-, four-, and five-room type houses. Like the first farmsteads, all cottages at Dyess were frame structures, simple, convenient (indoor toilets), and modern (electric lights). The three-room house, with one bedroom, living room, and kitchen, would accommodate a family of three or four members. The four-room house, for a family of five or six, had two bedrooms, while the five-room house provided three bedrooms for families over six. Although Murphy's carpenters followed one basic plan for each type of house, they varied the location of rooms, porches, doors, and windows enough to avoid monotony. The houses were painted white, with green, dark red, or brown trimming. Workers cleared about two acres of land immediately around each house and barn, but the colonists themselves had to clear the rest of the land. Colony officials furnished the sample houses in order to determine the cost ($195.00 for three bedrooms, living room, and kitchen) and made them into
temporary sleeping quarters for some of the workers.23

According to Dyess' original plan, there would be 500 three-, four-, and five-room cottages located on farm units of thirty, forty, and fifty acres, respectively. The colonists would purchase them at cost with payments amortized over a ten-year period. He estimated that the house and barn together would average $600, $800, and $1,000, depending on size. But in late August, Dyess revised the colony plan, the first of many changes. Now he intended to build 750 cottages, while limiting all farm units to twenty acres each.24 During the summer and fall, Murphy's work crews regularly completed ten to fifteen houses each week. On October 15, Murphy had 101 houses either finished or under construction. By the end of 1934, there were 146 farm cottages ready for occupancy; seven months later, the number had risen to 277 completed and sixteen under construction. In January, 1936, Dyess Colony contained 490 completed farm homes.25

Since the colony was mostly wilderness, one of Murphy's earliest tasks was to build roads and bridges and


dig drainage ditches. As soon as the saw mills began buzzing, three draglines, two caterpillar tractors, and a pile driver went to work on both new roads and old county roads. Radiating out in all directions from the temporary headquarters, road crews cleared right-of-ways, graded roads, and spread gravel. When completed, the colony's road system followed the section, half section, and sometimes quarter section lines, forming a grill-like pattern. In all, Murphy completed about thirty-five miles of gravel roads, built twenty-four main bridges and numerous small bridges, and dug some ninety miles of drainage ditches. What made the task of road building easier was the fact that no one lived on the land the roads were traversing. The road builders, wrote Norment with obvious satisfaction, did not have "to consider what this property owner or that influential citizen had to say about it, or institute an condemnation proceeding or experience any useless delay." Like any small town, the project also needed a railroad. The St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad agreed to run a train to the colony, provided the colony would construct about five miles of track from the spur southeast of Wilson, Arkansas. The colony sawmills provided 24,600 oak cross ties for this five miles, several sets of switch ties, and additional cross ties for a half mile of switch track that served the warehouse and

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26 Ibid.
cotton gin. On November 15, the Frisco Railroad began running one train to the colony and back to Wilson each day.  

Near the heart of the project, Dyess set aside about 150 acres for the community center. When he first began laying plans for an agricultural colony, he knew that low-income families would be unable to provide for themselves normal community needs like education, medical care, and recreation. With Eichenbaum's help, Dyess created not merely a community center but a veritable small town business district. In early September, Murphy assigned a crew of men the task of clearing the community center grounds and staking out the building sites for administration building group, while other men laid out the streets and boulevards. In October, construction crews started work on the administration buildings, including the administration building proper, commissary, cafe, and various stores. In November, work began on the hospital and school buildings. As the year ended, Murphy sharply cut back work on farmsteads and concentrated on the community center. By January 31, 1935, the administration was ninety-five per cent complete, with commissary, hospital, cafe, and store buildings not far behind. In early May, the administrative staff moved their offices from the temporary headquarters to the new administration

27A Review of Work Relief Activities in Arkansas, 132, 143.
building.  

The Social Service Division of the Arkansas Emergency Relief Administration supervised the selection of colonists. "The choice of Colony families is made on a very rigid selective basis," wrote Mrs. Dot Kennan, Division director. Realizing how crucial family selection was, she was looking for people with leadership qualities, stability, and resourcefulness, people who would help make Dyess Colony a successful community of self-governing individuals. Mrs. Kennan's staff gave first consideration to former ERA rehabilitation clients, especially those who had lost their homes and farm equipment during the Depression. To qualify, applicants had to have farming experience, submit references from leading citizens in their home communities, and prove their good health by passing a physical examination.

After a year of experience, the Social Service staff tightened their selection criteria. They began requiring a physical examination of each member of the family, not just the family head, with a Wassermann test on parents and grown children. They stressed the selection of people with skills,

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28 Ibid., 127, 128, 140.


in addition to farming experience, that could be utilized at the colony. More important, they checked closely the attitudes of applicants toward colonization, farm ownership, and the contribution they could make to the colony. Did they want to plant deep roots in a farm, or was colonization simply a "way out" until something better opened up? The Social Service staff also paid more attention to religious affiliation: "experience has shown that emotional instability experienced in excessive religious fervor of certain religious sects was a disturbing element, and was interfering with work at the colony." Since a few families had come to the colony with a mistaken impression of requirements or conditions or had otherwise proved unsuited to the project, the Social Service Division began arranging for prospective colonists to visit the colony with their county administrator in order to make sure they thoroughly understood what they would be getting into.31

The Emergency Relief Administration established a definite procedure for locating and approving qualified families. At the request of the Social Service Division, each ERA county caseworker and rural supervisor recommended "one or two eligible families whom they considered most likely to succeed in the colonization program." If

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interested, the families filled out appropriate applicant forms. The county administrator and his staff verified the information given, studied the records of these families, and made recommendations to the state ERA office, specifying first and second choice. A committee made up of Mrs. Kennan and W. A. Rooksberry of the Social Service Division, Mrs. Hilda K. Cornish, director of Women's Work, and E. B. Whitaker, director of rural rehabilitation, went over each application and made the final selections. When notified, the county administrator gave approved clients a "twenty-four hour preparatory notice" for removal to the colony on a given date, with ERA providing transportation.32

On October 25, 1934, the first colonists arrived at Dyess Colony, thirteen families from thirteen different counties. One of these families was W. H. ("Harve") Smith, his wife and five children, from Bassett, Arkansas, seven miles away. A cash tenant who rented land outright, Harve Smith had been a cotton farmer all his life. Then the Depression left him destitute. With cotton hovering around six cents a pound, he could no longer pay rent for land, nor could he find a place as a sharecropper. Forced on relief, he and his family struggled through the winter of 1933-1934.

In early May, 1934, he became a rural rehabilitation client and quickly demonstrated that his plight was due not to his own incompetence but to circumstances beyond his control. He grew enough produce for his family, paid back his relief loan, and had enough left to buy a mule from the ERA. When he arrived at Dyess Colony, he brought with him his own cow and calf, 105 chickens, enough forage to carry his stock through the coming winter, and enough canned food to feed his family. Before moving, the Smiths lived in a leaky three-room cabin; when it rained, they had to move all the furniture out of one room. At Dyess, Smith moved his family into a new five-room home, still smelling of fresh paint, located on a thirty-acre tract. He spent the winter clearing the land and working part-time for the colony itself. In the spring of 1935, he had his unit ready for cultivation. If he stuck to it, one day he could own both the house and the land.\textsuperscript{33}

FERA officials began finding fault with family selection at Dyess as early as November, 1934. "Dyess Colony is troubling everyone," wrote regional social worker Loula Dunn. Until recently, she said, the colony had no qualified social worker, and the basis of family selection was still

\textsuperscript{33}A Review of Work Relief Activities in Arkansas, 123, 126.
In 1935, there were further complaints that the pace of family selection consistently ran behind farmstead construction; available houses at the colony were not being filled fast enough. After the first thirteen families came in October, 1934, ten families arrived in November, eighteen in December, and four in January, bringing the total to forty-five families. As a result, a large number of houses stood empty during the crop year of 1935 when they might have been used. By November, the Emergency Relief Administration had selected a total of 161 families, thirty-eight of whom returned home after a short stay, leaving 133 families then living on the colony. In contrast, there were over 300 cottages completed and ready for occupancy.

In November, 1935, the Resettlement Administration took over family selection for Dyess Colony. The Little Rock regional office had developed an efficient staff of family selection specialists—a staff that could possibly provide the guidance needed at Dyess. A senior selection specialist took up residence at the colony itself, while a

34 Loula Dunn, Memorandum to Josephine C. Brown, December 3, 1934, R. G. 69, National Archives; Dunn to W. R. Dyess, November 30, 1934, ibid.


five-man staff worked in the field visiting and interviewing rural rehabilitation clients. The Resettlement Administration approved only two families for Dyess in December, but thirteen in January, sixty-four in February, 128 in March, 120 in April, and twenty-two by mid-May. In six or seven months, the RA had assigned 349 families to Dyess, filling all but eighteen of the farmsteads at the colony, and these were filled soon afterward.37

As families arrived, colony officials assigned them to farm units according to the number of family members. A husband and wife with one or two children received a twenty-acre tract. Larger families had more manpower available, so they settled on thirty-acre tracts. Exceptionally large families, perhaps around ten members, took the forty-acre units. In effect, most newly arrived families went on temporary relief. Since most arrived without adequate household equipment, the Emergency Relief Administration immediately supplied them with beds, mattresses, and stoves, expecting these to be paid for later. To get them on their feet, relief officials also took care of anything they could not provide for themselves: food, clothing, tools, household necessities, medical attention. In return, the head of

each family worked a certain number of days on colony construction, usually as unskilled labor.\textsuperscript{38}

The social service supervisor and the rural supervisor helped the colonists establish homes and farms at Dyess. Appointed October 26, 1934, one day after the first families arrived, Mrs. Ed L. Salyers supervised home demonstration work.\textsuperscript{39} Stressing self-sufficiency, she worked with the wives in preparing household budgets and gave instruction in canning, sewing, and other homemaking arts. To aid families with home furnishings, she converted one of the farm cottages into a home demonstration house, using furniture that carpenters could easily copy at the colony work shop with lumber cut on the colony land. Starting November 26, Jake Terry, rural supervisor, helped family heads plan the best use for their land.\textsuperscript{40} He advised farmers through weekly group meetings, individual visits to their tracts, and published bulletins. Based on the Extension Service program of diversified farming, Terry's farm management program emphasized four basic principles: food for the family,

\textsuperscript{38}\textit{A Review of Work Relief Activities in Arkansas}, 126, 127.

\textsuperscript{39}\textit{Traveling Recovery Road}, 157; \textit{A Review of Work Relief Activities in Arkansas}, 147; \textit{Osceola Times}, February 15, 1935.

\textsuperscript{40}\textit{A Review of Work Relief Activities in Arkansas}, 126, 146, 147; Connie J. Bonslagel to Colonel Lawrence Westbrook, November 12, 1934, R. G. 96, National Archives; \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, May 12, 1935.
feed for livestock, cash income, and soil income and soil improvement. Thus colonists planted not only cotton, but corn, truck gardens, hay crops, and pastures. In addition, each farmer had a flock of chickens, a sow, at least one milch cow, and a mule for plowing. As rural supervisor, Terry sought to build a community of farmers who were both self-reliant and ready to act as a group when this would give them an advantage.41

After two years of construction, the Emergency Relief Administration halted work on community facilities and farmsteads at Dyess Colony in the early summer of 1936. By then, Dyess was a community of about 3,000 people. At the center of the project, the community center had grown into a small city, with city blocks, paved streets and sidewalks, stores, official buildings, and residential sections. The main administration building, a two-story brick veneer structure, with smaller brick veneer buildings on either side, formed a semicircle around a memorial plaque to the colony's founder. The building to the right contained a community department or general store, the left one a cafe, barber shop, and post office (with rural free delivery). Two blocks away stood a combination grade school and high school, while three other grade schools were located in other sections of the project. Nearby, a wood-working and furniture

41 A Review of Work Relief Activities in Arkansas, 146, 147.
factory, canning plant, saw mills, machine shops, cotton gin, and grist mill provided employment for a few colonists and vital services for all. In addition, community facilities included a filling station, railroad depot, canning plant, ice house, laundry, garage, barn, and four warehouses; later there would be a print shop and credit union. A baseball field and grandstand faced the Tryronza River. Across the street were a swimming pool, bath houses, tennis courts, and not far away, a city park. The community hall, a T-shaped building, held a library and movie theatre-auditorium, plus space for a variety of indoor entertainment. Besides the community buildings, there were about forty private residences for the families of administration personnel.42

Completely surrounding the community center, the colony land stretched out in every direction. When construction ended, Dyess colony consisted of 500 farmsteads of varying sizes: sixty-one three-room, 233 four-room, and 206 five-room houses. Similarly, the land had been broken up into 500 farm units: 334 farms of twenty acres, sixty-four of thirty acres, and 102 of forty acres. By spring planting time in 1936, colonists had cleared only about 4,875 acres. In all, the Emergency Relief Administration had invested $3,645,193.00 in Dyess Colony—a total that included

everything from land and all construction to direct relief for individual colonists.43

At the start of 1936, Dyess Colony had several serious deficiencies for a project almost two years old. Except for construction supervisor Cone Murphy, no one administrative officer had ever been in charge of the entire project. Instead, W. R. Dyess relied on a half dozen people—Murphy, E. B. Whitaker, Jake Terry, Mrs. Ed Salyers, Howard Eichenbaum, and Dr. L. L. Huebner, colony physician—with each person responsible only for the specific tasks assigned to him, nothing more. Until his death on January 14, Dyess himself seems to have provided the only overall direction the colony had. Perhaps more serious, Dyess Colony still had no organizational structure. The Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation had launched Colinization Project Number One and still held title to the project property; but Dyess was only part of its total program of rural rehabilitation, and indeed was only one of the community projects it undertook. What Dyess Colony needed was its own organization, one that would allow the colony to achieve maturity as an independent and self-sufficient community. Nor had another important matter been definitely worked out. The colonists did not know what obligations they had incurred by moving to

43 Audit Report, Dyess Colony, Incorporated, Dyess, Arkansas, February 29, 1936, R. G. 96, National Archives; Traveling Recovery Road, 154, 155.
Dyess; they had no idea how much their farmsteads would cost or how long they would have to pay it off. All they had was faith in the good will of the government.  

After Dyess’ death, the new Works Progress Administration for Arkansas, Floyd Sharp, could no longer postpone these problems as his predecessor had done. The Resettlement Administration already had plans for absorbing the Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation within a few weeks. Sharp had to take immediate action if Dyess Colony was not to be absorbed along with it. At a special meeting on February 17, 1936, the board of directors of the Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation formed a new organization, Dyess Colony, Incorporated, to take over the management of the Colony and carry W. R. Dyess’ plans to conclusion. Floyd Sharp, Henry B. Baker, and R. C. Limerick comprised both the board of directors and the stockholders of the new corporation, each holding one share of no par value stock. They

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44 Report of Roland RE Pyne, Regional Engineer, Period Ending November 10, 1934, Hopkins Papers, Box 79, FDRL.

pledged their stock to the WPA national director, Harry Hopkins, who held it "in trust against the faithful performance of duties on the part of the Board of Directors." Since all three were also stockholders in the Arkansas RR Corporation, the meeting turned into a joint conference of officers of both corporations. The Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation sold for one dollar all real and personal property of Colonization Project Number One to Dyess Colony, Inc. Then they discussed plans for the formation of a subsidiary corporation to manage the colony and community facilities and sell stock to the colony residents. "Under this plan," Sharp explained, "the residents of the colony will eventually own the land they are now purchasing and in addition will own the corporation that operates the community center." At last, Dyess Colony had not only the kind of organization it needed for permanence, but a new name as well. The term "Dyess colony" had been used almost from the start, but it did not become the official designation of the colony until after Dyess' death and the creation

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46 *Arkansas Gazette*, February 18, 1936; *Osceola Times*, February 21, 1936; *Extract of Minutes, Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation*, dated February 17, 1936, R. G. 96, National Archives. See Floyd Sharp, Memorandum to All Residents of the Dyess Colony, February 10, 1936, *ibid*.

47 Raymond O. Denham to Rexford G. Tugwell, July 15, 1936, *ibid*.

48 *Arkansas Gazette*, February 18, 1936.
of Dyess Colony, Inc. 49

Less than a week after the creation of Dyess Colony, Inc., Sharp gave E. S. Dudley a leave of absence from his job as state director of the WPA's Division of Employment and appointed him colony administrator. 50 That left only one unsolved problem: the terms on which colonists could get possession of their homes and farms. Again, colony authorities had to reach a decision soon. Cone Murphy, who had stayed on as superintendent of construction, would have the last of 500 farmsteads ready in June or July. 51 The Resettlement Administration planned to be through with family selection by early June, and about 350 new families would want to know exactly where they stood in regard to future ownership. More important, a new crop year had virtually arrived, and Dyess Colony could be successful only if full use were made of its land and facilities. Within a few weeks, Sharp, Baker, and Limerick, with the help of the colony's special council, Lawrence Westbrook, worked out what they considered to be a fair and equitable plan for home ownership. Perhaps to impress the colonists with the importance of this step, Westbrook visited Dyess and personally explained the details of the purchase plan.


50Arkansas Gazette, February 22, 1936.

51Ibid.
Everyone would have a chance to own his own farm, Westbrook assured the colonists in a speech in early August of 1936. Until then, they had been merely "licensees" renting their land. But, Westbrook explained, Dyess Colony, Inc., would have each tract of land and its improvements appraised. The appraisers would consider the earning power of the property--not only its value as a home but the ability of the land and improvements to produce a living--the tax rate, replacement value, and market price. Then the Dyess corporation would offer to sell each family the house and land they occupied at the appraised value, less ten per cent. "We are," Westbrook explained, "making this deduction to the family living there not as any special mark of favor, but because we think it would cost about that much to get someone else established there." Finally, Westbrook said, the corporation Dyess Colony, Inc., and each purchaser would enter into a sales contract, with the selling price amortized over a thirty-year period at six per cent annual interest. The colonists could make monthly, quarterly, or semi-annual payments as they wished; and at its discretion, the corporation could defer all or any part of a payment and extend the loan in emergency situations. No one would be permitted to re-sell their farm except to the colony corporation. All of this was in the future for most colonists, however, since each family had to serve a two-year probationary period
before becoming eligible for a purchase contract.\textsuperscript{52}

From 1936 to 1940, Dyess Colony, Inc., operated the project under WPA direction. The colony became perhaps the most highly organized community project of Region Six; because of its size, it had to be. As colony administrator, Dudley was responsible for three large areas of activity: farm operations, business management, and community government.\textsuperscript{53} He assigned farm operations to his assistant administrator, Jake Terry, and a staff of farm advisors; they, in turn, worked closely with the colony's home demonstration agent and 4-H Clubs to coordinate farm and home management planning. Dudley retained major responsibility for business, marketing, and cooperative activities, while delegating specific tasks to a business manager and accountant. After October 31, 1936, Dudley marketed all cash crops grown at the colony through Dyess Colony Corporative Association, an organization in which all project residents owned stock.\textsuperscript{54} In addition, the cooperative association operated the store, gin, feed mill, cannery, commissary, lumber mill, blacksmith

\begin{footnotes}
\item[52] Address to the Arkansas Farm Tenancy Commission by Lawrence Westbrook, September 21, 1936, Hopkins Papers, Box 116, FDL; Lawrence Westbrook to Paul V. Maris, August 10, 1936, and enclosures, R. G. 96, National Archives; see \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, January 9, 1938.
\item[53] Azile Aaron to W. A. Rooksberry, March 25, 1936, R. G. 96, National Archives.
\item[54] Articles of Incorporation of Dyess Colony Cooperative Association, dated October 31, 1936, Arkansas Secretary of State, Corporations Department, State Capital, Little Rock, Arkansas.
\end{footnotes}
shop, furniture factory, and all other community facilities. "'Cooperation' must be our watchword . . . ," Westbrook told the colonists. "In this community here we aim to apply the principles of co-operation to all our important activities and at the same time to preserve and develop that spirit of competitive individualism which seems necessary for the highest achievement in any line of human endeavor."\(^5\) As time went on, the colonists themselves, through the Dyess Cooperative Colony Association, were expected to purchase the cooperative facilities and take on more and more the tasks of running their own community. As for community government, Dudley functioned as a city manager coordinating the work of schools, utilities, public health and sanitation services, police and fire departments, plus religious, civic, and recreational activities.\(^6\)

By 1939, the air had begun visibly seeping out of the Dyess balloon. To some of its supporters, like Lawrence Westbrook, the development of Dyess Colony was a romantic vision of rugged, pioneer farm families engaged in "carving their homes out of the wilderness."\(^7\) Undoubtedly, the colony's early years did afford challenge, excitement, a

\(^{5}\)Lawrence Westbrook to Paul V. Maris, August 10, 1936, and enclosures, R. G. 96, National Archives.

\(^{6}\)Azile Aaron to W. A. Rooksberry, March 25, 1936, and enclosures, ibid.

\(^{7}\)Arkansas Gazette, June 10, 1936.
sense of blazing new trails for others to follow if the colony were successful. For the colonists, the future was to be glorious. "I predict that within ten years, this will be the most prosperous community in Arkansas or any other State," Westbrook once told the colonists. "There will be no rich people here, but everyone will be well-to-do."\(^{58}\) Westbrook's promises, however, never caught up to reality. Life at Dyess was much like life at any other rural community during the Depression. It was hard. There was little romance in cutting down trees and clearing land, walking behind a mule all day long, or picking cotton from sun up to sun down. "Any colonist with a modicum of industry," Henry Baker wrote in 1936, "can be assured of owning his own home within a reasonable time."\(^{59}\) Yet in early 1938, for example, only 155 families had deeds to their homesteads, leaving about 445 families still on probationary status. There was a constant turnover of families. Between October, 1934, and April, 1938, a total of 649 families lived in the colony at some time; of these, 252 or thirty-nine percent moved away.\(^{60}\) As a WPA project, Dyess Colony was a financial failure. Dyess Colony, Inc., lost $386,729.02 in

\(^{58}\)Lawrence Westbrook to Paul V. Maris, August 10, 1936, and enclosures, R. G. 96, National Archives.

\(^{59}\)Traveling Recovery Road, 156.

\(^{60}\)Charles P. Loomis and Dwight Davidson, Jr., "Sociometrics and the Study of the New Rural Communities," Sociometry, II (January, 1939), 57, 58.
1937, $221,325.70 in 1938, and $144,181.35 in 1939, though its operations did show constant improvement. The seeds of future trouble had already started to sprout.

DYESS COLONY: POLITICS AND DENOUEMENT

During the twelve-year history of the New Deal community program, Dyess Colony generated more internal quarrels and political controversy than any other project in Region Six. One of Dyess' most persistent problems was unrest among the colonists. When discontent first appeared in 1936, Dyess authorities took the position that the colony offered residents opportunities on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. "No one of you is under any obligation to stay here if he doesn't think he will like it," Lawrence Westbrook told the colonists, "nor is the Corporation under any obligation to keep anyone here if its officers feel that that person would not make good and cooperate with the Corporation and with his neighbors. There is no compulsion on either side." Westbrook added, "I merely mention the matter because I have heard that there are a few, a very few, people here in the community who have not understood that the Government was offering them an opportunity they might take on the Government's terms or leave without rancor or prejudice, if they didn't want this particular kind of chance."¹

¹Lawrence Westbrook to Paul V. Maris, August 10, 1936,
Most of the colonists, then and later, did put forth an honest effort to take advantage of their new opportunity, made few complaints, and remained confident that the colony administration had their best interests at heart. Harve Smith, one of the original thirteen colonists, was probably characteristic of the majority of Dyess residents. A newspaper reporter talked to Smith after he had lived at Dyess for three and a half years.2

"What do you think of this place now?"

"It's the best proposition a poor man ever had," Smith said.

"In what respects?"

"Well, there's nothing against a man here. A man does need more acreage, but still I've got feed enough to do two mules and my other stock this winter. Here, they've given a man a chance when it looked like no one else would."

"Think you'll have any trouble buying your place?"

"Nope. I'll buy it all right."

"What do you think of the co-operative idea for operation of the community center?"

"Swell idea." (Harve was not much of a talker.)

"What do you like best about the place?" the reporter

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and enclosures, Harry L. Hopkins Papers, Box 116, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York (to be cited hereafter as Hopkins Papers, FDRL).

2Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), January 9, 1938.
"Well, I've got a home and some good land—best in the world, and an opportunity to buy them. If we boys will just line with them [the colony directors] they'll back us, but we wouldn't have a chance without this place. Let me tell you, the sentiment of the farmers is looking up."

"Anything you don't like about it?"

"Well, yes, but it can't be helped. The only thing hurtin' now is this 'PWA' that is putting us on jobs and keeping us off our farms."

Harve was working for the PWA because he was broke. After he had cleared thirty-one acres of land, he lost "near everything" in the floods of 1937: his corn crop, most of his feed, hay, hogs, chickens, and other stores. After the flood, he tried to make a go of it on a twenty-acre tract. But like many other colonists, he was forced to go to work for the PWA until he could get on his feet again. Smith wanted desperately to get back to farming. He asked: "Why not give me a $25 mortgage on my cow and let me go on my farm and make it back?"

"They've been awful nice to us," Harve concluded. "They've given me a good school for my kids, a good hospital—and a chance."

"I don't suppose you're interested in politics?"
[Translation: Are you part of any dissension movement?]

"Nope," Smith grinned. "We ain't interested in politics." I guess we'd just do what 'they' wanted us to."
But by 1938, an increasing number of families had developed an interest in "politics." Like all communities, Dyess contained its share of trouble-makers. Discouraged, many families left the project when they saw only hard work ahead. Other dissidents stayed on and found plenty to criticize, but only sporadically did discontent flare into the open. In April, 1938, for example, Dudley discharged two men, the colony store manager and the dry goods department manager. He explained that this action was taken in order to enable the colony to hire more experienced personnel.  

"They did not have enough experience in merchandizing to operate the general store," Floyd Sharp commented. But in protest, 156 colonists signed a petition asking that the store clerks be rehired; and 200 sent a second petition to Mrs. Roosevelt, who had visited and expressed an interest in Dyess, requesting her to investigate the "administrative activities" of the colony. After Sharp refused to rehire them, the protest gradually subsided. "As to an investigation," he said, "I am sure that the clerks would not welcome one."  

Until 1939, however, no major dissension movement challenged the colony's leadership, largely because colonists discontent lacked an issue and, most important, leadership.

3Ibid., April 27, 1938; Osceola Times, April 25, 1938.  

4Ibid.
Suddenly, it seemed, the dissidents found both. On March 17, 1938, colony officials served eviction notices on two colonists, ordering them to vacate their houses within three days. One was S. B. Funk, fifty-two, a raw-boned farmer and one-time veterinarian from Haskell in Saline County, and a resident of the colony since 1934; the other, A. J. McGravin, also fifty-two, a native of Morrillton who came to Dyess in 1935. They were both incompetent, colony authorities maintained, and they had performed insufficient work during the customary two-year probation period to merit further occupancy. In addition, Funk owed the colony over $1,600 and had been a constant source of trouble. McGavin was in better financial condition, but he had continually refused to participate in any of the colony's cooperative enterprises. Since both refused to leave, Dyess Colony, Inc., initiated a suit against them for unlawful detainer and cut off their credit at the colony store. But Funk and McGravin obtained credit outside the colony, employed A. F. Barham, an Osceola lawyer, to represent their case, and apparently spent their spare time building up support among other colonists. The lawsuit, they later claimed, was the start of "open indignation" at Dyess; before then, other colonists had

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5Arkansas Gazette, April 2, 1939. Both Funk and McGravin took their cases to the Arkansas Supreme Court and lost. Arkansas Reports: Cases Determined in the Supreme Court of Arkansas from March 1940 to October, 1940 (Little Rock, 1940), CC, 180-93.
been afraid to discuss openly their dissatisfaction. When others saw they might also lose their farms, Funk and McGravin said, they "at first bided their time but last fall [1938] decided nothing was to be done about the present management and decided they must interest the public." So in 1939, Funk and McGravin emerged as the ringleaders of a dissident element made up of about a third of the total colony population. (There were then about 375 families at Dyess.)

When refused permission to hold protest meetings at the colony, on March 17 a group of about 250 Dyess residents--men, women, and children, not family heads--gathered at the courthouse in Osceola to protest against what they called "unfair and discriminatory management." The protesters claimed they had been charged exorbitant prices for land they bought at the colony. On March 29, 275 held a second mass meeting in Osceola, this time an all-day affair climaxed with the sending of telegrams to President Roosevelt and Governor Carl E. Bailey. In the telegram to Bailey, they requested that the Governor use his "influence with Mrs. Roosevelt to put an end to the intolerable conditions existing here." "The records of this county show," the telegram read, "that this land was purchased at $2.50 per acre. Our contracts call for its sale to us at its actual cost plus

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6*Arkansas Gazette*, April 1, 1939.
improvements, but officials have now insisted that we agree to pay from $75 to $100 per acre—many times the value of the land." If they failed to pay, they faced the threat of being thrown off the colony. "Unless you can prevent this...," they said, "we will lose four years of labor and our last chance for a home. Please help us."  

The most vocal dissenter, Funk was probably the author of the telegram. "I bought 38 acres to be paid for over a period of years and thought I was to get it at $2.50 an acre," he complained. "After I had worked it for three years I found out they had charged me $3,900." Colony officials, he further charged, had meted out brutal treatment to dissenting colonists. In June, 1938, a Dyess farm supervisor had supposedly beaten one colonist unconscious and injured four others who were holding a meeting at a schoolhouse in the colony. When a speaker from outside the colony attempted to make a talk, colony authorities ordered him out; then, as he attempted to go on with his remarks, Funk claimed the farm supervisor and a deputy sheriff assaulted him, too.  

Scarcely bowing to the more spectacular charges, colony officials countered with facts and figures. Resident manager E. S. Dudley denied that anyone had been charged exorbitant prices. "Prices of the tracts are based on the

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9Arkansas Gazette, April 2, 1939.
size and the amount of the improvements," he explained.

"The land is appraised and the improvements, such as drainage ditches, roads, schools and other conveniences, are figured in as part of the purchase price."¹⁰ R. A. Lile, colony accountant, admitted that some of the land had been purchased for $2.50 per acre, but that did not represent the entire cost of obtaining title. Lile placed the actual cost at $9.82 per acre—a figure that included the cost of land, legal expenses, quitclaim deeds, surveying and payment of delinquent taxes. For example, Funk's land alone cost $382.88. But counting improvements, he was paying $76.93 an acre on 38.99 acres. The average cost of improvements—five-room house, barn and poultry house of the type built on the Funk tract—was $2,291.88, while the cost of drainage ditches amounted to $7.18 per acre or $279.95. "In view of the fact that various tracts were to be sold to the homesteaders as cleared land," said Lile, "$15 per acre was included in the cost price and set up in a reserve for clearing. This added $584.85 to the cost of the land." Thus, Lile said, the cost of the Funk tract was $1,247.68; with improvements, it came to $3,539.56. But he received a $273.90 credit, or fifteen dollars per acre, for land which he had cleared, reducing the cost of the tract to $3,265.66.

¹⁰Ibid., March 18, 1939. Dudley, however, seems to have been confused about what went into the purchase price just as some of the colonists were. See Lile's statement next.
Finally, allowing him ten per cent off, the sales price to Funk was $2,999.52. Dyess Colony, Inc., had added no interest, nor prorated the cost of roads and bridges. Funk's annual payments were $153.03, or about four dollars per acre per year; and he had thirty years to pay.\textsuperscript{11}

There were several reasons for the dissension at Dyess. The Emergency Relief Administration had made at least two major mistakes that plagued the colony for years afterward. From the start, FERA region engineer Roland R. Pyne warned against the danger of not thoroughly acquainting clients with the size of the financial obligations they assumed as Dyess colonists.\textsuperscript{12} This mistake was never fully corrected, and it did immeasurable harm. A number of colonists, like Funk and McGravin, expected to buy their land and homes at a cheaper price than the colony could offer. Newspaper stories of $2.50 an acre land and $1,000 homes had made such a deep impression that it could never be eradicated. Equally serious, family selection specialists allowed a number of poor choices to slip through. The project, Dudley later explained, was set up to assist only persons with farming backgrounds, but relief agencies had admitted people who were not primarily farmers, people who were, for example, carpenters or who worked at other trades.\textsuperscript{13} One colonist,

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Ibid.}, April 1, 1939.

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Report of Roland R. Pyne, Regional Engineer, Period Ending November 10, 1934}, Hopkins Papers, Box 79, FDRL.

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Arkansas Gazette}, April 2, 1939.
Homer Williams, put it this way:

When this thing started out back in 1934, they brought us here people who hadn't had anything before in their lives. They were on relief. They took them from all walks of life and from all parts of the state, and put them down here on an equal basis, doing the same thing—farming. As time went on, they began to sift down. Some of them couldn't take it. Others made a go of it. You just can't take so many different types of people and set them down doing the same thing without having a little trouble.14

Many colonists may have started out with high hopes, worked hard for the first year or two, but, after repeated disappointments, lost their enthusiasm. Some found it difficult to adjust to the full-time job of farming, to the sticky black gumbo soil, to the "buffalo gnats" common in that part of eastern Arkansas. A few colonists, it seems, were unable to understand the legal documents and technicalities involved in purchasing their homes.

Both the Emergency Relief Administration and the Resettlement Administration share responsibility for selection mistakes at Dyess. But probably the ERA should take the greatest blame. Funk, who came to Dyess in November, 1934, and McGravin, who came in April, 1935, were both ERA choices. Dyess Colony, after all, was the Emergency Relief Administration's first colonization effort in Arkansas. No one in 1934 or 1935 had the experience in community building available a few years later. Even the Resettlement Administration's family selection staff, young and inexperienced in 1936, had

14Ibid.
undertaken no major selection task except for the Mississippi subsistence homesteads. It is likely that they, too, were feeling their own way.

Since the dissenters represented only a minority, other colonists resented the unfavorable publicity they gave the colony. In early April, one group, a newspaper reported, was planning to send petitions to President Roosevelt and Governor Bailey denying all charges in the dissidents' petitions and expressing satisfaction with the opportunity of living at Dyess.\(^1\) (Whether they actually did so was unreported.) Colonists C. E. Tarpley reflected the attitude of some toward Funk and McGravin when he said, "If those two birds were in paradise they wouldn't be satisfied unless they were raising a ruckus." They were "sore because they don't want to get down to work."\(^2\) One reporter found the colonists divided into three groups: those strongly favorable to the colony, those strongly opposed, and those in the middle, not highly favorable but not discontented either. The majority took the third course. Homer Williams was one of those in the middle. "If they don't like it here," he remarked, "I would move." Williams, however, had actually signed the dissenters' petitions, not because he was dissatisfied, but because he was willing to help those who asked him to sign to improve their condition. Williams had no

\(^{15}\text{Ibid.}, \text{April 2, 1939.}\) \(^{16}\text{Ibid.}\)
grievances against the colony or its management; they had always given him a square deal, he said, and he was making progress toward acquiring his home and land.\textsuperscript{17}

In Arkansas politics, Dyess Colony was always a potential issue, especially as deficits mounted and dissenters grew more vocal. At first, the colony's identification with W. R. Dyess was alone enough to attract controversy. As a large planter and businessman, Bill Dyess had been involved in politics since moving to Arkansas in 1930—first local, then state politics. In Mississippi County, the most important political fact was its division into rival northern and southern sections. The largest county in Arkansas, Mississippi County had two courthouses, one at Blytheville in the northern section, the other at Osceola in the southern section; the existence of two courthouses not only indicated the size of the county but the bitterness of the sectional rivalry.

Since Dyess' home was at Osceola, he had built political ties in the southern section with, for example, Ben F. Butler, farm implement dealer and landowner, and R. E. Lee Wilson, a large planter who owned the entire town of Wilson, Arkansas, a few miles south of Osceola.\textsuperscript{18} Later, as

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{18}George D. Babcock to Winthrop D. Lane, July 13, 1934, Record Group 69, Records of the Works Projects Administration, National Archives (to be cited hereafter as R. G. 69, National Archives); Nels Anderson to Lane, July 9, 1934, \textit{ibid}. 
Emergency Relief Administrator, Dyess became a powerful force in statewide politics, with large amounts of Federal funds to dispense on relief projects and thousands of jobs to fill in every part of the state. In 1932, Dyess had supported J. M. Futrell for governor against Dwight H. Blackwood of Blytheville, and he did much to win the county for Futrell. In 1933, Futrell in turn backed him for the job as relief administrator; and in turn, Dyess threw his relief organization behind the Governor's campaign for reelection in 1934. According to current rumors, Dyess himself was ambitious for elective office; and he planned to run for governor in 1936 after Futrell stepped down—or perhaps for United States Senator. He probably had a good chance for either office. He was already well known among political leaders across the state, had built up a favorable popular image as relief administrator, and possessed a magnetic personality. ERA social service chief Gertrude S. Gates, who was one of Dyess' severist critics, admitted that "he could charm the birds off the trees if he chose." But at times, Dyess' political ambitions and activities made the colony a political football. When political foes attacked

19Gertrude S. Gates, Memorandum to Winthrop Lane, June 18, 1934, ibid. Dyess denies his political ambitions in Blytheville Courier News, July 6, 1934; Arkansas Gazette, July 7, 1934.

20Gertrude S. Gates, Memorandum to Winthrop Lane, June 18, 1934, R. G. 69, National Archives.
him, they usually wound up attacking the colony as well; it was a soft spot few could resist.

During the 1934 gubernatorial campaign, for example, Dyess' involvement in local and state politics combined to drag the colonization project, then only a few weeks old, into the first primary as a political issue.²¹ A strong Futrell partisan, he found himself facing a number of embarrassing charges—charges intended, the Osceola Times said, to "react upon the present state administration."²² Had the Emergency Relief Administration shown favoritism to the southern half of Mississippi County, the least populated part? Why did most of the relief labor being used at the colony come from Osceola rather than from Blytheville? How, indeed, did the colony itself come to be located not only in Dyess' home county, but in the very part of that county where he himself lived? Was it not true that a substantial part of the land purchased for the colony, if not all of it, had been owned by none other than Lee Wilson? Had he, with Dyess' help, neatly unloaded a large tract of worthless land on the government? What about Dyess' political favoritism, such as the purchasing of building materials and machinery from his friend Ben Butler in the early days of the colonization project? Why, too, had ERA crews improved roads running

²¹See Arkansas Gazette, June 17, 1934; Blytheville Courier News, July 6, July 11, 1934.

²²Osceola Times, July 6, 1934.
past Dyess' private land in Mississippi County? Why had there been extensive resurfacing of thirty or forty miles of formerly gravel roads near Wilson, Arkansas? Why, why, why?

As a result of such criticism, George Babcock, Nels Anderson, and Winthrop D. Lane, all FERA representatives, spent three days in Mississippi County investigating charges against Dyess. Anderson took a less tolerant attitude toward Dyess' conduct than did Babcock. By improving roads on land which he and Wilson owned, Anderson emphasized, Dyess had committed a clear indiscretion. As for the development of the colonization project, Babcock believed that Dyess had shown no "unusual" favoritism to the Southern section of the county. "That the location of this project," Babcock noted, "happened to have been in the part of the county which is generally considered as that section in which our executive lives, and almost surrounded by property owned by one who seems to be one of his strongest friends [Wilson], should not be a particular reason for criticism." "In fact," he continued, "I believe that if his home had not been located in this Southern section region there would have been little criticism of any kind so far as selection and location were

23George D. Babcock to Winthrop D. Lane, July 13, 1934, R. G. 69, National Archives; Nels Anderson to Lane, July 9, 1934, ibid.
Dyess' home, Babcock pointed out, was at least twenty-five miles from the colony and at the very northern border of the Southern section of the county. In summary, Lane reported finding "serious indiscretions but no criminal acts or acts justifying removal." He added: "I am still uncertain whether I shall recommend a new state administrator." The Federal Emergency Relief Administration did not fire Dyess, though that was a possibility; and in Arkansas, the criticism died down after Futrell won a second term. But this was not the last time Dyess Colony would become involved in state politics.

In 1939, a political feud between Floyd Sharp and Governor Bailey caught Dyess colony squarely in the middle. Bailey and Sharp had been at odds politically for two or three years. According to the Governor's supporters, Sharp had made the Arkansas WPA into a powerful political machine and had used it with deadly effect against Bailey when the latter ran for United States Senator in 1937 (John E. Miller defeated him to fill Senator Joseph T. Robinson's unexpired term). Apparently, Bailey was determined to get revenge. On February 25, 1939, Representatives B. Frank Williams,

24 George D. Babcock to Winthrop D. Lane, July 13, 1934, ibid.

25 Winthrop D. Lane to Aubrey Williams, July 10, 1934, ibid.

26 See Arkansas Gazette, March 8, 1939.
L. H. Autry, and Woodrow A. Hutton of Mississippi County introduced an administration-sponsored bill into the House directing the Arkansas Corporation Commission to audit the affairs of Dyess Colony, Inc.; Senator Ivy W. Crawford of Blytheville sponsored the bill in the Senate. The bill called for an investigation "to determine the extent of the State of Arkansas's interest in the establishment, management, and disposition of Dyess Colony." The Williams-Autry-Hutton bill passed the House, but in the Senate it quickly ran into opposition. The bill's opponents denounced it as a political maneuver. "I'm going to tell you what's behind this bill," Senator Ellis M. Fagan of Little Rock said. "I'm speaking for a man who can't speak for himself--Floyd Sharp." The fact that the bill called for only an investigation of Dyess Colony, ignoring the Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, Fagan said, showed it was "aimed to embarrass Mr. Sharp and to enliven agitation for his removal."

The Corporation Commission was responsible only to the Governor, he asserted, and it will bring out the report it is told to bring out. Senator Jeff Bratton of Paragould also opposed the investigation: "Instead of trying to investigate the how and why of Dyess Colony, we ought to be glad the

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federal government has given the money to some of our people."28

On March 7, Senate opponents amended the bill to place the investigation under the attorney general's office—and out of reach of the Corporation Commission, some of whose members were known to be hostile to Dyess Colony.29 For an instant, it looked as if they had averted any threat of investigation. Then, unexpectedly, Bailey's forces accepted the amendment and lined up enough votes to pass the new version of the bill. But on March 8, with the legislative session scheduled to end at noon the next day, Fagan and twelve other senators filibustered the bill to death. Together, they kept the floor of the Senate for nearly eight hours, the longest filibuster in recent Arkansas history. Fagan read a voluminous report of a federal audit of Dyess colony, interrupting the narrative with comments on the high cost of living, termites, and the Far Eastern situation. He took almost three hours alone reading the first page of the report and two explanatory letters. The Senate adjourned at eleven o'clock that night without taking a vote.30

But Bailey had held back a trump card. On March 6, the very day of the first mass demonstration of colonists at

28All quotes from ibid., March 8, 1939.
29Senate Journal, 1408.
30Ibid., 1412, 1439, 1460; Arkansas Gazette, March 8, 1939.
Osceola courthouse, he dissolved Dyess Colony, Inc., leaving the $3,000,000 corporation without legal right to do business in Arkansas. In an executive proclamation, the Governor ordered the dissolution of 153 domestic and thirty-seven foreign corporations which had failed to file reports and pay Arkansas franchise taxes for the past three years. Dyess was only one of these, but the intent was clear. Dyess Colony, Inc., Bailey said, had failed to pay thirty-three dollars in franchise taxes due the state. Former Governor J. M. Futrell, colony attorney, had recently advised the Arkansas Corporation Commission that Dyess Colony, Inc., contended it was a federal agency and not liable for the state franchise tax; in turn, the Arkansas Tax Division's secretary, colony officials claimed, notified them that the commission would accept this contention. But the commissioners apparently changed their minds. Now they claimed that Dyess Colony, Inc., possessed the same powers as any other business corporation, with nothing in its articles of incorporation restricting its operations to a non-profit basis or establishing it as an instrument of the Federal government.\textsuperscript{31}

Sharp, perhaps a little stunned, declared that the dissolution of Dyess Colony, Inc., was a waste of time if it were an effort to oust him from the project. "I have asked Harry L. Hopkins to be relieved of my duties with the

\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid.}, March 17, 1939.
colony," he announced. On March 22, he obtained a new Arkansas charter setting up Dyess Rural Rehabilitation Corporation as the successor to Dyess Colony, Inc. Like Dyess Colony, Inc., the new organization was a "benevolent, non-profit corporation" whose major objective was "to rehabilitate individuals and families as self-sustaining human beings." Secretary of State C. G. Hall issued the new charter upon payment of the usual fee of ten dollars. Legally, Dyess Colony was back in business.

Thus, at the end of March, 1939, Dyess Colony was in serious trouble; it was on the verge of financial collapse, a third of the colonists were in open revolt, and a state investigation had been just barely averted. As Sharp realized, the only way he could safely protect the colony from Bailey's vendetta was to cut all ties between it and the WPA. Besides, the Works Progress Administration had been under congressional orders since mid-1938 to wind up the affairs of the old Federal Emergency Relief Administration, including the liquidation of WPA interests in three rural community corporations: Pine Mountain Valley, Georgia;

32Ibid., March 23, 1939. Sharp, however, stayed on as president of Dyess Rural Rehabilitation Corporation.

33Articles of Incorporation of Dyess Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, March 22, 1939, Secretary of State, Corporation Department, State Capital, Little Rock, Arkansas.
Cherry Lake, Florida; and Dyess. In February, 1939, soon after the Bailey feud started to heat up, Sharp approached regional director T. Roy Reid about the possibility of transferring Dyess colony to the Farm Security Administration. In August, the FSA agreed to take over Dyess, but no one appeared in any hurry to do so. As Paul Conkin notes, Dyess colony was hardly a welcome addition to the FSA's communities. In September, Reid stressed that the FSA should not move too rapidly in taking control of the project. There was "considerable unrest" at Dyess, he advised, and the FSA take-over was expected to greatly increase that unrest. The Dyess Rural Rehabilitation Corporation was planning to ask forty or fifty families to vacate their units; and the present management, Reid contended, should ask them to leave before the FSA took over. It would be hard for the FSA, he argued, to assume management and then demand their withdrawal immediately after taking charge. Nor should the FSA take over until after the corporation finished out a final full

34H. M. Colvin, Memorandum to William E. Linden, February 2, 1939, Record Group 96, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, National Archives (to be cited hereafter as R. G. 96, National Archives).


Finally, the FSA decided to go ahead with transfer. On November 22, the board of directors of the Dyess Rural Rehabilitation Corporation held a special meeting; and, Floyd Sharp, H. C. Baker, and R. C. Limerick, resigned. Then FSA personnel—Reid, resettlement director E. B. Whitaker, and regional finance director James T. Holliday—took their places as president, secretary, and treasurer, respectively. Soon after, the new board of directors transferred their Dyess corporation stock in trust to the Secretary of Agriculture, as the old state Rural Rehabilitation Corporations had done in 1936. The main purpose of this move was to place eviction cases at Dyess in Federal court and guarantee speedy conviction.

When the Farm Security Administration took over Dyess, Reid had already set up a committee under E. B. Whitaker to visit the project, report on conditions there, and recommend

37 T. Roy Reid to W. W. Alexander, September 15, 1939, R. G. 96, National Archives; Reid to Alexander, September 21, 1939, ibid.; see G. E. Lukas, Memorandum to J. O. Walker, October 9, 1939, ibid.

38 E. B. Whitaker to W. W. Alexander, November 27, 1939, ibid.; Mastin G. White, Memorandum for Alexander, December 4, 1939; ibid.; see Alexander to Corrington Gill, October 23, 1939, ibid.; T. C. Donnahue to Baird Snyder, December 5, 1939, ibid.; Arkansas Gazette.

39 E. B. Whitaker, Memorandum for T. Roy Reid, December 20, 1939, R. G. 96, National Archives; Whitaker, Memorandum for Reid, December 22, 1939, ibid.; see G. E. Lukas, Memorandum for C. B. Baldwin, January 20, 1940, ibid.
future action. Whitaker found 339 families living at Dyess with a total population of nearly 2,000 people; about 1,000 were school-age children. The Resettlement Administration's Management Division had selected about two-thirds of these families, and about eighty per cent of the population had been residents of Dyess three years or longer. The colony contained 518 farm units; 332 were twenty-five acre units, while 186 were between twenty-five and forty-five acres, making the size of the average unit about twenty-five acres. Dyess Colony, Inc., had let its farm management program dwindle. The basic community services were still in operation: gin, store, blacksmith shop, schools, hospital, library, and some others. The physical property had never been put back in first-class condition after the flood of 1937. With the project under the Tyronza River, about six inches of water stood inside most of the homes; as a result, their floors and walls were out of plumb and in need of repair. There was very little fencing on any of the units, and some had no barns or other outbuildings. Roads through the project were in poor conditions, some of them almost impassable. "In general, the physical condition of the


community and its various structures is good," district engineer Troy C. Donnahue reported. "In fact, considering the size of the property and various damaging elements to which it has been exposed, such as the flood of 1937, the cost of putting this large project in good physical condition is comparatively moderate." Yet Whitaker estimated that it would take an expenditure of $830,697.81 to put the Dyess on a par with other projects in the region. This would represent a cost of $2,770 per unit assuming the project were finally divided into 300 units.

In the spring of 1940, the Farm Security Administration launched a long-range program of reorganization at Dyess. On June 19, the regional office set up Dyess Farms, Inc., a cooperative association composed of the heads of families living on the project. As the master association,

42Preliminary Engineering Report on Dyess Community, Mississippi County, Arkansas, December 1939, ibid.

43E. B. Whitaker, Memorandum for T. Roy Reid, January 3, 1940, ibid.

44By-Laws of Dyess Farms, Inc., June 19, 1940, ibid. Under the FSA, Dyess would be known as Dyess Farms, not Dyess Colony. "The name has been officially changed from 'Dyess Colony' to 'Dyess Farms,'" Reid wrote in early 1940, "to give emphasis to the fact that this is a farming enterprise and to remove the general impression that it is a government colony for the segregation of a number of relief clients who are being cared for by the government." The change of name also eliminated a somewhat collectivist sounding word and substituted another which emphasized the individualistic nature of the project. Dyess had never stressed collective ownership of farm land, but in 1940 the FSA could not afford to take any chances. T. Roy Reid, Quarterly Report, Region VI, January-March, 1940, ibid.
Dyess Farms intended to purchase the entire project, all 15,144 acres and nearly 600 structures, from Dyess Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, although the latter retained title for another year. In the meantime, Ray D. Johnston, the new community manager, went ahead with Dyess' most pressing need: the reorganization of individual farm units. Whitaker's committee had reported that many of the original 518 farmsteads were too small to support a family. So Johnston re-subdivided the farm land, combined adjacent units, and brought uncleared land into cultivation. He increased the size of the units to an average of forty acres wherever possible and decreased the total number of farm units to 300, expanding the amount of available crop land from 9,600 to about 12,000 acres. In addition, the FSA provided Dyess Farms with a $872,920 loan to cover the cost of putting the project structures in good repair and a $30,000 loan for operating capital. As soon as possible, Johnston made necessary repairs to the buildings on all 300 of the reorganized units, improved the drainage system, reconditioned roads, cleared more land, constructed fences, and insured an adequate water supply.


46 T. Roy Reid to W. W. Alexander, May 22, 1940 and enclosures, ibid.; Reid to C. B. Baldwin, August 7, 1940, ibid.; Loan Agreement, dated June 29, 1940, ibid.; Alexander to Reid, June 29, 1940, ibid.; J. O. Walker, Memorandum for R. W. Hudgens, June 25, 1940, ibid.
As units were repaired and reorganized, the Farm Security Administration sold them to the occupant families, if they could qualify under the FSA's standards, or to other families selected for residence at Dyess. About 200 of the families then living on the project already held deeds from Dyess Colony, Inc., although most had made little progress toward purchasing the units. The rest had year-to-year rental contracts. Since Dyess Farms could not make any improvements until the old deeds had been canceled, the association requested most of the residents, especially those living on smaller units, to surrender their deeds in return for a new purchase contract. The Dyess Farms contracts took into account the increase in size of each farm as well as home improvements; each family received credit for any equities they had in their unit. Dyess Farms based the cost of the additional land and improvements on an appraisal of the earning capacity of each unit. The conversion from WPA deeds to FSA contracts was an extremely slow process; by July, 1943, Dyess Farms had executed only ninety-six new contracts. The board of directors of Dyess Farms and the project manager had to consult with each family, adjust their past indebtedness, and work out the exchange to the satisfaction of the families while protecting the government's interests. To insure the success of farm operations on the new units, Dyess Farms mapped out a new farm and home management plan in which each family supplied its own beef,
pork, milk, eggs, garden vegetables and any other subsis-
tence goods. As before, all Dyess farmers continued to own
and operate their units individually.  

Under the WPA, the cooperative services program had
gradually dwindled. In 1936, the Dyess Colony Cooperative
Association leased the store, cafe, filling station, and
blacksmith shop; but it was a financial failure. Dyess
Colony, Inc., took back the store after only six months of
unsuccessful operation. Since then, the colony cooperative
had subleased the blacksmith shop to an individual resident;
so by 1939, it was reduced to operating only the cafe and
filling station, and the cafe was selling only soft drinks
and cigarettes. The Dyess hospital had never set up a
cooperative medical association; it was still in operation
but under an informal association of project families on a
monthly fee basis. The colony store had long suffered from
lack of participation. None of the families had supported
the store fully, and by 1939 only about 200 of the resident
families were patronizing it at all. The gin was somewhat

47 Dyess Farms, Arkansas: The First Experiment with a
New Kind of Rural Community, dated May 7, 1941, ibid.; John
Armstrong to John L. McClellan, July 21, 1943, ibid.;
John Fischer to Mrs. A. B. Adams, April 26, 1940, ibid.;
Dyess Farms, Inc., Economic Justification, Organization and

48 W. T. Frazier, Memorandum for Brice M. Mace, Jr.,
December 19, 1939, ibid.; U. S. Department of Agriculture,
Farm Security Administration, Monthly Narrative Report, Dyess
Farms, May 1, 1940, ibid.
better patronized, although some of its 300 customers had ginned as little as one bale of cotton each since it opened. Many of the other community facilities were simply not in use.49 "One of the main problems that must be overcome before a cooperative association can hope to be successful on this project is the apparent lack of knowledge of cooperative principles and of cooperative spirit among the families now residing on the project," cooperative specialist W. T. Frazier reported. "It is my understanding that the present cooperative association has only about 40 members out of the 370 families. . . ."50 The Dyess school system, on the other hand, was apparently the only unqualifiedly successful community activity on the project.

The Farm Security Administration streamlined the community program by reorganizing the basic enterprises and eliminating the more superfluous ones. On March 1, 1940, with FSA help, the farmers at Dyess formed the Dyess Cooperative Store Association and borrowed $5,000 for operating capital. The store association leased the store building from Dyess Rural Rehabilitation Corporation and purchased the inventory of merchandise on hand for $10,000 over a ten-

49Kate Fulton, Memorandum to E. B. Whitaker, December 19, 1939, ibid.

50W. T. Frazier, Memorandum for Brice M. Mace, Jr., December 19, 1939, ibid.
During the summer, the Dyess Hospital and Health Association began operations with a $4,760 grant. Two physicians, a registered nurse, and the community hospital provided members with medical care at an annual cost of twenty-two dollars per family. On September 9, Dyess farmers organized the Dyess Cooperative Gin Association, borrowed $6,000 from the FSA, leased the project's gin, and started ginning their 1940 cotton crop. Dyess Farms leased other facilities from the Dyess RR Corporation and subleased them to individual operators: blacksmith shop, gasoline station, garage, and feed mill. No provision was made for the operation of the shoe and harness shop, canning plant, cafe, or craft building. The local school district continued to operate the school system as before. Finally, on June 2, 1941, Dyess Rural Rehabilitation Corporation and Dyess Farms, Inc., entered into as "Agreement for Sale of Dyess Colony." The initial purchase price was $650,000 for


52 Dyess Farms, Arkansas: The First Experiment with a New Kind of Rural Community, dated May 5, 1941, ibid.


the farm property, not including the community center and facilities. After the project had been fully reorganized, the FSA would appraise the property in terms of its earning capacity and then establish the final purchase price, not to exceed the initial $650,000. According to the terms of the agreement, Dyess Farms would begin making annual installments ten years after the date of conveyance. But in June, 1941, the association began legal occupancy of the project.55

The Works Project Administration left a legacy of unrest among the colonists. When the FSA took over, the unrest, if anything, increased. "The proposed transfer of the management of Dyess Colony Community to the Farm Security Administration," wrote family selection specialist Kate Fulton in December, 1939, "is contributing to the already unsettled state of mind in the Community."56 Many colonists were guessing how the FSA program would operate. Some were afraid they would no longer be able to supplement their incomes with WPA work. Some believed they should not have to repay the full amount of their old indebtedness. The Farm Security Administration naturally wanted to end uncertainty, establish a harmonious relationship with the


56Kate Fulton, Memorandum to E. B. Whitaker, December 19, 1939, ibid.
colonists, and restore their faith in the colony. Regional
director T. Roy Reid and assistant director E. B. Whitaker
made a trip to Dyess in early January, 1940, and spoke at a
colony-wide meeting in the community center. They invited
the colonists to elect an "advisory committee" to consult
with the management on matters of mutual concern. Although
such committees were standard policy on all FSA community
projects, Reid was especially anxious for the Dyess committee
to secure the confidence of the people and insure active
cooperation on the part of everyone. But soon after the
election results came in, he found that the whole idea had
backfired: a majority of the new committeeemen were members
of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union.57

Organized in late 1939, STFU Local Number 29 claimed
to represent more than two-thirds of the total number of
colonists on the project.58 Whatever its strength, it was
active and well organized. Before the FSA could undertake
any reforms, local president L. J. Brantley and secretary
Floyd Slayton drew up a petition of grievances, and the
membership passed it unanimously at a meeting on February 22,
1940. "The main element which has been lacking in the
operation of the Dyess project heretofore," the petition

57T. Roy Reid to W. W. Alexander, January 4, 1940,
ibid.

58See T. Roy Reid to W. L. Ford, Jr., March 26, 1940,
ibid.
read, "has been the failure of the management to recognize and encourage Democratic operation of the project." Speaking for the union members, they asked for a greater share in the making of important decisions affecting their welfare. "The colonists have no desire to take away any of the rights of the management to protect the investments of the Corporation," they said. "The colonists desire only the right to be consulted and the right to negotiation of disputed matters as between management and colonists." The election of an advisory committee was a step in the right direction, but they wanted the scope of the committee enlarged and its power extended. "It should become a bargaining agent as between management on the one hand and the committee representing the colonists on the other hand." Specifically, the committee should have power to bargain about such matters as loans and repayment plans, discipline action against colonists, equitable settlement of old indebtedness, and the right of colonists to be consulted on the plans for management for the coming year, and their right to have a voice in the selection of project supervisors.59

On March 3, a delegation of STFU members presented the petition to Farm Security Administrator Will W. Alexander at his office in Washington. H. L. Mitchell, one of the founders of the STFU, headed the delegation; and Slayton was

59 To the Officials of the Farm Security Administra-
tion, dated February 22, 1940, ibid.
there to represent Local Number 29. Mitchell offered evidence that a majority of the families at Dyess were members of the union and repeated the request that the Dyess advisory committee be recognized as the "bargaining committee" of the project. According to newspaper reports the next day—reports based on an interview Mitchell gave the Associated Press—the STFU won a complete victory; Alexander recognized the union as the bargaining agent for the Dyess colonists. "Dr. Alexander said he agreed to bargain with the union because it represented a majority of the project colonists," the AP reported, paraphrasing Mitchell. "He said he would grant similar recognition to any group on any FSA project, whether it be a union or not, as long as it represented a majority." Mitchell added that FSA recognition would pave the way for unionization of sharecroppers and tenants on privately-owned cotton plantations. If the report is correct, Reid moaned, "our actions in attempting to get harmony in the administration at Dyess are nullified."

In reality, Alexander had granted nothing. Either Mitchell misunderstood what Alexander was saying, or the Associated Press misunderstood Mitchell. "I believe," Alexander wrote Reid immediately, "I made it perfectly plain

60Arkansas Gazette, March 3, 1940; Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), March 2, 1940. See Commercial Appeal (Memphis, Tennessee), March 9, 1940.

61Roy Reid to Pate R. W. Hudgens, March 3, 1940, R. G. 96, National Archives.
that such committees are purely advisory, and the responsibility for the management and operations of the project must rest with FSA officials." "I agreed, of course, that the Advisory Committee recently elected at Dyess Colony should be recognized as representing the project residents.... It was well understood," Alexander said, "by everyone in the meeting that the Committee could be recognized as representing project residents and not the Southern Tenant Farmers Union."62

Two days later, on March 6, Reid and Whitaker went back to Dyess and, with Ray Johnston, met with advisory committee. When Reid asked Tom Hale, chairman of the committee, to preside at the meeting, Hale objected that L. J. Brantley should take charge, since the union was to be recognized as the colony's bargaining agent.

I immediately advised him [Reid reported] that the Farm Security Administration wanted the advice and counsel of the committee which had been selected by the people, but did not consider any organization or committee from any organization as a bargaining agency. He stated that we should so consider it since Washington had authorized such action. I then read your letter. [Reid had set Hale up nicely.] We had about a five minute discussion and the committee seemed to feel that it was all right and that it would be best for us to deal with them as a committee reporting to the residents of Dyess Farms.

The meeting then moved on to a calm, two and a half hour discussion of the requests listed in their petition.

The committee seemed pleased that we are taking steps

to appraise the farms and rewrite the contracts on the basis of the appraised value or present contract value, whichever is less. . . . They were advised that it would not be possible for them to make changes in our loan policy but we asked for suggestions from them. Apparently they were misunderstanding on some provisions and they were not insistent on any point; however, they were strongest in their views that we should not take second mortgages on this year's crops to secure their past indebtedness to the Dyess Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, but they seemed to understand the purpose of this and raised no real objection to it.63

The basis of the colonists' request for a voice in personnel selection, Reid learned, was the fact that they objected to two men already employed at Dyess, a farm foreman and the clerk in charge of the main office. The foreman had also served as a deputy sheriff, and he was the man who had allegedly broken up a protest meeting in 1938. Reid promised an investigation of both men, and later transferred the foreman and fired the clerk for incompetence. The FSA had as much trouble with factionalism among the colonists as it did with STFU petitions. A group of five men, for example, had asked for a meeting; so Reid and Whitaker stayed overnight at the colony and met with them the following morning. Unlike the other group, these men opposed the announcement that the STFU had been granted bargaining rights at Dyess, and they spoke for a large number of colonists who felt as they did. Reid read Alexander's letter a second time, and they seemed pleased. STFU organizers, they told Reid,

63 T. Roy Reid to W. W. Alexander, March 9, 1940, ibid.
had been using the newspaper statement to coerce colonists into the union. Reid left, satisfied with the results of both meetings. "I think we made progress in handling our relations with the people on Dyess Farms," he wrote, "and that we can now make more progress." 64

To further set matters straight, Reid published Alexander's March 4 letter in the press. After this experience, however, he was determined to keep Dyess Colony out of the news as much as possible. During the coming weeks, newspaper editors and reporters applied considerable pressure to regional information advisor George Wolf for news about Dyess, but he successfully stalled for time. "Reid is not in favor or any publicity for some time to come," Wolf wrote, "as we have not had time to accomplish anything worth mentioning." 65 Reporters could still go directly to the colony. "Fortunately," he commented, "the roads into the project are so bad that newspaper men don't drop by there lightly." 66 As for congressional inquiries, ESA policy was to "speak about Dyess only when spoken to" until project affairs had reached a more settled state. 67

64 Ibid.
65 George Wolf to John Fischer, May 16, 1940, ibid.
66 George Wolf to Nathan W. Robertson, April 11, 1940, ibid.
67 Jack H. Bryan to George Wolf, April 7, 1941, ibid.
Some of the colonists, like Floyd Slayton, seemed to have made a career out of dissent. In 1939, Slayton had been one of the demonstrators who claimed they had been charged exorbitant land prices at the Osceola courthouse. About that time, Kate Fulton of the Family Selection staff reviewed Slayton's case and recommended he be evicted, but no action was taken. After Funk and McGarvin's evictions in 1940, he graduated to ringleader of the dissident faction as both secretary of the STFU local and a member of the advisory committee. Although Local Number 29 soon disbanded, Slayton and four or five others kept up a running battle with FSA officials. Most of his clique were holders of old Dyess Colony deeds, and they claimed that Dyess Farms, Inc., had no right of control over the actions of such deed holders except to collect payments. They insisted they did not have to abide by the rules and regulations of the new management. In January, 1943, Slayton was behind a petition, with sixty-eight signatures, proposing the removal of the board of directors and the revision of Dyess Farms land

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68 See Arkansas Gazette, March 18, 1939.

69 Homer N. Hall, to A. M. Rogers, January 3, 1942, R. G. 96, National Archives.

70 See, for example, Floyd Slayton to Brice M. Mace, Jr., October 15, 1940, ibid.
purchase contracts. "Mr. Slayton's record here shows that he has not cooperated with the organization at any time and that he has gone out of his way to cause dissatisfaction among other members," community manager Homer N. Hall wrote in 1943. "So long as he and his four or five buddies are permitted to carry on as they are now doing, it will not be possible for us to put the program over as it must be put over." With people like Slayton, Hall believed, the FSA had reached an impasse; it was either Slayton or the colony.

"This whole thing hinges on whether or not the Farm Security Administration is going to manage the operation of this Project of have it operated by Floyd Slayton, Dewey Smothers, W. M. Hodnett and two or three others." "I think the existence of this Project depends on the elimination of this bunch." In 1943 and 1944, the FSA took a number of colonists, including Slayton, to court on eviction suits and won; but as late as 1945, there was still a group at Dyess who

71 Homer N. Hall to A. M. Rogers, January 3, 1943, with enclosed copy of Petition for Call of Meeting, signed by sixty-eight people, ibid. Yet when a group of twenty-four persons signed a letter to the Arkansas congressional delegation in March, 1942, defending the FSA's management of Dyess, there was Slayton's name along with the others. To the Honorable Senators and Congressmen from Arkansas, dated March 23, 1942, ibid.; Ray D. Johnston to E. B. Whitaker, April 6, 1942, ibid.

72 See Homer N. Hall to T. B. Fatherree, November 15, 1943, ibid.; Hall to A. M. Rogers, January 3, 1943, ibid.
were trying to form another STFU local. 73

Even after allowing for the trouble-makers, no one can overlook the possibility that many colonists complained because they had something worth complaining about. In January, 1944, just before liquidating Dyess, regional director A. D. Stewart, Reid's successor, admitted that "Many of the claims of unfair treatment of Dyess farmers arising from conditions existing prior to 1940 . . . are justified." 74 WPA purchase contracts, he said, were not only unfair but against the principles of sound agricultural planning. The units were too small for a cotton economy, he pointed out, and they cost too much. When the FSA took over, the new management had to enlarge and reorganize the units and, "in an effort to adjust the unreasonable contracts they had signed," offered colonists additional land at an average of ten dollars an acre. In addition, the FSA marked off the greater part of the indebtedness charged against farmers prior to 1940. But the correction of past mistakes in turn created new problems. "From this reorganization," Stewart said, "has come much discontent and controversy because of the lack of understanding by the farmers of what we were

73 David Burgess, Memorandum to H. L. Mitchell, May 21, 1945, Southern Tenant Farmers' Union Papers, Box 47, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

74 Arkansas Gazette, January 9, 1944; A. D. Stewart to Floyd Sharp, January 22, 1944, R. G. 96, National Archives.
attempting to do." Some did not understand, for example, why they had to turn in their old contracts in exchange for new ones. "Not understanding that they are bound by the old purchase contract, no matter how unfair, until they relinquish it and sign a new document, some farmers have refused to meet this request and for this reason have yet to receive their deeds."75

Stewart did not say the former management had been unreasonable, but he did stress that "because of the necessity for changing plans[,] some claims of unfair treatment by occupants were probably justified."76 Consider, for example, the case of a hypothetical farmer who came to Dyess in 1934 and lived through every change in management down to liquidation in 1944. When he first arrived, he expected to have a chance to purchase his own farm. He did indeed get a tract of uncleared land and a new home, but he had to wait two years, until 1936, before he knew the exact terms he was offered. He also had to go through a two-year probationary period in order to qualify for a purchase contract. But even after he finished his second year at Dyess, there was still no contract. Dyess Colony, Inc., did not issue any sales contracts until after the lapse of three years, in 1937. As

75Arkansas Gazette, January 9, 1944; see John L. McClellan to C. B. Baldwin, July 10, 1943, R. G. 96, National Archives.

76A. D. Stewart to Floyd Sharp, January 22, 1944, ibid.
farmers began finding out how much they had been charged, unrest broke into the open; but our hypothetical farmer, let us say, along with about 200 others, did receive contracts. Then, in 1940, the FSA took control of management, changed the program substantially, and announced that all old deeds would have to be canceled and new ones issued. Almost as soon as this change had been made, Dyess Colony went into liquidation, and his new sales contract had to be exchanged again—this time for a deed and mortgage. But at last, he did have a deed to his farm. He had a deed, that is, if he had not already been evicted as a trouble-maker. "Plans for the sale of units changing at different intervals during the operation have caused some of the occupants who talked to me," Stewart said, "to lose faith in any person offering proposals and to lose faith in all proposals for the final liquidation of this Project."77

When the Farm Security Administration started liquidating the resettlement projects in 1943, Dyess had still not completed its reorganization program. A large number of families, highly dissatisfied with the new sales contracts, had simply refused to complete negotiations with Dyess Farms for the purchase and repair of their units. At the time of liquidation, Dyess Farms had executed only about 125 new contracts, while seventy-five units were still occupied under

77Ibid.
contracts entered into with Dyess Colony, Inc., and the remaining 100 or so units were under annual leases. After several tries and much delay, the Farm Security Administration worked out a plan for the liquidation of Dyess Colony that would satisfy all project residents. "Each worthy and eligible occupant now living at the farms," Stewart promised, "will be given an opportunity to buy his unit at a price reasonable to him and fair to the government." The board of directors of Dyess Farms, Inc., stressed the desire of resident families to secure deeds to their farms immediately. On the other hand, the board refused to consider a plan in which Dyess Rural Rehabilitation Corporation would deliver deeds to the residents and insisted on dealing directly with the government. On June 16, 1944, Dyess Farms held a special business meeting, and about 120 members approved a plan of liquidation. Many of the colonists who were under eviction suits attended, and they raised no objection. The members passed every required resolution without a dissenting vote; it was the first time everyone at Dyess had been able to agree on anything for years.

78 W. T. Frazier, Memorandum to Frank Hancock, March 24, 1944, ibid.

79 Arkansas Gazette, January 9, 1944.

80 W. T. Frazier, Memorandum to Frank Hancock, March 24, 1944, R. G. 96, National Archives.

81 A. D. Stewart to C. Stott Noble, June 21, 1944, ibid.
Thus, on June 17, Dyess Rural Rehabilitation Corporation transferred title to the colony's 13,711 acres of farm land to Dyess Farms, Inc., waiving the payment of $650,000 provided for in the "Agreement of Sale" of April 2, 1941. Then Dyess Farms canceled all purchase contracts and deeds, gave each family a note, deed, and mortgage to their units, and sold the family farm units occupied under rental contracts to applicants eligible for farm ownership under the terms of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act. The United States government took a mortgage on the land and arranged to make all collections from purchasers without the help of either Dyess RR Corporation or Dyess Farms. Next, the Farm Security Administration amended the loan agreement of June 29, 1940, so that, as part of the final arrangement, Dyess Farms could make improvement loans to individual purchasers of farm units. No loan could exceed $1,000 unless it was personally approved by the regional director. Each farmer's note and mortgage would include the amount of the improvement loan if any were made. Since most of its $872,820 loan was still unspent, Dyess Farms refunded all excess loan funds not previously used for repairs and not needed for improvement loans. The refund came to about $325,000. The cooperative association agreed to convey all of its assets—real

82 Agreement of Transfer between the Dyess Rural Rehabilitation Corporation and the Dyess Farms, Inc., September 30, 1945, ibid.
estate, notes, mortgages, and other property—to the government upon request. By October, 1944, Dyess Farms had converted to deed and mortgage 220 FSA purchase contracts and fifty-six old Dyess Colony deeds, leaving only thirty-two units still unsold.

After disposing of individual farm units, Dyess RR Corporation still owned the community center, a village of about forty-five buildings, and 2,596 acres of undeveloped land. In 1945, the corporation began disposing of most of its surplus property. The Dyess Health Association paid $1,200 for the hospital building and the block on which it stood. The Dyess Cooperative Gin Association bought the gin building and machinery for $22,500, and the Cooperative Store Association paid $5,000 for the store building and lot. The Arkansas Power and Light Company purchased the electric power distribution system and began furnishing power to the project. In November, 1945, Dyess Rural Rehabilitation Corporation opened bids on the remainder of the community.

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83A. D. Stewart to Frank Hancock, February 12, 1944, ibid.; Robert H. Shields, Memorandum to Hancock, April 4, 1944, ibid.; Hancock to Stewart, April 5, 1944, ibid.

84Dyess Colony, Memorandum by A. W. Palmer, October 9, 1944, ibid.

center buildings and land. Lee Wilson and Company, which had sold a considerable part of the original project land to W. R. Dyess, submitted the highest bid of $50,100 cash for the community village as a unit; but the regional office rejected the offer as they thought a much better price could be obtained through negotiations. On the second round, Lee Wilson was high again with a bid of $60,000, and again he was rejected. By this time, some of the families who had bought farm units had objected that the purchase of the entire village by one large commercial organization would depreciate the value of their small holdings. Conceding their point, the regional office then sold the community center piecemeal. By March, 1946, the Dyess school district, churches, and ten individuals together had purchased nineteen structures and seven vacant lots for $26,206.00; twenty-two houses, the administration building and community building, three warehouses, and seventeen vacant lots were still on the market.86 On May 7, 1948, a notice appeared in the Lepanto, Arkansas, News Record offering for sale 614 acres of cut-over timberland, with no improvements and no cultivation; that was all that remained unsold of the Dyess project property.87

Prior to 1939, the Federal Emergency Relief Adminis-

86 Ibid.; Thirty-four People to Bill Fulbright, March 5, 1946, ibid.
87 News Record (Lepanto, Arkansas), May 7, 1948.
tation granted Dyess colony a total of $3,396,250.00. With these funds, W. R. Dyess spent $136,994.48 for land, invested $982,284.11 in farm buildings, and built a community center for $265,123.81. From 1934 to September 1946, Dyess colony suffered a net loss from all sources totaling $1,364,890.59. Down to 1939, Dyess Colony, Inc., had built up a deficit of $811,546.91, while Dyess RR Corporation lost $553,343.68 from 1939 to 1945. In addition, the colony wrote off $252,149.35 through debt adjustment. After 1940, Dyess RR Corporation gradually decreased operations because of the transfer of the farm units to Dyess Farms, Inc., and the store, gin, and hospital to other cooperative associations. Somewhat more successful, Dyess Farms operated at a profit of $11,423.12 in 1941, but suffered a loss of $2,981.21 in 1942, and then went into liquidation.

After 1946, the Farmers Home Administration, successor to the FSA's successor, took responsibility for liquidating the resettlement program. At Dyess, the FSA had not left much to do. In 1951, both the Dyess Rural Rehabilitation

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88Audit Report, Dyess Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, Dyess, Mississippi County, Arkansas, For the Period March 22, 1939 to September 30, 1945, R. G. 96, National Archives.

Corporation and Dyess Farms, Inc., turned their remaining assets back over to the parent agency of the Dyess project, the Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, which still maintained a revolving trust fund under the supervision of the Secretary of Agriculture. Since all government mortgages against Dyess Farms had been paid in full, and Dyess RR Corporation had disposed of its property, the FHA's next step was the dissolution of the other two corporations. On June 27, 1951, the Dyess RR Corporation dissolved itself, an easy task because the corporation had only three stockholders who could easily meet and take the necessary steps for dissolution. The Farmers' Home Administration consistently maintained that all FSA cooperative associations must be dissolved in order to comply with the congressional liquidation mandate. Yet for Dyess Farms, Inc., the matter was more difficult. According to Ray Johnston, who was then FHA county supervisor at Dyess, the current membership list had been lost out of the minute books. In any case, during the last years it had been difficult to obtain a quorum (twenty-five per cent of the members) at the annual membership meetings, and Johnston doubted that the necessary two-thirds

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90O. N. Spring, Memorandum to D. B. Lasseter, April 23, 1948, ibid.; Minutes of Annual Meeting of Board of Directors of Dyess Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, held June 1, 1951, ibid.; J. V. Highful, Memorandum to Lasseter, August 16, 1951, ibid.; Spring to Highfull, October 9, 1951, ibid.; Highful, Memorandum to Lasseter, January 17, 1952, ibid.
would show up for a meeting that held little importance for them. Dyess Farms, however, was for all practical purposes already dissolved. It had no debts and no assets, and its membership no longer carried on any business as an organization. In 1951, the Farmers Home Administration simply closed its files on Dyess Farms, Inc., and on Dyess Colony. 91

The main highway leading through Plum Bayou was a solid line of cars. At project headquarters, a large crowd assembled in front of a temporary stage made of unpainted lumber. It was Friday, November 20, 1936. The Resettlement Administration had invited the public to the ceremonies officially dedicating Plum Bayou, near Wright, Arkansas, the first RA resettlement project in the nation to be so honored. After working all summer, the Construction Division had five homesteads ready for occupancy and over ninety other houses in various phases of construction. Regional director T. Roy Reid, acting as master of ceremonies, introduced the project's special guests: Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace, Resettlement Administrator Rexford G. Tugwell, assistant administrator Will W. Alexander, and AAA Director Howard R. Tolley. Representing Arkansas were Senators Joseph T. Robinson and Hattie W. Caraway, Congressman John L. McClellan, Governor J. M. Futrell, and Governor-elect Carl E. Bailey. Most of the guests made brief speeches. "I want businessmen to see this experiment in farmstead operation," Wallace said, so they will be "convinced that thousands of
houses like this one [referring to the nearest homestead] can be built and thousands of farms like this sold on a business basis as a paying proposition." "People who live in the country," Tugwell remarked, "have a right to security of possession that is beyond question, to an income sufficient for a decent standard of living, to rear healthy families." The first three families selected for Plum Bayou were present to accept the keys to their homes. "These are not keys to houses--" Tugwell told them, "they are keys to the future." Each farmer, alone or with his family, crossed the stage and accepted his keys from Tugwell: "I sure do thank you." Although much more remained to be done, Reid's organization had already invested months of work in Plum Bayou.\(^1\)

The Resettlement Administration followed one basic pattern in developing all resettlement projects. Tugwell delegated his regional directors authority to select land for resettlement purposes, although he himself made the final decision on all proposals.\(^2\) In other words, Reid was responsible for exploring resettlement possibilities in Region Six and recommending specific projects to Washington. After

\(^1\)Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), November 21, 1936. See Arkansas Gazette, November 8, November 15, 1936. Daily Graphic (Pine Bluff), November 20, November 21, 1936.

\(^2\)Rexford G. Tugwell to Theodore G. Bilbo, July 1, 1936, Record Group 96, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, National Archives (to be cited hereafter as R. G. 96, National Archives).
receiving approval for a project, Reid had to purchase and
develop the land, construct the homesteads, and select the
families to occupy the farm units. He organized the project
families into a cooperative association, a legal device to
enable the project to borrow federal funds and carry on
certain cooperative activities. The typical resettlement
project contained a community center, cooperative store,
cooperative gin, and perhaps a school. Finally, Reid brought
in a community manager, farm advisor, and home management
supervisor to take charge of the project's operations on a
day-to-day basis.  

Reid drew on every available resource, both inside
and outside his organization, for help in locating land
suitable for resettlement purposes. E. B. Whitaker (resettle-
ment director), B. M. Gile (land use director), and Reid
himself all possessed a vast knowledge of agriculture, land,
and land values in Region Six. The Regional Land Use Com-
mittee and the State Land Use Committees located and approved
possible resettlement areas. To help with this task, Reid
also sought the advice of the land grant colleges, agricul-
tural extension services, and experiment stations of the

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Paul K. Conkin, Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal
Community Program (Ithaca, N. Y., 1959), 168; Joseph W. Eaton,
Exploring Tomorrow's Agriculture (New York, 1943), 87-93.
respective states. In addition, he received many unsolicited suggestions from individuals with land for sale and from groups wanting federal money spent in their community. For example, Oscar Ameringer, socialist editor of the American Guardian (Oklahoma City), tried to sell the RA a 5,500-acre plantation in Louisiana which he described as "my personally conducted resettlement project." In 1936, a group of citizens of Attala County, Mississippi, complained to Senator Pat Harrison that the RA had not bought any land in their county for some time; they wanted to sell the government more land. At the same time, other people voluntarily warned of fraudulent schemes for selling worthless land to the government. In early 1936, Mississippi Senator Theodore G. Bilbo reported that "a lot of high powered real estate agents, racketeers, and lawyers bought from the state a lot of land [which had been forfeited for taxes] . . . all for the purpose of unloading this on the Federal Government." "

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4Resettlement Administration, Annual Report of Assistant Regional Director, in Charge of Rural Resettlement [E.B. Whitaker], July 1, 1935 to December 31, R. G. 96, National Archives.


6Pat Harrison to E. B. Whitaker, August 21, 1936, R.G. 96, National Archives. See T. Roy Reid to Will W. Alexander, March 31, 1938, ibid.

7Theodore G. Bilbo to Rexford G. Tugwell, June 12, 1936, ibid.
Once a general resettlement area was approved, Whitaker's job was to find and purchase suitable land. First, he sent out someone with a general knowledge of land values to canvass the area. This person, perhaps a county agent or the man designated project manager, located and took options on likely tracts of land owned by people wanting to sell. In some cases, Whitaker also issued a press release inviting tenders on farm land, an announcement that both urban and small town newspapers would carry. The Resettlement Administration did not engage in land speculation. Whitaker was anxious to buy land on a strictly competitive bases—the best land available for the lowest possible price. After the initial options were taken, Gile's Land Utilization Division undertook a thorough appraisal of the land and made its recommendation to the regional office, which then passed them on to Washington. The Resettlement Administration demanded that land meet certain standards of price, market value, and productivity. Whitaker wanted to buy productive farm land, land that was under cultivation, free from flooding, and containing little timber. Ideally, he preferred land located near improved roads and power lines and accessible to schools, churches, towns, and markets. After

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8 Madison Journal (Tallulah, Louisiana), February 21, 1936; Resettlement Administration, Annual Report of Assistant Regional Director, in Charge of Rural Resettlement, July 1, 1935 to December 31, 1936, R. G. 96, National Archives.

9 See, for example Madison Journal, February 14, 1936.
Gile submitted his appraisals, Whitaker usually took new options at the appraised value or less if possible. Finally, the Federal government actually paid for land only if the vendor could furnish a title acceptable to the United States Department of Justice.

The Resettlement Administration purchased only the best land for the resettlement program. Whitaker was under no compulsion to settle for anything but the best since the Depression had knocked the bottom out from under land values all over the region. "Almost without exception," wrote Whitaker in 1936, "the land selected for resettlement purposes has an average yield higher than the average yield of the basic crops in the community where the land is located." At the same time, the RA's policy was not to take advantage of any landowner in distress. Whitaker was careful not to force anyone to sell his property; he purchased land only from those who really wanted to sell. But he did take advantage of certain conditions created by the Depression.

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10Resettlement Administration, Annual Report of Assistant Regional Director, in Charge of Rural Resettlement, July 1, 1935 to December 31, 1936, R. G. 96, National Archives; Madison Journal, February 14, August 21, 1936.


12Resettlement Administration, Annual Report of Assistant Regional Director, in Charge of Rural Resettlement, July 1, 1935 to December 21, 1936, ibid.

13Madison Journal, August 21, 1936.
As he explained:

It was the exception, rather than the rule, if such land was not owned by an absentee landowner. A number of larger tracts were bought from banks or insurance companies in the process of liquidation, and the fact that the national government was in a position to pay one hundred percent cash made the Resettlement Administration a very desirable purchaser of the tracts in question. This enabled us to buy land at a much lower cash price than the same land would have sold for to a private concern where from fifty to seventy-five percent of the purchase price would have been deferred.14

In Region Six, the Resettlement Administration purchased 194,481,934 acres of land for resettlement, a total investment of $4,823,927.92. Overall, Whitaker paid an average of $24.80 per acre. The lowest priced land bought was in Arkansas ($21.55 per acre), while the cost of land in Louisiana ($28.00) and Mississippi ($28.57) was somewhat higher.15

Each resettlement project involved painstaking planning and months of work from conception to authorization, construction, and finally completion. After locating land for a possible resettlement project, Whitaker and Reid submitted a preliminary proposal to Washington showing that the project had enough merit to warrant the expenditure of time

14Resettlement Administration, Annual Report of Assistant Regional Director, in Charge of Rural Resettlement, July 1, 1935 to December 31, 1936, R. G. 96, National Archives.

15U. S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Security Administration, "Resettlement Projects, Land and Source of Acquisition, Also Status of Unit Development, Vendor, Acreage and Number of Units Developed or Undeveloped, Region Six," January 1, 1941, mimeographed, ibid.
and money needed to prepare a "project plan." The assistant administrator checked the proposal and, if he approved, authorized a detailed study made of the project and released allotments for that purpose. Only then could Whitaker begin taking options on the necessary land. In the project plan, Whitaker in effect had to present a justification of the project, demonstrating the need for it and giving full details on everything involved in its development: would it need a cooperative store, a gin, or a school? What crops could be grown profitably? Did local landowners and businessmen favor the idea of a project? What were the estimated costs of land, of construction, and of administering the project? Then Reid submitted the project plan to Tugwell, who checked it for feasibility, soundness, legality, and availability of funds. If satisfied, he authorized the construction of the project. The regional office then went ahead with purchasing the land and drawing up construction plans, specifications, and maps for a final check by the Washington office. Tugwell reviewed the plans a last time to compare them with budget estimates. After receiving word of final approval, Whitaker immediately went ahead with building the homesteads, dividing the land into individual farm units, and selecting families.16

At first, the Resettlement Administration did all of

16Resettlement Administration, Administrative Order 162 (Revision 1), July 8, 1936, ibid.
its own construction work, using WPA labor and occasionally some of its own clients. But the Construction Division's building costs ran far beyond what low-income farmers could ever hope to repay. After 1937, the Farm Security Administration fought to hold construction costs to an absolute minimum. Farm Security Administrator Will W. Alexander placed a cost limitation of $1,300 on houses built in the South and, because of the harsher climate, $2,100 on houses built in the North. In 1938, the FSA turned all construction over to private contractors who could build houses more cheaply than the Construction Division. On community type projects in Region Six, private construction firms negotiated a single contract for building all necessary structures, with the FSA acting as consultant and architect. On the farm tenant security projects or anywhere units were scattered, contractors had to make separate contracts for the construction of each homestead.


18Nathan W. Robertson to Paul Wooton, March 1, 1939, ibid.; Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 171.

19C. B. Baldwin to Will M. Whittington, August 19, 1938, R. G. 96, National Archives; R. B. Lord to T. Roy Reid, April 5, 1939, ibid. See Resettlement Administration, Construction Division, Progress Report for Projects in Development and Planning, Period July 1, 1936 to August 1, 1936, ibid.

To further keep costs down, the FSA experimented with precutting and prefabrication building methods. Prefabrication was most successful where fifty or more houses were erected within a radius of about twenty-five miles. Setting up a small portable sawmill on the project and using a limited number of house plans, a construction crew cut all lumber to exact specifications and assembled as many parts as possible in this central shop. They completed entire sections: wall panels, gables, window and door casings, and floor frames. Then the components were trucked to the building sites and nailed together. Whitaker first tried prefabrication in Arkansas and later Mississippi, but he never used it on a large scale.

The Farm Security Administration built about fifteen different types of houses in Region Six. All of them were conventional wood-frame structures stressing utility and simplicity. FSA architects eliminated all purely decorative features as well as every unnecessary gable, beam, and rafter. They standardized house plans as much as possible without making the various types look too much alike. Built

21 Nathan W. Robertson to Paul Wooton, March 1, 1939, ibid.; Farm Security Administration, Report of the Administrator of the Farm Security Administration, 1938 (Washington, 1938), 18, 19; Farm Security Administration, Report of the Administrator of the Farm Security Administration, 1940 (Washington, 1940), 17-19.

22 C. B. Baldwin to Pat Harrison, February 16, 1938, R. G. 96, National Archives.
on concrete piers, the typical resettlement home contained three to five bedrooms, living room, kitchen, built-in sink, shelving, pantry, and screened porch. Newspaper reporters generally described project houses as modern, comfortable, and convenient; but the structures did not measure up to all of these standards. The houses, for example, had no indoor plumbing, although each one had a storeroom designed for conversion into a bath when the family could afford it. The exterior of the houses was usually white, the interior finished in natural pine, with the kitchen painted enamel. In addition to the dwelling, the average homestead unit included a barn, poultry house, outhouse, all necessary fencing, several acres of pasture, and about forty acres of farm land.23

While construction crews were at work, the regional office started looking for families to occupy the homestead units. The Community and Family Services Section of the Management Division was responsible for family selection. Miss Kate Fulton (later Mrs. T. Roy Reid), regional chief of this section until 1941, sought families who could measure up to rather high standards. The Resettlement Administration could not afford to pick clients at random for its

Resettlement projects. Families were eligible for resettlement if they were low-income farm owners, farm tenants, sharecroppers, or farm laborers. No one without farming experience could even be considered, nor was anyone qualified who could obtain credit at reasonable terms from other Federal or private lending agencies. Candidates for resettlement had to show evidence of initiative and ambition, have a reputation for paying their debts, and show promise of being able to repay the cost of their units. They had to be free from disease or other physical disabilities and pass a medical examination before final acceptance. The Resettlement Administration preferred married couples with one to five or six children, a limitation imposed by the size of the homesteads. The head of each family had to be at least twenty-one years of age and under fifty. The RA and FSA did not discriminate on the basis of nationality, race, or creed, although both agencies stressed homogeneity, especially on community-type projects, to insure smooth relations among families living closely together.

The regional family services section and the community

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managers worked closely together to select qualified families. Applications would start pouring into the regional office as soon as Whitaker announced the purchase of resettlement land; only in a few cases did the RA have a shortage of qualified families to choose from.²⁶ By December 31, 1940, the RA and FSA had received over 11,000 applications for some 2,700 farm units on resettlement projects.²⁷ County extension agents, home demonstration agents, and district and county rural rehabilitation supervisors had recommended most of these families. On each resettlement project, the community manager organized a Family Selection committee, consisting of himself as chairman, the regional chief of the family services section, a project family selection specialist, and usually the home economist and the farm management specialist assigned to his project. The committee gave preliminary approval to families which seemed most qualified and enthusiastic about resettlement. The family selection specialist interviewed these families, visited their neighbors, their landlord, the merchants they patronized, and the family physician, seeking their opinions as to the family's

²⁶The most notable exceptions were Terrebonne and the Subsistence homestead projects in Mississippi. See Chapters III and VIII.

²⁷Community and Family Services Section, Annual Report, January 1, 1940 to December 31, 1940, R. G. 96, National Archives: Farm Security Administration, Report of Family Selection Applications, Acceptances, and Occupancies for Units on Projects as of July 1, 1942, dated August 20, 1942, ibid.
chances for success in home ownership. After consulting with the family selection committee, the project manager submitted a list of names to Kate Fulton, who then reviewed each case and made the final decision. The committee arranged for the approved families to visit the project while it was under construction. The community manager had to make sure each family understood all of the responsibilities and obligations it would assume in becoming a member of the project. The family had one week after returning home to reach their final decision and to notify the community manager. If the answer was yes, he took care of moving their household goods to the project.  

The Community and Cooperative Services staff, headed by Claude Woolsey, handled the problems of legal organization for the Resettlement Division in Region Six. Woolsey formed the typical resettlement project into a cooperative association. Each association had its president and board of directors, sold capital stock to its members, and possessed authority to engage in all activities related to agricultural production. The articles of incorporation of Terrebonne Association, Inc., for example, authorized its members

28Resettlement Administration, Administrative Order 105 (Revision 3), September 25, 1936, ibid.; Eaton, Exploring Tomorrow's Agriculture, 94, 95; Madison Journal, February 26, 1936; Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 186-88.

29Claude Woolsey, interview with the author, January 19, 1968; Eaton, Exploring Tomorrow's Agriculture, 105-12; Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 202-10.
To engage in any activity in connection with the producing, marketing, selling, harvesting, dairying, preserving, drying, processing, canning, packing, milling, ginning, compressing, storing, handling, or the utilization of any agricultural products produced by it or produced or delivered to it by its members; or the manufacturing or marketing of the by-products thereof; or in connection with the purchase, hiring or use by it or its members of supplies, machinery, or equipment; or the construction or maintenance of houses, barns, sheds, or facilities or its use or the use of its members; or in connection with performing or purchasing services of an economic or educational nature to its members.30

Arkansas and Mississippi already had suitable laws regulating the formation of cooperatives; but in Louisiana, Woolsey used a statute governing business corporations until the state legislature passed an agricultural cooperative law in 1939.31

The cooperative association was primarily a device to simplify certain administrative problems on resettlement projects. The Resettlement Administration leased to the association all project land, houses, community buildings, schools, stores, gins, and other community facilities. This move allowed the project residents themselves to collect rent, maintain and repair buildings, and eventually to manage the project. Without the association, the RA would have had

30"Articles of Association of Terrebonne Association, Inc.,” dated November 8, 1938, Secretary of State's Office, State Capitol, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

31Woolsey interview; Mastin G. White, Memorandum for W. W. Alexander, September 26, 1938, R. G. 96, National Archives; see Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 202-13, 215.
to perform such administrative functions indefinitely. In addition, the association received a cooperative loan from the government to finance the construction of its homestead units and the purchase of necessary farm equipment. By loaning the money to the association, the RA made certain that development and operating funds would be available at all times; otherwise, it would have been necessary to go back to the United States Treasury every time money was needed for anything.\textsuperscript{32}

The Resettlement Administration also dealt with project residents through the cooperative associations. The head of each family was entitled to membership in the association and to one vote in all of its decisions. Project members served as presidents of the association and on its board of directors. On most projects, the families subleased individual farm units from the association, not from the government itself. After a five-year trial period, each family entered into a sales contract with the association for purchasing their unit over forty years at three per cent interest. On cooperative projects like Terrebonne and Lake Dick, farmers had no promise of future ownership of individual farms; instead, they worked as day laborers on land they all owned in common as members of the association. At

\textsuperscript{32}Establishment of Community Organizations, Memorandum approved by the President on December 24, 1936, R. G. 96, National Archives; Walter E. Packard to all Regional Directors, n.d., \textit{ibid}. 
the end of the year, each farmer received a share of the profits based on the number of days he had contributed to working the association's land. 33

Ultimately, the cooperative associations were to serve as the instrument through which projects could become self-governing. Under the articles of incorporation, the board of directors possessed broad authority to conduct the project's business activities. Subject to approval by the general membership, the board of directors could select the farm manager, determine management policies, authorize budgets, set membership requirements, admit new members, and control the terms of contracts with its members. But the principle of democratic control came into conflict with the need for guaranteeing the government's investment. Thus the RA and FSA, under the provisions of their loan agreement with each association, insured the government complete power of control and veto. The RA-FSA staff on each project exercised effective control over the association and over the entire project. The regional office appointed the community or project manager whose duties were to supervise the work of the project staff and to oversee all project activities. Since the government paid the salaries of the farm manager, who directed day-to-day farm operations, and the project accountant, they were for all practical purposes FSA employees,

33 Woolsey interview; E. B. Whitaker, interview with the author, January 19, 1968.
although both were responsible to the association under the terms of the articles of incorporation. In addition, the FSA approved all project budgets and controlled every expenditure made by the association from daily wages to dividend payments. No change in the articles of incorporation could be made without prior permission of the regional office, nor could any member be expelled from the project unless the government agreed that such action was justified.\footnote{Eaton, Exploring Tomorrow's Agriculture, 105-13.}

In addition to the cooperative associations, the Resettlement Administration formed subsidiary cooperatives to carry on certain specialized tasks. The RA, wrote Whitaker, encouraged each farmer "to cooperate with his neighbors in owning grain binders, grain separators, tractors, grist mills, blacksmith shops, sweet potato curing houses, cooperative stores, cooperative gins . . . and other such cooperative activities where the participation of the whole community is desirable for the success of the undertaking."\footnote{Resettlement Administration, Annual Report of Assistant Regional Director, in Charge of Rural Resettlement, July 1, 1935 to December 31, 1936, R. G. 96, National Archives.} The typical community type project would also have a livestock improvement association and several kinds of marketing associations.\footnote{See Farm Security Administration, "Resettlement Projects," \textit{ibid.} See J. T. Holliday to G. E. Lukas, April 30, 1940, \textit{ibid.}; Shelby Thompson to Frank J. Welch, February 10, 1942, \textit{ibid.}}
completely avoid aid to cooperatives that competed with private business, nor did they want to force local merchants into bankruptcy. Ideally, a project would be justified in operating a cooperative store or gin if these services were not available nearby.37

Since poor health was one of the major handicaps of many low-income farm families, the Resettlement Administration also developed medical-care cooperatives which provided its clients with a kind of health insurance. Each family made a fixed annual payment, usually about twenty-five dollars, to a trustee who divided the money into twelve parts, one for each month of the year. In case of illness, the family could go to any local physician participating in the program; and the physician sent his bills each month to the trustee. If the amount on hand was not enough to pay all bills in full (which was usually the case), each physician received his pro rata share. Even so, this was more than they might have received otherwise.38

The purpose of cooperatives was primarily to give small farmers the advantages that size conferred on large-scale operators. Their use did not represent either a loss of faith in individualism and private property or an attempt

37 Rexford G. Tugwell to T. Roy Reid, May 8, 1936, ibid.

to rebuild society with collectivist values. On the contrary, the Resettlement and Farm Security Administrations in Region Six worked hard at encouraging individual effort in the resettlement program. Farmers owned their own cows, chickens, workstock, and all farm implements that a family-size farm would justify them in owning. Above all, they had a chance to own their own farms and their own homes. Yet cooperative enterprises played an important role on every resettlement project. According to the FSA annual report of 1938:

Large-scale farms that can use highly mechanized operation methods have, in some areas, become a serious threat to the small, family-sized farm enterprise. The small farm, for example, may not be large enough to justify the use of a tractor or other heavy machinery. If a number of small farmers band together, however, they can take advantage of these modern, large-scale methods, and at the same time preserve the traditional values of independent farm ownership.39

Since this banding together took the form of cooperative organization, there was no contradiction in pursuing individualistic ends with cooperative means.

The Resettlement Administration's stress on cooperative enterprises was not a sudden or spectacular change in Southern agriculture. More than a half century before the New Deal, the Grangers had experimented with cooperative shipping associations, cooperative fire insurance companies,

and especially cooperative stores patterned after those of the English Rochdale societies. After World War I, many farm leaders saw cooperative action as a means of alleviating the effects of the agricultural depression without involving direct government action. In 1920, the American Farm Bureau Federation launched a campaign to encourage cooperative handling and selling of farm products. The Capper-Volstead Act of 1922 defined the legal status of farm cooperatives and exempted them from antitrust laws. In 1929, President Herbert Hoover sponsored the Agricultural Marketing Act which set up a Federal Farm Board to administer a $500,000,000 revolving fund for encouraging agricultural cooperatives. Essentially, cooperatives were a businesslike approach to increasing farmers' bargaining power in the competitive market place. 40

The Resettlement Administration provided all projects with a staff of farm management and home economic supervisors to teach low-income families the basic tools of successful farm living. With many settlers having less than a grade school education, resettlement projects took on the appearance of an adult education program. Through expert supervision, the Resettlement Administration sought to help

families achieve a satisfactory standard of living and enable them to pay for their farms. No family was approved for a resettlement homestead unless they were willing to participate in the RA's farm and home management program. Early each year, RA advisors worked with client families preparing plans and budgets for the next twelve months. The farm management plan called for a diversified farm program rather than a continuation of the South's one-crop system of agriculture. Cotton remained the cash crop on most projects, but each farmer also planted corn, soy beans, truck crops, and raised livestock. Each farm program also had to meet certain soil conservation requirements. During the growing season itself, farmers conferred with the parish or county rural rehabilitation supervisor on proper cultivation methods.41

The wives followed a "live at home" program of producing as much of the family's needs as possible on the farm and reducing store purchases to a minimum. Since most farm tenants would not (or could not) cultivate gardens, their diets lacked essential foods. But in helping housewives plan the home budget for the year, home management supervisors insisted that each family have a garden and can vegetables for the winter months. Farm wives also received instruction in sewing, sanitation and hygiene, and household

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41 Milo Perkins to T. Roy Reid, October 19, 1938, R. G. 96, National Archives; Perkins to Reid, November 15, 1938, ibid.
and yard beautification. Critics condemned this part of the resettlement program as paternalistic. This was indeed paternalism, admitted the Helena Record, "but paternalism is ... required to bring the nation's less privileged citizens into new and better conditions." 

For all resettlement families, the Resettlement and Farm Security Administrations tried to create a genuine sense of community life. All community and most infiltration type projects had a community center which provided the focus for social and educational activities. Stressing the need for recreation, the Resettlement Administration encouraged the use of community centers for dances, plays, musical programs, and an occasional movie. The Community and Family Services staff conducted a broad educational program for resettlement clients. Where necessary, the RA built school buildings and turned them over to local school boards for operation. Vocational teachers arranged regular class work for adults in scientific agriculture, farm management, and cooperative organization. The resettlement program furnished vocational guidance for school drop-outs, helping them get into CCC camps, NYA projects, or trade schools. Religious denominations held services on many resettlement projects. At Dyess,


43Helena (Arkansas) Record, June 20, 1938.
for example, the major denominations leased lots and erected church buildings; but on most community projects, Protestant groups formed a union church which clients could attend if they wished. In addition, the RA and FSA encouraged the observance of certain "special days" of project activity. One of the most widely used in Region Six was Settlers' Day, an annual open house for an entire project. Resettlement families invited friends from outside the project, the community manager invited prominent people from nearby towns, and both clients and manager put the project on public display. Some projects sponsored a similar Neighborhood Training Days program lasting two or three days. If there were no established county or parish fair, resettlement families substituted a similar event known as Achievement Days. Such activities were an effective means of building good public relations while contributing to the educational and social progress of project families.44

From the beginning, the Resettlement Administration designed the resettlement program to be self-liquidating. In other words, all cooperative associations would eventually pay back their development loans and take full responsibility for managing the project. No resettlement project was to remain permanently in government hands. But in 1943, before

44George Wolf to John Fischer, November 18, 1939, R. G. 96, National Archives; A. D. Stewart to C. B. Baldwin, November 10, 1941, ibid.; Community and Family Services Section Annual Report, January 1, 1940 to December 31, 1940, ibid.
this process could run its course, Congress ordered the liquidation of the entire resettlement program. The Farm Security Administration canceled its leases with all cooperative associations and gave individual farm families a mortgage to their land and homestead. By 1945, the FSA had liquidated all of the resettlement projects; but most of the families who had participated in the program were at last securely on the road toward farm ownership.

The resettlement program operated on the assumption that society rather than the individual was primarily responsible for rural poverty. While relief of distress was indeed a goal, the RA and FSA placed major emphasis on solving the fundamental causes of distress, an objective with revolutionary potential. Yet what is most obvious about the resettlement program in Region Six is its cautious and, except for projects like Lake Dick and Terrebonne, traditional attack on the problems of the rural poor. The Resettlement Administration never intended to launch a wholesale movement to establish good, bad, and indifferent farm tenants on resettlement farms. Regional and Washington officials carefully checked every resettlement proposal for soundness and practicality. The regional office sent out agricultural experts to analyze each acre of land anyone

45Conkin, *Tomorrow & New World*, Chapter IX.

offered the government. Only farm families who had outstanding qualifications could even be considered for membership in a resettlement project. The community and social services program undertook the tasks of giving low-income farm families a practical education in farm and home management. Project residents participated in cooperative enterprises, but they did so primarily as a means to an end. All but a few resettlement families in Region Six were working toward the day when they could become independent owners of their own farms.
CHAPTER VII

PLUM BAYOU AND CREW LAKE: BACK TO THE FAMILY FARM

The Resettlement Administration's program in Region Six included almost the full range of possibilities for resettlement projects. But since they all shared important similarities, it is possible to take a few typical projects and generalize about the entire resettlement program. Plum Bayou and Crew Lake illustrate two different approaches to resettling low-income farmers. Plum Bayou, Arkansas, was a community project, the type best adapted to the delta regions where large tracts of rich land could be purchased cheaply. At Plum Bayou, the Resettlement Administration laid out 200 farm units on contiguous tracts of land and formed a separate farm community. This pattern was used at Lakeview, a Negro project in Arkansas, at Transylvania in Louisiana, at Richton in Mississippi, and elsewhere. The Louisiana Farm Tenant Security project, better known as Crew Lake, was an infiltration project, a more versatile type of resettlement (if less glamorous) that could be used in both delta and hill country where the land was neither rich nor available in large units. The Crew Lake tract itself was located in the Mississippi River delta, but the Resettlement Administration infiltrated
or scattered half of the project's units all across the northern Louisiana hills. Arkansas and Mississippi repeated this pattern with their own farm tenant security projects; in addition, Campbell Farms, Arkansas Valley Farms, Western Arkansas Valley Farms, Crowley's Ridge Farms, and Northwest Arkansas Farms were similarly organized.¹

Plum Bayou and Crew Lake also offer excellent examples of the resettlement program's stress on the family farm, in contrast to cooperative farming. Plum Bayou was a community project, but community did not mean collective. On both projects, settlers farmed their own units individually and looked forward to eventually owning them free and clear. Plum Bayou and Crew Lake were not among the most successful projects financially in Region Six, but they did enable many clients to get their feet permanently back on the soil. Neither project became the subject of controversy, at least none that made the papers. Plum Bayou was not in the headlines as much as, for example, Lake Dick, a more exciting cooperative project in the same county; and Crew Lake was far quieter than Terrebonne, a controversial Louisiana cooperative.

¹ U. S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Security Administration, "Resettlement Projects, Land and Source of Acquisition, Also Status of Unit Development, Vendor, Acreage and Number of Units Developed or Undeveloped, Region Six," January 1, 1941, mimeographed, Record Group 96, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, National Archives (to be cited hereafter as R. G. 96, National Archives); Resettlement Administration, "Project Description Book," March-December, 1936, mimeographed, ibid.
In sum, Plum Bayou and Crew Lake merely illustrate typical Resettlement Administration projects in Region Six.

The Resettlement Administration launched Plum Bayou at a time of growing unrest among sharecroppers and tenants in eastern Arkansas and of growing desire among Arkansans to see something done about tenancy. For Arkansas, in fact, 1936 was the year of the sharecropper. In January, the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union set up a tent colony near Parkin to give shelter to a group of tenant families (about 100 people), all recently evicted from a Cross County plantation for joining the union. The next month, Governor J. Marion Futrell visited Parkin, heard complaints of harassment, and declared it "much ado about a very little." In May and June, the STFU called a general strike, and 5,000 croppers left the fields in eastern Arkansas. When landlords fought back with a reign of terror, the nation more than ever became aware of conditions among Arkansas tenants, but so did Arkansans themselves. "The latest trouble," the Pine Bluff Daily Graphic commented of the STFU strike, "should be a lesson to the leaders of this state that unless they . . . take some remedial steps, a dangerous situation may arise." Equally distasteful was the bad publicity Arkansas

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2Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), February 29, 1936.
3Daily Graphic (Pine Bluff), June 11, 1936.
was getting in national publications. So in August, Governor Futrell appointed a Farm Tenancy Commission to investigate all aspects of the tenancy problem. This move may have improved Arkansas' image somewhat, but it also reflected Futrell's growing concern with the tenancy system as a roadblock to economic progress in the South. Headed by Charles E. Palmer, a Texarkana newspaper publisher, the commission got down to work in September, held sessions throughout October and November, and turned out a preliminary report in December.

The Palmer commission apparently watched with interest the Resettlement Administration's work at Plum Bayou. In November, Palmer postponed a commission meeting for three days so that members could attend the project's dedication. A month later, the commission released a summary of its conclusions, and they were remarkably similar to what the RA was already doing at Plum Bayou. The Arkansas tenancy commission recommended a "new homestead policy" to give sharecroppers "the opportunity of farm-homeownership." The Federal and state government, they suggested, should "collaborate on making available to tenants land sufficiently productive to permit purchasers to pay for them over a long term at low

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4Ibid., June 18, 1936.

5Arkansas Gazette, August 16, 1936.

6Ibid., November 15, 1936; Daily Graphic, November 8, 1936.
interest rates." Palmer described the report as "sane, comprehensive, feasible." If action were taken promptly, he predicted, it would "end all danger from socialist and communist activities in rural sections." But without Plum Bayou's leadership, it is doubtful that such proposals as these would have ever been adopted.\(^7\)

The Resettlement Administration made Plum Bayou its first resettlement project in Region Six. By later 1935, the Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation had successfully negotiated with the Deming Investment Company of Kansas City, Missouri, for the purchase of the Wright plantation in Jefferson County, Arkansas. Then in March, 1936, the Resettlement Administration's regional office took over the corporation's activities and completed the purchase, paying $198,000 for 5,643.60 acres of fertile bottom land located between Little Rock and Pine Bluff, ten miles from England, on the northeast side of the Arkansas River.\(^8\) According to the regional office, the Wright plantation "was the first tract of resettlement land in the United States bought and paid for by the RA."\(^9\) For several years, the Arkansas state penitentiary had cultivated about 3,600 acres of the

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\(^7\)Arkansas Gazette, December 13, 1936.

\(^8\)Ibid., February 15, 1936; Daily Graphic, February 15, 1936, November 21, 1936.

\(^9\)Wright Community Resettlement Project, n.d., mimeographed, R. G. 96, National Archives; see Albert Maverick, Jr., to John O. Walker, October 11, 1937, ibid.
plantation with convict labor. The rest of the land suffered from floods on the Arkansas River, but it was suitable for future drainage and development. In May, assistant regional director E. B. Whitaker purchased more land in the same vicinity with a view to expanding the Wright project. The Resettlement Administration acquired the Ferda plantation, 1,880 acres, for $97,000, and the Morrow plantation, 1,240 acres, for $54,000 both in Jefferson County.\(^\text{10}\) In addition, Whitaker purchased several scattered tracts in Pulaski and Lonoke counties: a 120-acre tract for $5,100, a 260-acre tract for $10,100, a 320-acre tract for $8,500, and a 390-acre tract for $12,800. This made a total of 9,853.60 acres purchased at a total cost of $386,000. After being enlarged, the Wright Community Resettlement project took the name of a lake left by an old channel of the Arkansas River—Plum Bayou.\(^\text{11}\)

The regional office began making plans for developing the Wright plantation while the Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation still held it under option. As both regional resettlement director and head of the Arkansas RR Corporation, E. B. Whitaker was in a perfect position to coordinate the activities of both agencies in launching the Wright

\(^{10}\)Farm Security Administration, "Resettlement Projects," \textit{ibid.}; Carl C. Taylor to T. Roy Reid, February 18, 1936, \textit{ibid.}

\(^{11}\)Farm Security Administration, "Resettlement Projects," \textit{ibid.}
project. Between October, 1935, and January, 1936, Administrator Rexford G. Tugwell released two allotments totaling $205,000 to cover the cost of the land and the preparation of project plans. On December 23, 1935, Whitaker's preliminary plans for the Wright plantation won approval from Tugwell; and on February 12, 1936, Tugwell approved the final project plan with an estimated cost of $845,750 (however, not all anticipated costs were included at this time). Whitaker proposed to establish 100 farmsteads averaging thirty-six acres each at an estimated net unit cost of $7,207.50. The regional office was to begin work on the 100 homesteads without delay and to drain and clear the 2,000 acres of low, wet land on which about fifty families could be resettled at a later date. As for community and cooperative facilities, Whitaker planned a cotton gin, community center, cooperative store, and other facilities; but assistant administrator Carl C. Taylor recommended further study of their operation and justification before granting authorization. Since construction was to start that spring, there was no chance the project could begin full operations during the current (1936) crop year. Rather than let the land lie fallow and become infested with weeds or lose the

plantation's cotton base of 2,000 acres, the regional office proposed to operate 3,600 acres with relief labor until regular clients could take over in 1937.\textsuperscript{13}

By the time regional director T. Roy Reid made his first annual report in December, 1936, his organization had already put a year's work into Plum Bayou. On December 23, 1935, the regional Architectural and Engineering staff dispatched a field survey party to the project. By May 1, 1936, the surveyors finished locating all boundaries, roads, bridges, drainage ditches, wells, and septic tanks and staking out the final unit subdivisions and all building foundations. Working with the Resettlement Division, the architects and engineers also drew up both the preliminary and final project plan books which Reid sent to Washington; in these, the regional office assembled information on the surrounding area (average annual rainfall, nearby towns and markets, etc.) as well as detailed maps, specifications, sketches, and cost estimates of all proposed work.\textsuperscript{14} During the same period, the Management Division made a study of social, economic, educational, health, and recreational phases of the project, worked out an agreement with local school officials for the project's use of their facilities,

\textsuperscript{13}Carl C. Taylor to T. Roy Reid, February 18, 1936, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{14}Report of Architectural and Engineering Staff, Region Six, Little Rock, July 1, 1935 to December 31, 1936, \textit{ibid.}
and formulated criteria for the selection of families. At the end of 1936, the family selection unit had investigated 262 applicants, rejected 136, and approved forty-seven, with seventy-nine still pending.\textsuperscript{15} In April, the Construction Division moved its crews to the plantation and began actual work on the homesteads themselves. According to a report made before they started, it would cost an estimated $358,000 to build 100 units on the Wright plantation, and require 214,800 man hours of work, and an average monthly employment of 215 men.\textsuperscript{16}

The dedication of Plum Bayou on November 20 gave the public its first chance to see what the Resettlement Administration had done. It was a big day for Plum Bayou and a milestone for the Resettlement Administration, since this was the first dedication of a resettlement project in the nation. The list of special platform guests left out few names of importance in New Deal agricultural programs or in Arkansas politics: Henry A. Wallace, Rexford G. Tugwell, Will W. Alexander, AAA director Howard R. Tolley, BAE chief A. G. Black, assistant secretary of agriculture Paul H. Appleby, rural resettlement director Walter E. Packard, construction division director Frank G. Schmitt, T. Roy Reid,

\textsuperscript{15}Management Division, News Letter, Region Six, July 1, 1935 to January 1, 1936, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{16}Employment on Resettlement Administration Projects, February 18, 1936, \textit{ibid.}; Resettlement Administration, Annual Report, Region Six, December 31, 1936, \textit{ibid.}
E. B. Whitaker, Senators Joe T. Robinson and Hattie W. Caraway, Governor J. Marion Futrell, Governor-elect Carl E. Bailey, Arkansas Democratic national committeeman Brooks Hays, Congressmen John L. McClellan and D. D. Terry, Arkansas public utilities commission chairman P. A. Lasley, state bank commissioner Marion Wasson, and others. Plum Bayou's dedication was important enough for Little Rock and Memphis newspapers as well as the Associated Press and the United Press to send reporters. The general public showed genuine interest in Plum Bayou by attending in large numbers. Although no one made an accurate count of the crowd, its size may be guessed from the fact that the England, Arkansas, Kiwanis Club served 500 dozen doughnuts and 150 pounds of coffee—perhaps enough for 3,000 to 4,000 people, depending on how hungry they were.17

After the formal ceremony, chief construction engineer George Barton took the visitors on an inspection tour of the new farmsteads. "Come over and see the houses we're living in," one man gushed proudly. "Come over and see the new farm we have." So far, Barton's crews had completed only five of the proposed 100 homes. The new farmsteads were wood-frame structures emphasizing utility and economy; a newspaper

17Arkansas Gazette, November 21, 1936; Daily Graphic, November 21, 1936. For the publicity leading up to November 20, see Arkansas Gazette, November 8, 15, and 20; Daily Graphic, November 8, 12, 20.
reporter described them as "tasteful, simple, and distinctive." They all came equipped with electrical wiring, plumbing, running water, and outdoor toilets, at least until septic tanks could be installed later. As yet, no grass or shrubbery grew around the houses, although plans called for each house to be landscaped with native shrubs and trees. Each farmstead, Barton told the visitors, would include a barn, cotton, poultry, and hog houses together with all necessary fencing. For water, Plum Bayou families would rely on individual wells equipped with gasoline pumps. In addition, each farmer would have an orchard and a small pasture for his stock. When construction crews finished in early 1937, there would be thirty-nine four-room, fifty five-room, and eleven six-room houses on the former Wright plantation. For Plum Bayou, the Resettlement Administration's authorized farmstead cost (planning, land acquisition, and construction) totaled $739,151 or $7,392 per farmstead unit. Of the total authorized cost, construction costs alone amounted to $512,842.75, which was an expensive $5,128 for each unit.

"These five homesteads that you see here are not for everyone," Tugwell stressed in his speech. "They are only

18Arkansas Gazette, November 15, November 21, 1936; Daily Graphic, November 21, 1936.

for the farm families who have proved their good intentions and have shown definite ability to succeed."\textsuperscript{20} At Plum Bayou, the Resettlement Administration offered opportunities specifically to young farm families; the age limit for heads of families was thirty-five years old or younger preferably, not the standard fifty years of age at most community-type projects. To qualify, farmers also had to have a background of 4-H Club, Smith-Hughes, or similar training in farm operation and management. The regional office chose the Plum Bayou settlers from families on rural rehabilitation rolls all over the state of Arkansas.\textsuperscript{21}

Only three families had moved into their new homes at Plum Bayou before the formal dedication, but they were typical of the kind of people the Resettlement Administration was looking for. At thirty-four, Joe F. Lackey was almost too old to qualify for Plum Bayou. But he "just kept after the Resettlement folks until they gave [me] a chance," he said of himself. During the 1920's he and his family spent seven lean years on a farm in Faulkner County, Arkansas, before giving up. He then got a job in a rice mill at DeWitt and later as a carpenter in Little Rock; but when his three children were old enough to help with the chores,

\textsuperscript{20}Arkansas Gazette, November 21, 1936.

\textsuperscript{21}Wright Community Resettlement Project, n.d., mimeographed, R. G. 96, National Archives; Daily Graphic, November 8, November 21, 1936; Arkansas Gazette, November 8, 1936.
he turned back to the farm. Prior to coming to Plum Bayou, the Lackeys lived on the Case plantation, a RA rural rehabilitation project twenty miles south of Little Rock, and farmed fifty acres on a share-tenant basis. There they accumulated workstock, livestock, feed to carry them through the winter, and 650 cans of fruits and vegetables. La Vaughn York, twenty-seven, and his wife, twenty, and their seven-month-old daughter, had also served an apprenticeship on the Case project where they rented a twenty-four acre tract. They borrowed $461 to make a crop, paid it back, and raised enough food and feedstuff to make next year's crop. As rehabilitation clients, they acquired livestock, farm implements, and canned 175 quarts of fruits and vegetables. Born on an Indiana farm, York had struggled to get a high school education and one year of technical agricultural training. Ira W. Counts was twenty-five years of age, his wife twenty-two, and Wilber, junior, about three. Counts was born and reared on a Lonoke County, Arkansas, farm, but became discouraged and tried a job in a nearby town. In 1930, he decided to go back to farming; and with the RA's help, he had a better chance to succeed. 22

Plum Bayou quickly won the endorsement of the most important newspaper in Arkansas. "All who realize the purpose of the Plum Bayou homesteads project," the Arkansas

22 Ibid., November 21, 1936.
Gazette commented editorially, "... must hope for its complete success." As the Gazette put it, that purpose was "to demonstrate the feasibility of land ownership by young farmers and young farm wives..." But was it all too good to be true? Each separate farm, the editorial said, will make a pretty picture with its modern comfortable house and outbuildings,

... with its landscaping of native shrubs and trees, its orchard, its trim barn and cotton house and hog house and poultry house, and its flat fertile crop land stretching out beyond. Too pretty to last, might be the criticism of conservatives familiar with many unfortunately typical sections of rural Arkansas and the rural South. Wait, such a pessimist might say, until ranging stock has had its way with young shade trees and shrubbery, until hogs have rooted in that young orchard and insect pests taken their toll, until needed repairs to buildings have gone unmade for a year or two, and then see how pretty things will look.

The Gazette saw the hope of Plum Bayou in the kind of people who could meet the RA's membership qualifications. "The RA is giving its Plum Bayou clients high standards to live up to," the paper said. "But it is selecting them shrewdly." These farmers were "the best equipped in character, training, and outlook..." What we want for Arkansas, the Gazette said, was "more small farms whose owners can be proud of the attractive and comfortable homes those farms support."24

The editor of the Pine Bluff Daily Graphic was another booster for Plum Bayou. "According to our way of thinking,"

23 Ibid., November 20, 1936.
24 Ibid.
he wrote, "projects of this kind will do more for the county than any other effort put forth by the Roosevelt Administration." "This is one plan of the New Deal wherein the government will get back some of the money it is putting out." Such projects, he believed, should be encouraged because they will "eventually get us away from so-called relief projects."  

On a visit to Plum Bayou and a neighboring project, Lake Dick, in 1939, the Graphic editor talked with Dr. J. D. Niven, landowner and "one of Jefferson county's best known citizens." Dr. Niven took his New Deal laced with Horatio Alger and a dash of Abraham Lincoln. After listening to Niven, the editor became even more strongly convinced that his earlier support of Plum Bayou was correct:

Dr. Niven pointed out that the project [Plum Bayou] was yielding an influence for good. He related how a little girl came to his store a few weeks ago to buy some goods. She lacked 41 cents having enough to pay the bill. He told the child he would credit her with the 41 cents but reminded her that her father [a resettlement client] owed him a bill of several years' standing. A few days later the child returned to the store, paid the 41 cents and part of the old bill. Since that time the father has paid the old account in full.

"That has shown me," Dr. Niven said, "the value of these resettlement projects. They are making men feel different. They are giving them renewed ambitions, creating a desire to deal honestly with their fellow men and pointing a way to success and prosperity."

The editor put in the last word: "If the government through these resettlement projects will . . . inculcate in the minds

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25Daily Graphic, November 12, 1936.
of the residents the principles of the Golden Rule in business and in life as illustrated by Dr. Niven[,] the effort will stand for years to come as a memorial to the present administration."26

With full operations beginning in the spring of 1937, the Resettlement Administration's next step was the development of legal organization. Plum Bayou had two cooperative associations, not one as did most later community projects.27 On March 2, 1937, the regional office incorporated the Plum Bayou Cooperative Association under the laws of Arkansas for a period of fifty years. According to its articles of incorporation, the Plum Bayou Cooperative Association could issue up to $500 worth of capital stock with a par value of one dollar per share. The stockholders consisted of individual family heads at Plum Bayou, each buying five shares of stock but having only one vote. No stockholder was allowed to own more than five per cent of the capital stock of the association. The president of the first board of directors was Stanley W. Rhodes, newly appointed community manager at Plum Bayou. With one of its own employees as president, the Resettlement Administration could more easily

26 Ibid., February 22, 1939.

influence the board's decisions as well as guarantee the experience necessary for successful operation. On April 9, 1937, regional officials set up a second cooperative association, the Plum Bayou Homestead Association, this one for a period of perpetual existence. The Plum Bayou Homestead Association was organized as a benevolent corporation rather than a business corporation as in the case of Plum Bayou Cooperative Association. Under this form of organization, it could operate without issuing capital stock or paying dividends.

If Plum Bayou had followed the Resettlement Administration's standard practice, the function of the Homestead Association would have been to borrow funds for development work, construct the individual farm units and all cooperative facilities, lease the land and the improvements, then manage the project, while the Cooperative Association operated the necessary community and cooperative services. Plum Bayou, however, deviated from this pattern in small details. Since the Construction Division erected the homesteads, the Plum Bayou Homestead Association had no loan, no

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29Audit Report, Plum Bayou Homestead Association, Wright, Jefferson County, Arkansas, For the Period April 9, 1937 to June 30, 1939, ibid.; Petition for the Incorporation of the Plum Bayou Homestead Association, April 16, 1937, ibid.
lease, and no part in the development of the Wright plantation. Instead, the Resettlement Administration simply transferred the completed units to the Homestead Association, which became the "landlord organization" for the entire project. For example, the association's board of directors assumed responsibility for paying taxes, insurance premiums, repair and maintenance bills, and repaying all obligations due the Resettlement Administration and the Farm Security Administration. Eventually, Plum Bayou Homestead Association was to take over the government's title to the Plum Bayou project.\(^{30}\)

In addition, the Plum Bayou Homestead Association had the task of day-to-day management of the entire project, with the advice of the community manager. The association leased the farm units to individual clients, collected their rent, and passed it on to the Resettlement Administration. At Plum Bayou, each family paid rent on a share-crop basis: one-third of the corn and feed crops and one-fourth of the cotton and cotton seed. Under the terms of the RA's flexible lease agreement, the actual payment would be lower in case of a poor crop year due to adverse weather or other unavoidable causes. After a five-year trial period, farmers who had proved their mettle became eligible to enter into a lease-and-purchase contract. Then they had forty years in which

\(^{30}\)See Chapter V.
to pay the association for their farms. The association also appointed a manager who supervised farm operations. Plum Bayou's farm management plan called for each farmer to plant thirteen acres of cotton, ten acres of corn, three acres of alfalfa, with five acres devoted to the farmstead itself, five acres to pasture, and the remaining acreage to truck and minor crops. As on all projects, the farm plan had its complement in the home management plan, a "live-at-home" program designed to cut expenses to the bone and insure that each farmer could meet his obligations. Plum Bayou subjected clients to close supervision; but most important, each Plum Bayou farmer worked a plot of land which he had hope of one day owning.31

The two associations played separate but complementary roles in providing cooperative services for Plum Bayou farmers. On June 21, 1937, the Resettlement Administration made a $65,966.05 loan to the Plum Bayou Homestead Association and a $32,095.00 loan to the Plum Bayou Cooperative Association.32 The Homestead Association's loan went for construction of a store, warehouse, gin and cottonseed house, personnel house, feed and grist mills, repair shop, and

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31E. B. Whitaker to C. B. Baldwin, August 7, 1940, R. G. 96, National Archives.

breeding barns. Then the association leased these facilities from the government and in turn subleased them to the Plum Bayou Cooperative Association. The Cooperative Association used its loan to operate these facilities. In reality, this association used the store, equipment, and other buildings for two years without signing a lease or without paying any rent for their use. At Plum Bayou, such leases were sometimes rather informal; apparently, the Resettlement Administration held the Homestead Association so tightly in its grip that at first an unwritten understanding was satisfactory. But sooner or later, a formal arrangement had to supersede the informal one. On April 1, 1939, the Cooperative Association signed a five-year lease with an option to purchase.33

The community and cooperative services existed for obvious purposes: to furnish members with facilities which they could not own individually and to provide the benefits of bulk purchasing of certain items. Only in this way could the farm and home management programs actually succeed in making Plum Bayou self-sufficient. The Plum Bayou farmers ginned their cotton in their own gin and bought farm supplies at a store in which they owned an interest—all at cheaper prices than they could get if they had acted individually.

They also had hope of a partial return on the money they spent in the form of patronage dividends. Rather than depend on outsiders, as members of the association they operated for themselves such cooperative enterprises as a livestock improvement service, feed and grist mills, and a syrup mill; and they cooperatively marketed all farm produce, from cotton to livestock. Eventually, the Cooperative Association added a meat curing plant and a potato curing house. An established farm community would already have such facilities; but in the work of community building, there was no time to wait on natural growth.34

Plum Bayou farmers had one of the most elaborate community centers in Region Six, second only perhaps to the center at Dyess. Costing $85,000, the community center complex included an eighty-by-one-hundred-foot gymnasium which doubled as an auditorium, a three-room home economics building, and a school building with seven twenty-two by thirty-foot rooms. The latter contained a library, conference rooms, and a vocational shop. After construction was complete, the Plum Bayou Homestead Association turned the school over to the Plum Bayou School District Number Sixteen. The school served all white children from the fourth to twelfth grades in the district, whether or not their parents lived

on the project. The first three grades attended another school nearby.35

In 1938, the Farm Security Administration expanded Plum Bayou with the development of the so-called "Ferda Addition." The Resettlement Administration had acquired the Ferda and Morrow plantations and several small tracts in 1936 at a total cost of $171,947.00.36 Once part of Arkansas Delta Farms, the Ferda addition consisted of 3,700 acres of river bottom land with about 2,920 acres in cultivation, all located within a few miles of the Plum Bayou project. In addition to the land, the original investment included a store building, an old cotton gin, livestock barn, a residence, and several other usable buildings, although the tenant houses were valuable chiefly as salvage material. When Plum Bayou took over, FSA rural rehabilitation clients were farming the land under temporary arrangements until definite plans could be implemented.37

At Ferda, the Farm Security Administration followed the pattern the Resettlement Administration had perfected for developing community projects. With $256,272 borrowed


36Arkansas Gazette, January 22, 1938; Daily Graphic, January 16, January 22, 1938.

from the FSA, the Plum Bayou Homestead Association erected
the necessary housing units, improved the land, constructed
or repaired the necessary cooperative facilities, and leased
the Ferda property from the government. Finally, the Home-
stead Association subleased certain land, buildings, and
equipment to the Plum Bayou Cooperative Association and the
individual farm units to the clients. The latter association
borrowed an additional $10,436 from the government in order
to operate a store, repair shop, livestock improvement
service, syrup mill, heavy equipment cooperative, and other
cooperative facilities on the Ferda addition. As construction
started, project manager Stanley Rhodes supervised the task
of subdividing 3,111 acres into sixty-six units averaging
47.1 acres each. This left 589 acres, part of which
afforded a community pasture and woodland and part of which
was scheduled for later development. Rhodes had all of these
units filled in time for the 1939 crop season. With the
Ferda and Morrow units, Plum Bayou had room for resettling
180 families with twenty units undeveloped. 38

Plum Bayou left a record of overall financial success;
but as the history of both cooperative associations show, it
was an uneven record. The Plum Bayou Homestead Association
lost money from the start and never broke out of the red. 39

38Ibid.

39Plum Bayou Homestead Association, Annual Financial
Report, For the Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 1943, ibid.
Since it had no income from sales or patronage as did its sister association, the Homestead Association's income consisted solely of rental payments, and the rents it collected were not enough to cover the cost of maintaining and managing the project.40 The Homestead Association leased a considerable portion of its assets to the Plum Bayou Cooperative Association but failed to collect any rent on this property until 1939.41 Even afterward, there was little financial improvement. After making arrangements to liquidate its assets, the Plum Bayou Homestead Association ceased operations on December 31, 1943.42

On the other hand, the Plum Bayou Cooperative Association built a reputation for profitable operation. At the end of 1939, for example, the board of directors disbursed a patronage dividend totaling $4,445.00, and there were other dividend payments to follow.43 From 1937 to 1944, the

40 T. Roy Reid to W. W. Alexander, May 9, 1939, ibid.
41 Audit Report, Plum Bayou Homestead Association, Wright, Jefferson County, Arkansas, For the Period April 9, 1937 to June 30, 1939, ibid.
Cooperative Association made a profit every year except one (1940) due to crop failure. In 1939, the board of directors increased its authorized capital from $500 to $1,000 so that clients on the Ferda and Morrow tracts could become members. On December 15, 1944, the Cooperative Association actually made the final payment on its FSA loan, a milestone that not many associations in Region Six reached. But already, certain weaknesses had begun to catch up with the association. For one, some of the association's enterprises had long been merely dead weight. By 1943, the syrup mill, livestock improvement, repair shop, feed and seed mill, heavy equipment, sweet potato plant were operating in the red, while only the store and cotton gin turned a profit. As a result, the association liquidated most of these activities in 1944, retaining only three "departments"—store, gin, and repair shop. The move strengthened the association financially but did not solve its basic problem: not all members were using the facilities to the fullest extent.

44Audit Report, Plum Bayou Cooperative Association, Wright, Jefferson County, Arkansas, For the Six Months Ended December 31, 1938 and the Calendar Year 1939, ibid.


46Stanley W. Rhodes to Claude Woolsey, July 6, 1942, ibid.; Audit Report, Plum Bayou Cooperative Association, Wright, Jefferson County, Arkansas, For the Period January 1, 1940 to December 31, 1943, ibid.
possible. In 1942, for example, eight tenants did not gin any of their cotton at the cooperative gin. The Board of directors took a firm stand and refused to renew their leases.\(^{47}\) Soon the store, too, was in trouble. Rhodes had difficulty finding and keeping an experienced manager; in one year (1943) the store had three different managers, and profits sagged. The store was also hurting because two-fifths of the membership of the association lived over five miles from its location, and almost half of the members lived nearer outside stores (and cotton gins) and patronized them to save time.\(^{48}\) Without one hundred percent participation, the savings the association could provide were reduced for everyone, good customers and bad.

In August, 1945, the board of directors went ahead with a move they had been contemplating for the past year. For $27,000 they purchased from the government the cooperative facilities they held under lease—store, gin, feed mill, shop, and several dwellings—and the land on which these were located.\(^{49}\) To make a $6,600 cash down payment, the association amended its by-laws to provide for a capitalization of


\(^{49}\)Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Board of Directors of Plum Bayou Cooperative Association, Inc., Wright, Arkansas, held August 9, 1944, ibid.
$50,000 (1,000 shares of common stock at one dollar each, and 4,900 shares of preferred stock at ten dollars each).\textsuperscript{50}

Hopefully, the members would be willing to invest more money in the association in order to take care of their new obligations. In fact, they proved to be quite unwilling. The board made the down payment, but could not meet its first yearly payment due the FSA on December 31, 1945.\textsuperscript{51}

What was wrong? First, the purchase was a sound investment but it was ill-timed. When World War II ended in August, the demand for cotton plummeted—just before harvest. Taking a heavy loss, the cooperative ginned only 426 bales of cotton instead of the 1,500 or more common in past years. More than fifty per cent of the cotton raised on the project and in the vicinity of it was still in the fields by the end of the year, and there was no prospect for picking it.\textsuperscript{52}

Second, the members of the association were no longer behind their cooperative; ". . . lack of membership participation," explained regional cooperative specialist Claude Woolsey, "is the contributing factor to the unsuccessful operations in 1945."\textsuperscript{53}

By early 1946, the Plum Bayou Cooperative

\textsuperscript{50}J. V. Highful, Memorandum to Elstner D. Beall, July 27, 1945, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{51}Plum Bayou Cooperative Association, Wright, Arkansas, Annual Financial Report, For the Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 1945, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{52}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{53}\textit{Ibid.; J. V. Highful, Memorandum to Elstner D. Beall, February 19, 1946, \textit{ibid.}}
Association's financial condition had reached "an alarming stage." It was unable to carry on operations for another year.

In 1942, the Farm Security Administration began planning the sale of individual units and community facilities at Plum Bayou. By 1943, regional director A. D. Stewart had transferred all community buildings and facilities to the Plum Bayou Cooperative Association, replacing the lease with a sales contract. He completed the sale of units to individual farmers in 1945. At Plum Bayou, the resettlement agencies had poured $386,000.00 into land and $1,203,893.44 into homestead development, while the cost of community facilities came to $373,919.49. Each homestead represented an average investment of $8,052.80, the highest unit cost in Region Six by $2,000. Plum Bayou, in fact, was the second most expensive resettlement project in the region. By June, 1945, Stewart had sold 141 out of 151 reorganized units for a total of $636,333.00. To that point, Plum Bayou had lost $495,541.94 in the final sale of units; it had already fallen behind $135,957.74 in operating expenses. Its total deficit came to $631,499.58. Plum Bayou finished with the highest losses of any resettlement project in Region Six. No other project, either community or infiltration type, came within

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54 Ibid.
55 A. D. Stewart to C. B. Baldwin, October 1, 1942, ibid.
When liquidating a resettlement project, the Farm Security Administration had each unit appraised separately by an impartial committee which based its recommendations on the fair market value of the land and of the buildings on the land. The results of this final appraisal explain a large part of Plum Bayou's deficit. Although the FSA had invested an average of $8,052.80 in each unit, Plum Bayou settlers paid an average price of only $4,214.12 per unit, according to the appraised market value. Thus the difference between unit investment and appraisal value was $3,838.68. At Plum Bayou, regional officials fell into perhaps the deadliest trap of the resettlement program: over-capitalizing the project families. Since it was the first project in the region, they ambitiously invested more money in the Plum Bayou farmsteads than the clients could ever hope to repay, raising the cost of the units far beyond their true value. The regional office soon acquired enough experience in community building to avoid this mistake—or at least a mistake of this size.


57 Ibid.
II

In Louisiana, the Crew Lake project was the earliest New Deal experiment in creating a new community of family-sized farms. Located in the flat cotton fields of the delta, the Crew Lake community was part of a larger multiparish undertaking known as the Louisiana Farm Tenant Security project. In February, 1936, E. B. Whitaker, assistant director of Region Six, announced that the Resettlement Administration wanted to buy land to convert into "resettlement projects in which clients will be placed on small farms of from 20 to 40 acres." While he showed particular interest in large tracts of 2,000 acres or more, Whitaker was seeking land units of all sizes.58

About the same time, Lee O. Sumrall, as manager of the Farm Tenant Security project, began getting in touch with landowners in northern Louisiana who had improved farm land for sale. "These farms," he said, "must be well located as regards to school facilities, mail routes, churches, and gravel or hard-surface roads."59 The Resettlement Administration demanded the land meet certain standards of soil fertility, market value, and price. Sumrall examined offers of several hundred tracts of land of all sizes from small


59Richland Beacon-News (Rayville), March 7, 1936.
individual farms to at least one delta plantation, but found only twenty-three good enough to submit to the regional office at Little Rock, Arkansas. The Millsaps plantation, purchased in 1937 for $103,000, was the largest land deal on the Farm Tenant Security project. In all, the Resettlement Administration paid $223,540.67 for 7,165 acres of rich alluvial farm land in Caldwell, Richland, St. Landry, Natchitoches, Morehouse, Tensas, and Bossier parishes.

As a scattered farm or "infiltration" type of resettlement, the Farm Tenant Security project fit easily into the existing pattern of small family farms in the Louisiana hill country. From his headquarters at Columbia in Caldwell Parish, Sumrall supervised 110 family farm units that were widely scattered through eight parishes. Some of them were single, isolated farms; but others, like those at Crew Lake, were clustered together on contiguous tracts of land. As

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60 Madison Journal, July 3, 1936; Weekly News (Marksville), July 18, 1936; see Madison Journal, December 4, 1936; Caldwell Watchman (Colombia), September 4, 1937, January 8, 1937.


62 With forty units, Crew Lake was the largest center of activity on the Farm Tenant Security project, but there were also nineteen units in a tract at Indian Village, thirteen units in a tract in St. Landry Parish, and thirty-eight scattered units, including one eight-unit tract, two tracts with six units each, one five-unit tract, two tracts with three units each, one tract with two units, and seven isolated units. Farm Security Administration, "Resettlement Projects," ibid.
E. C. McInnis, RA director in Louisiana, explained: "We've kept away from any idea of setting up 'colonies,' apart from other farmers. The farms are individual ones, located near others and among others. These families won't feel themselves in any special class, but farmers like the others." The acquisition of the 3,000-acre Millsaps plantation made possible the resettlement of many families at one location to form a new community. The plantation was broken up into forty adjacent family-sized units; the settlers, though grouped together, owned their own farms and operated them individually like all other farmers on the Farm Tenant Security project. Crew Lake was an experiment which combined cooperative effort with the goals of farm ownership and rural rehabilitation.

At Crew Lake, the Resettlement Administration stressed cooperative enterprises, not because of any philosophical distaste for competition or individualism, but to help groups of small farmers operate with the efficiency of large commercial farms. The Crew Lake Cooperative Association, incorporated on September 22, 1937, was a self-governing body operating under a president and board of directors elected by project families, who made up its membership. The

63Morning Tribune (New Orleans), May 30, 1937.

64"Certification of Incorporation of the Crew Lake Cooperative Association, Inc.," Secretary of State's Office, State Capital, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Crew Lake families also formed a cooperative medical association which functioned
member families attended the association's meetings where they each had one vote and participated in minor decision-making, although the community manager maintained actual control of Crew Lake activities. With headquarters at Rayville, the Crew Lake Association operated cooperatives for purchasing registered livestock and heavy farm equipment. Through community cooperation, the project families had the advantage of using costly farm machinery for their heavy work that none of them alone could have afforded. The association cooperatively ginned and marketed cotton grown at Crew Lake. The Crew Lake Association was incorporated for a term of fifty years and is still in legal existence.

In July, 1937, Sumrall began breaking up the Millsaps plantation into individual farm units, tearing down tenant shacks, and building each family a new homestead. The Resettlement Administration's Construction Division erected a complete village of farm homes, styled after modest suburban dwellings, along the banks of Crew Lake. Costing about $1,650 each, the new homes were wood-frame structures with one or two bedrooms, living room, kitchen, dining room, and

as a kind of health insurance. Lewis E. Long to John J. Riggle, July 26, 1938, R. G. 96, National Archives.

screened front porch. In addition to the dwelling, each homestead included a barn, poultry house, smoke house, and outhouse. The homes were all painted white, the barns and other structures dark red. The Crew Lake homestead units varied from forty to 100 acres; the average was fifty-two acres. Sumrall provided each family with about seven acres of pasture, laid out roads through the project, and cleared land where necessary. Crew Lake families had access to a three-building community center for meetings, lectures, movies, dances, and other recreation; they could also take advantage of community services such as a cooperative store, repair shop, feed mill, and syrup mill. 66

After developing the land, the Farm Security Administration resold the Crew Lake homesteads to individual farmers. The homesteader entered into a lease-and-purchase contract with the government, agreeing to pay for his farm over a forty-year period at three per cent interest with annual payments of about $185. These were low-income families who under ordinary circumstances would be unable to obtain credit on reasonable terms and who could not put up any security for a loan. The FSA used the lease-and-purchase contract as a

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device to protect the government's investment by insuring control and technical supervision. In addition, each family came on the project for a trial period of five years; and during that time they were required to pay back at least fifteen per cent of the homestead cost and to demonstrate that they had the qualities to achieve success as farm owners. To prevent speculation, farmers could not resell their land without FSA approval, though this condition was never enforced. After the trial period, the FSA established a final resale price for the units based on their productivity; and the contracts were converted into fee simple deeds which for practical purposes eliminated government control of the project.67

In 1937, the Resettlement Administration began selecting the Crew Lake families.68 After field workers thoroughly investigated each applicant, a family selection board in the Little Rock regional office gave final approval to the families that met certain criteria. The screening process was

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67Cloyd O. Hopkins, project manager at Crew Lake after 1939, interview with the author, November 1, 1963; Richland Beacon-News, April 3, 17, 1937; Monroe Morning World, May 6, 1938; Claude Woolsey, head of the Cooperative Section in the Little Rock regional office, interview with the author, January 19, 1968.

designed to pick out families most likely to be serious about putting down permanent roots in a farm. Like all resettlement communities, Crew Lake was to be a culturally homogeneous community of people who could cooperate together and identify with one another's problems. The RA wanted couples between twenty-five and forty years of age, having up to five or six children. "They must measure up to several standards," McInnis said.

They must, first of all, undergo a physical examination and be free from disease and physical handicaps. . . . They must show us that they have thrift and integrity, that they know enough about the job of getting along in farming, to warrant this new help. We have to be sure that they won't fail through sheer lack of knowledge or experience in farm work.69

In other words, applicants had to be outstanding tenants—tenants who were not on relief rolls, who had initiative, but who had been too poor to buy their own farms. They brought with them their personal property, including furniture, farm implements, and livestock. There was no difficulty in finding qualified families to fill the forty units at Crew Lake.

The tenant families selected for the Crew Lake project had all moved into their new homes by early 1938. The new settlers were usually not shifted long distances or moved into drastically different environments. Most were already residents of the Crew Lake region. One family, after having

been tenants on the Millsaps plantation, were potential owners of the same land they had rented for the past eight years. Across the highway from their new home stood the house they had occupied—a square, unpainted cabin, which was later torn down.\textsuperscript{70} Another family had moved to Crew Lake in December, 1936, and farmed the land as clients in the RA's rural rehabilitation program.\textsuperscript{71} Before time for spring planting in 1938, the settlers performed for themselves some of the unskilled tasks in developing their homesteads. They built picket fences around their homes, dug irrigation and drainage ditches, and constructed outbuildings; some built wagonsheds and storehouses.\textsuperscript{72} The Crew Lake settlers had more reason to work with hope and self-confidence than in many years; they had a chance at last to realize their dream of landownership.

The rural resettlement program went far beyond merely setting up a tenant family in the farming business with land, homestead, and equipment. The RA and FSA supervised the actual operation of the farm. Working under Douglas Robinson, Richland Parish FSA supervisor, experts on both scientific farming and Louisiana agriculture consulted with all Crew

\textsuperscript{70}Monroe Morning World, May 6, 1938.

\textsuperscript{71}The Progress, June 2, 1939.

\textsuperscript{72}Lewis E. Long to John J. Riggle, July 26, 1938, R. G. 96, National Archives; Monroe Morning World, May 6, 1938; Morning Tribune, May 30, 1937.
Lake settlers and gave them the benefit of the best technical advice. Together each farmer and his counselor worked out a detailed farm plan—what crops to plant, how much acreage to devote to each, what livestock to keep, what garden crops to raise. The purpose was to provide the farmer with a cash income and to enable him to pay off his loan. At Crew Lake, the principal cash crop was cotton; at Terrebonne it was sugarcane. But without exception, the old one-crop system so common in the South was abandoned. Crew Lake families, for example, relied on sweet potatoes and livestock for additional cash crops; the project's farm plan included the soil conservation practices recommended by the Louisiana extension service and participation in AAA crop reduction programs.73

The Crew Lake families followed a "live-at-home" program of home management. Stressing self-sufficient farming, the FSA encouraged project residents to supply most of their own food, especially milk, poultry, and pork. "That's an essential," McInnis contended. "Forty-four per cent of farm living expenses come under these three items, and the farmer that doesn't provide them for himself is at a terrific disadvantage."74

The farm wife naturally played an important


74Ibid.
role in every resettlement project. Joyce Mullins, Richland Parish home demonstration agent, worked with the women in planning a budget for household expenses. The key to the RA-FSA home management program was the pressure-cooker; the women learned how to can the fruits and vegetables they raised in their gardens and to provide a balanced diet during the winter months. To a large degree, the resettlement communities were adult education courses in scientific farming, food preservation, nutrition, sewing, health care, sanitation, and personal hygiene.

In 1943, the Farm Security Administration began dissolving the Louisiana Farm Tenant Security project. This meant simply that the FSA phased out its participation in the project and transferred title and mortgage to the families living on the individual farm units. The object of the experiment from the beginning had been to promote independent farm ownership. By 1945, the RA and FSA had spent $233,540.67 to purchase the land and $379,211.17 to develop 110 individual homesteads. The average investment per unit—to develop and maintain for five years—was $5,416.94. But Crew Lake and Farm Tenant Security settlers paid an average price of $4,316.73 per unit according to the appraised market value. Thus the difference between unit investment and appraisal

value was $1,100.21. By June, 1945, the FSA had sold all but one unit for a total of $435,990.00, leaving the Farm Tenant Security project with a deficit of $110,858.41 in land and development costs. This figure, however, does not include $60,223.46 invested in community facilities, or an accumulated net loss of $27,202.90 in operating expenses over income. Since both items were written off, the project's total deficit was $198,284.77.76

Plum Bayou and Crew Lake were typical of most projects established by the Resettlement and Farm Security Administrations in Region Six. They were both experimental and unprecedented. But what happened there from day to day was undramatic, unromantic, unexciting, and completely unnewsworthy. They were in fact rather boring projects. Life at Plum Bayou and Crew Lake was the same as life anywhere in the Southern cotton belt—getting up before daybreak, hitching teams, plowing, hoeing, chopping, picking. It was the hard life of small farmers living on the edge of want. Plum Bayou and Crew Lake did, however, offer renewed hope for a few families. This hope was the most important part of everyday living and working. Perhaps for the first time, these tenant farmers had the hope that all their work was not for someone else. It was for themselves. It was for their future.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TERREBONNE COOPERATIVE FARM

Terrebonne Parish has every characteristic of Southern Louisiana. The Creole and Cajun population, the French and Spanish names, the old plantation homes, the lazy bayous, the live oaks heavy with Spanish moss all suggest strong ties with the past, rich traditions, and a certain timeless-ness. Thirty years ago as today, Houma, the parish seat, was famed for shrimp, oysters, and, above all, sugar cane. Terrebonne's rich, black soil—the "good earth" for which the parish was named—had made it one of the most important sugar cane producing parishes of Louisiana. Even in the Depression, its citizens liked to think of Terrebonne as a "modern garden of Eden."¹ Yet Southern Louisiana was hardly a paradise for farmers, especially small owners and tenants. In 1935, slightly more than half of all Terrebonne Parish farmers did not own their own land.² Young families found it difficult to get a start in farming. The Depression and

¹Houma Courier, August 26th 1938.

low sugar cane prices forced many small operators to fall back on mere subsistence agriculture, while large numbers of farmers completely lost their hold on the land. In Terrebonne Parish, the New Deal tried an approach to rural relief and rehabilitation that made the old and the new, the traditional and the experimental, stand out in sharp relief. The Farm Security Administration's project near Schriever, three miles south of Thibodaux, was an experiment in collective farming. No community project in Region Six made a greater departure from traditional farm practice.³

The Terrebonne project, along with Lake Dick (Arkansas) and Marcella (Mississippi), were the only resettlement projects in Region Six which ran counter to the traditional pattern of individually-owned family farms. The most important promoters of such projects were Rexford G. Tugwell, M. L. Wilson, and others in Washington who considered large-scale cooperative farming to be a valuable social and economic pattern, one that could become the wave of the future.⁴ The family farm, they believed, could not compete with newer larger-scale commercial agriculture. But farms were not

³Unlike Arkansas and Mississippi, Louisiana was the only state in the region with previous experience in cooperative farming. The New Llano colony, near Leesville in Vernon Parish, operated from 1917 to 1937. See Henry Edward Wilson, "The History of the Llano Cooperative Colony" (unpublished M.A. Thesis, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 1951).

only getting larger; machinery and hired labor were replacing sharecroppers, tenants, and even small owners. Perhaps the cooperative farm could help farmers readjust to the agricultural revolution without sacrificing economic democracy. In Region Six, however, most resettlement officials were not enthusiastic about cooperative farming, since it called for fundamental changes in agricultural structure and social values. As land grant college graduates or former county extension agents, they had always taken for granted the traditional values associated with individual land ownership. They believed that the family farm had a place even in a world of large-scale mechanized agriculture. Regional officials went along with such experiments as Terrebonne because they had to, but they also twisted the philosophy of cooperative farming enough to make it more palatable. Resettlement Division director E. B. Whitaker, for example, saw Terrebonne primarily as a training school program for low-income farm families who could not as yet measure up to the responsibilities of individual ownership or even of tenancy. Here, these families could gain practical experience, under trained supervision, in running a farm. After a few years, they could probably "graduate" to individual farming. 5 These two points of view were basically incompatible, but in the short run they did not conflict.

5E. B. Whitaker, interview with the author, April 19, 1968.
In June 1937, E. C. McInnis, Resettlement Administrator in Louisiana, announced the purchase of three adjacent plantations (Waubun, St. George, and Julia) near Schriever in Terrebonne Parish; in August, the RA acquired the Isle of Cuba plantation located away from Schriever toward Houma. All together, the Resettlement Administration paid $147,346.60 for 5,960 acres of gummy sugar cane land. The Farm Security Administration inherited the Terrebonne project in September, 1937, and made plans to put it into operation. George S. Harmount, as community manager, built a village of farm homes near Schriever, developed the land with new roads, fences, and drainage ditches, and organized the project into a collective farm large enough to support eighty families.

Terrebonne colony has a history of controversy, disappointment, and delay. The Resettlement Administration began planning the project in 1935; but Terrebonne did not officially open as a Farm Security Administration project.

6Times-Picayune (New Orleans), June 23, 1937; Morning Tribune (New Orleans), August 6, 1937; see Times-Picayune, October 9, 1938; Caldwell Watchman (Columbia), January 29, 1937; Louis J. Rodriguez, "The Terrebonne Project: Ideological Revolution or Economic Expediency," Louisiana Studies, VI (Fall, 1967), 267-77.

7U. S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Security Administration, "Resettlement Projects, Land and Source of Acquisition, Also Status of Unit Development, Vendor, Acreage and Number of Units Developed or Undeveloped, Region Six," January 1, 1941, mimeographed, Record Group 96, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, National Archives (to be cited hereafter as R. G. 96, National Archives).
until 1939. During part of the interim period, the FSA leased its land in Terrebonne Parish to the Louisiana Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, an organization formed by the Emergency Relief Administration in Louisiana to carry on its rehabilitation program for low-income farmers. Using relief labor, the Louisiana Rural Rehabilitation Corporation operated Terrebonne as a sugar cane plantation for the next two years. After a freeze destroyed the project's cane crop in 1937, the Louisiana corporation was unable to meet the terms of its lease; by the end of 1938, its losses amounted to $24,276. On January 1, 1939, the FSA took over the operation of Terrebonne.⁹

The work of the Louisiana Rural Rehabilitation Corporation kept alive interest in a resettlement project at Schriever, but local community and civic leaders from Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes were anxious to see it developed on a permanent basis. For months the Schriever project, according to the Houma Courier, was "a hot and cold proposition."¹⁰ In November 1937, the presence of a FSA engineering crew at Schriever raised the hopes of the Thibodaux Rotary Club, which made inquiries about the project's future.¹¹

⁹Henry A. Wallace to Allen J. Ellender, February 1, 1940, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives.
¹⁰Houma Courier, April 5, 1938.
¹¹Ibid., November 19, 1937.
But at that time no further work was done. The following spring, the Farm Security Administration began preliminary work on Terrebonne. In April, 1938, George Harmount announced a meeting in Thibodaux for anyone interested in the Schriever resettlement project. Before launching any resettlement community, the RA and FSA always secured not only the backing of local leaders but even that of property-owners whose land was adjacent to the project. Those who met in Thibodaux were supporters of the project, but were probably primarily concerned with having Federal money spent in their parish.

At the meeting, T. Roy Reid, Farm Security Administration director of Region Six, explained why the Schriever project had been delayed. The time required to investigate the titles to the land purchased for the project, Reid said, had thrown Terrebonne far behind schedule. When the land was finally transferred to the government, the end of the fiscal year (July 1, 1937) had arrived, and the funds appropriated for developing the project had to be returned to the United States Treasury. Consequently, no improvements could be made. This was the practice, he said, at the end of each fiscal year with money appropriated but not yet used for any project. But now, according to Reid, money was again available, and the project was going to be carried out as planned.

12 Ibid., April 8, 1938.
13 Ibid.
What Reid did not discuss was the indecision within the Farm Security Administration itself during 1937 and 1938 over how to organize Terrebonne. "The Terrebonne project," wrote J. O. Walker, Director of the Resettlement Division, "has been the subject of considerable difference of opinion." The central issue was whether the ultimate aim should be to operate Terrebonne as a cooperative farm or "to have each homesteader own and operate a family size farm." Reid's Little Rock office was apparently not anxious to have a project that critics could compare to a Soviet collective farm. But as they knew, cane production was a type of agriculture requiring a large outlay for heavy power equipment and as a general rule had been carried on more successfully by large-scale operators than by family-sized farmers.

About the same time the decision was made in favor of cooperative farming, the Farm Security Administration assigned George Harmount to Terrebonne as project manager. He had been FSA parish supervisor before his promotion and was


16 Whitaker, interview with the author, April 19, 1968; Horace E. Thompson, Community manager at the Lake Dick project, Arkansas, interview with the author, January 19, 1963; Little Rock Arkansas Gazette, January 3, 1939.
identified with the diversified farming movement in Terrebonne Parish. Although a graduate of Yale, Harmount had no formal agricultural training. 17 Since most FSA personnel in Louisiana backed individual farm ownership, Harmount's enthusiasm for trying a cooperative farm in the state more than qualified him for his job as Terrebonne project manager. He was the man most responsible for developing the Terrebonne colony.

Claude Woolsey, as chief of the FSA's Cooperative Section in Region Six, formed the project into a cooperative association known as Terrebonne Association, Inc., filing its papers with the Secretary of State's office on November 8, 1938. 18 Conrad M. LeBlanc, Sr., one of the project

17 *Times-Picayune*, April 9, 1939.

18 "Articles of Association of Terrebonne Association, Inc.," Secretary of State's Office, State Capital, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Claude Woolsey, interview with the author, January 19, 1968. Since Louisiana laws did not authorize cooperative associations to engage in agricultural production, Terrebonne had originally been incorporated under a 1922 law regulating business corporations. Organized on May 10, 1938, Terrebonne Farm, Inc., issued eighty shares of capital stock worth fifty dollars each; the corporation's membership consisted of owners of one share of stock. If families selected for the project could not afford to buy their own share, the FSA loaned them fifty dollars to meet this initial expense. On June 13, the Louisiana Legislature approved Act No. 40 of the 1938 session permitting the organization of cooperative associations without capital stock but with all the powers possessed by Terrebonne Farm, Inc. as well as substantial tax advantages. As a result, Terrebonne Farm was reorganized as Terrebonne Association. T. Roy Reid to W. W. Alexander, April 13, 1938, R. G. 96, National Archives; Mastin G. White to W. W. Alexander, March 26, 1938, *ibid.*; Mastin G. White, Memo for W. W. Alexander, September 26, 1938, *ibid.*; Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950, Vol. 1, Title 3, Chapter 2, pp. 42-62.
members, served as president, and Harmount himself was a member of the four-man board of directors. Every Terrebonne family was a member of the association and had one vote in its business meetings. The Farm Security Administration gave the Terrebonne Association a ninety-nine year lease on all project land and financed its activities with an initial loan of $415,619. Of this sum, the association used $280,659 in constructing the individual farm homes, barns, poultry houses, fences, roads, and renovating the community center. The balance, $134,980, was invested in farm implements, mules, and equipment used in the production of sugar cane. Under its lease with the government, the Terrebonne Association's annual rent for the use of FSA land was a fifth share of the sugar cane and a fourth share of all other crops. The Terrebonne project relied upon subsidiary cooperatives to carry on special tasks such as marketing produce and purchasing heavy machinery and equipment. The association became part owner of the Magnolia Sugar Refinery for use by the colonists. 19

To qualify for membership in the Terrebonne colony was somewhat different from most community projects. At Terrebonne, special preference was given to young married couples with reasonable education who had reached adulthood.

since the beginning of the Depression, although heads of families between twenty-one and fifty years of age could qualify.20 A. D. Roberts, family selection specialist, stressed that applicants should be enthusiastic about the cooperative idea, because a person with strong individualistic tendencies would not fit into the program. Even in the face of a shortage of project families, Roberts' office refused some applicants because they showed signs of being "rugged individualists."21 "The plan for the development of this project," a news release said, "is something new and it will be up to those families who first enter [Terrebonne] to make it a success; therefore, it is necessary that families be capable of understanding and adapting to these new conditions."22 The family selection staff was looking for families in good financial condition, with reputations for sobriety, honesty, and diligence, and who were well recommended by the business and professional men in their home communities. Experience with sugar cane production was essential; finally, no family was considered unless they were engaged in farming at the time of selection.23

20Times-Picayune, October 9, 1938; Item-Tribune, January 25, 1939; Houma Courier, August 5, 1938.
21Times-Picayune, April 9, 1939; Item-Tribune, January 25, 1939.
22Houma Courier, August 19, 1938.
23Ibid., August 5, 1938; August 19, 1938.
When the selection process was begun in April, 1938, Harmount planned to settle eighty families, the optimum number Terrebonne's size could support with a satisfactory standard of living.24 Paul N. Mayeau, FSA supervisor in Terrebonne Parish, advised those interested in getting on the project to make application at his office in Houma.25 On April 8, Mayeau organized a meeting to discuss the project with interested families in Houma and a second one in Thibodaux the following day.26 He scheduled trips to the project site at Schriever for those wanting to go. Soon he had about 300 family applicants on file; yet he was never able to get enough qualified families to fill all the project units.27 By August 5, 1938, the Houma Courier announced that the "final selection" of all tenant families for the project was underway. But on August 19 the Courier reported that "additional applications" were being sought. On September 9, "complete final arrangements" were again being made at Schriever, but more families for the project were needed.28 After a year's operation, in July 1940, only


26Ibid., April 8, 1938.

27Times-Picayune, April 9, 1939.

28Houma Courier, August 5, 1938, August 19, 1938, September 9, 1938.
sixty families were living on the project—twenty short of what had been planned for; and since only seventy-two units were built, twelve new houses, having never been occupied, were still standing empty.  

On Saturday, January 13, 1939, Mrs. Allen J. Ellender, wife of the Louisiana Senator, came to Schriever to attend the ceremony officially opening the Terrebonne project. The general public was invited; and scores of interested spectators, including many of the families already selected to become colonists, flocked to the community center. Acting as master of ceremonies, George Harmount presided over a series of nine speeches given both by FSA officials and civic leaders from Houma and Thibodaux. E. C. McInnis, FSA director in Louisiana, outlined the organization and operation of the Schriever project, recounted its history and gave details of other FSA activities in Louisiana. E. B. Whitaker, representing the FSA's regional office at Little Rock, stated that the success of the Schriever experiment would lead to the application of private capital to similar projects. That the project had much local support seems evident. Among other speakers, for example, Colonel Julius Dupont, president of the Houma-Terrebonne Chamber of Commerce, discussed the educational benefits of the project; and R. L. Caldwell, president of the Lafourche Parish police jury, said, "The people of Lafourche parish are behind the

29 *Times-Picayune*, July 15, 1940.
project 100 per cent and expect to do everything in their power to assist." After the speeches, Mrs. Ellender turned over the first shovelful of earth to begin construction work at Terrebonne.30

Once underway the development of Terrebonne was rapid. In September, 1938, the Farm Security Administration had asked for bids on the construction of seventy-three homestead units (219 separate structures); in January 1939, the contractor with the lowest bid began work.31 The homes were light frame structures built according to FSA specifications. They had two to three bedrooms, living room, kitchen, dining room, and screened side porch. The house plans did not include indoor plumbing, but they contained a storeroom which could be converted into a bathroom later. Although erecting the structures on a mass production basis, the FSA sought to avoid a monotonous "tenement" atmosphere by building several different types of houses ranging in cost from $1,495 to $1,732. Including house, barn, poultry house, water cistern, two mules, two cows, corn crib, tool shed, and fencing, the cost of each homestead averaged about $2,600. By July, 1939, work had been completed on the project.32


31Houma Courier, September 6, 1938, September 27, 1938, January 13, 1939; for additional delay in accepting awarding bids, see ibid., October 25, 1938, October 28, 1938, November 4, 1938; J. O. Walker, Memorandum to Edwin G. Arnold, December 12, 1938, R. G. 96, National Archives.

32Item-Tribune, June 25, 1939; Houma Courier, September 6, 1938.
Even before construction crews left, Terrebonne Association began cooperative operations on 3,140 acres of crop land and 640 acres of pasture land leased from the government. In other words, the client families farmed the land as one big farm and shared in the profits as members of the association. The Terrebonne cooperative association entered into "Work and Occupancy Agreements" with its members, furnishing them rent free two acres of land, house, barn, poultry house, toilet, water cistern, and livestock. In return the head of each family worked on the cooperative acreage as a day labourer. The FSA anticipated that work would be available at Terrebonne during most of the year for about eighty men. At harvest time, the association employed additional laborers from outside sources. During the development stage at Terrebonne clients who had already been chosen were employed on construction work as much as possible.\(^{33}\)

Under FSA supervision, the association's president and board of directors laid out a farm program for each year and appointed a foreman to take charge of farming operations. He in turn assigned the men work for which they were best suited. Some worked as tractor drivers, others as plow hands, still others took care of the stock. The association paid each family head for his work at the same rates he could

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get from private sugar cane planters. In 1939, for example, the current rate for cultivating cane was $1.20 a day and $1.50 a day for harvesting, plus overtime. At the end of the year, the association paid its expenses—overhead costs, installment on FSA loan, lease payment, and reserve fund—and divided the balance, if any, among the members according to the number of hours of work each had put in during the year. The project families, therefore, had two main sources of income: their daily wage, which should have covered day-to-day living expenses, and a dividend paid at the end of the year out of profits on the cane and other cash crops. In reality, however, the Terrebonne Association was never successful enough to pay a dividend. Project families had to depend on their income as day laborers on the project rather than on dividends as part-owners in the cooperative association.

Harmount subdivided 480 acres of project land into eighty homestead units of six acres each, two acres of which served as the homestead site, while the other four were devoted to garden vegetables, poultry, and livestock. Although project members occupied their individual homestead units rent free, each family paid thirty dollars a year rent on the four-acre tract; they could either keep its produce for their own use or sell it and keep the profit as

34Item-Tribune, June 25, 1939; Houma Courier, September 13, 1938.
supplemental income. Terrebonne's remaining 2,148 acres included space for roads, ditches, community center, community pasture, and uncleared land.\(^{35}\)

Since the Terrebonne project was located in the heart of the sugar bowl of southern Louisiana, the major portion of its arable acreage was planted in sugar cane. I. C. Borland, as farm management supervisor, designed the project's farm program to comply with recommendations made by the Louisiana Experiment Station; thus besides cane, the FSA program included corn, soy beans, Irish potatoes, truck crops, and livestock.\(^{36}\)

At Terrebonne, the Resettlement Administration had originally planned to imitate the so-called European village style of agriculture. The homesteads were to be grouped together to form a village in the center of the project, while the fields would stretch out all around in the distance. But when developing the project, the Farm Security Administration scattered the homesteads and despite plans for communal farming, broke up the cultivatable land into seventy-two units of forty acres each. The most important reason for this change was the fear, on the part of Little Rock officials, that plans for operating Terrebonne as a


\(^{36}\)Ibid., Times-Picayune, April 9, 1939.
collective farm would not be practical. Whitaker, for example, wanted to be prepared to split the community into individual family units if collective operations should fail. Thus the Schriever land was divided into forty-acre units which at first seemed to serve no real purpose. At the same time the FSA found it expedient to group together dwellings in two's and three's so that more than one family could use the same well, thus cutting costs and encouraging informal cooperation.

The communal organization at Terrebonne was the main source of controversy. One outspoken local critic was Edward A. Ford, Presbyterian minister at Thibodaux. Addressing the Houma Rotary Club on September 20, 1939, Ford offered several objections to the project's operation. As planned by the FSA, he asserted, Terrebonne was in grave danger of failing. The spirit of the resettlement program was to permit people to own land of their own. But at Schriever tenants could never own the land as individuals. Since ownership was not possible, he contended that personal initiative would be destroyed and a less desirable type of farmer would be drawn to the project.

The following week, George Harmount and John Lynch,

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37 Whitaker, interview with the author, April 19, 1968.
38 Eaton, Exploring Tomorrow's Agriculture, 79.
39 Houma Courier, September 23, 1938.
one of his colleagues, appeared before the Rotary Club to answer Ford's criticisms. Did the project fail to provide incentive for families since it did not anticipate eventual ownership? The answer, Harmount explained, was not as clear as Ford believed. Harmount contended that it was difficult to find people who were capable of operating their own farms, and that the cooperative plantation provided a means of discovering people with the qualities for gaining farm ownership. He explained that if a man had to buy livestock, equipment, and other needs for a modern farm, it would require several thousand dollars, while at Terrebonne a man can get started for fifty dollars. The fact that the land had been divided into forty-acre tracts indicated, Harmount suggested, that the FSA may have in mind actual tenant ownership at a future date. Lynch argued that from a practical standpoint sugar cane lent itself better to large-scale cooperative farming than to small family farms.  

On an earlier occasion, Harmount made an interesting defense of the operation of the Schriever project. The farmers there were not merely clients on another government project; they were, he said, stockholders in a business proposition. What of the charges of radicalism that were sometimes made? "Socialized farming? Communist? Radical?"

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40 Ibid., September 30, 1938. Fifty dollars was the price of one share of stock in Terrebonne Farm, Inc. See Footnote No. 48.
mused Harmount. "I don't like those words. They do not apply here. We are operating a business. Strictly business." In Louisiana and other Southern states, the FSA could also present its cooperative plantation projects like Terrebonne as a continuation of the South's large plantation system. But most FSA personnel in Region Six viewed Terrebonne as a place where inexperienced tenant families could receive practical training in farm and home management.

Community facilities were part of every resettlement project, whether based on individual ownership or cooperative ownership. At Schriever, Harmount converted the old Waubun plantation mansion into a community center containing his office and space for group meetings, social and educational activities; an athletic field was laid out near the building. In addition, the FSA built a school on the project and turned it over to the Terrebonne Parish school board. Local physicians and the parish health unit worked through the association's medical cooperative to provide medical attention and health education for project residents.

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41 *Times-Picayune*, April 9, 1939.
One of the idealistic arguments for Terrebonne was that it would afford farm families a full community life. Living and working together as members of the community, the Terrebonne settlers and their families would derive special benefit from their cooperative effort toward social and economic security—benefit they would miss if it were every man for himself in competition as individual farmers. Such community fellowship would supposedly appeal to young farm families and keep them from drifting into the cities.44 While the FSA encouraged project residents to be "cooperatively minded," most were unable to readjust their values and work together as a team.45 Many settlers were anxious to work their own plots on good days, but ready to work the association's land only on rainy or otherwise bad days.46

While the cooperative system did not suffer from a complete breakdown, it was not the success that Harmount expected. Most Terrebonne farmers were probably still not convinced that community property rather than private ownership was the answer to their problems. "I guess every man would like to own land," one farmer observed. "But it's pretty hard to raise a family and acquire land as a farm worker or tenant.

44*Houma Courier*, September 20, 1938.
45*Item-Tribune*, June 25, 1939.
46F. L. Spencer, farm management supervisor in Region Six and project manager at Mounds, interview with the author, December 2, 1963.
I think this project gives my family more security. I know we'll eat better."47 Like most others, his attitude was based on economic expediency; he stayed because Terrebonne meant steady work, temporary security, and perhaps a chance to save up enough money to buy a farm of his own.

The Farm Security Administration wanted every resettlement project to stand up on its own feet financially and repay the government's investment. Few communities were immediately successful in a business way, however, and the FSA found itself having to carry projects operating in the red. Terrebonne was one of the FSA's most unsuccessful cooperative plantations. In 1940, the project suffered a net loss of $42,684. In 1941, Harmount cut the loss to $16,582—a clear indication of financial improvement. Terrebonne's total income for 1942 was about $15,000 more than in 1941, but it was still $24,700 short of the project budget. Brice M. Mace, Jr., chief of the FSA's Farm Management Division, estimated that Terrebonne could "operate at a profit" by 1944; even then, it would still be a year behind any other cooperative farm project. Mace would not venture a guess as to when Terrebonne would be able to wipe out its deficit. The future of Terrebonne, Mace said, was "highly

47 Item-Tribune, June 25, 1939.
problematic."\textsuperscript{48}

In 1943, C. Stott Noble, assistant Farm Security Administrator in Washington, took charge of liquidating the Schriever project.\textsuperscript{49} He first canceled the Terrebonne Association's ninety-nine year lease by mutual agreement with its membership. Under incessant Congressional prodding, Noble quickly made plans to sell the land. Making use of the fact that Terrebonne was already broken up into individual farms, Noble offered project residents a chance to buy the units they occupied; he was also willing to sell units to eligible farm families who were not Terrebonne residents. By June, 1945, he had sold fifty-two of the fifty-five operating units at an average price of $4,312 each; this included all but 214 acres of the project's land. The FSA recovered $224,200.00 through sales of individual units, while it had invested $300,389.67 to purchase the land and develop the homesteads. In land and development costs, the Terrebonne project closed with a deficit of $59,804.78. In addition, Terrebonne had invested $205,270.25 in community facilities; and after five years its accumulated operating expenses were

\textsuperscript{48}Eaton, Exploring Tomorrow's Agriculture, 163, 154; U. S. Senate, Agricultural Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Hearings on the Agricultural Department Appropriation Bill for 1943, 77th Cong., 2d Sess., 1942, pp. 656-59.

\textsuperscript{49}Senate Agricultural Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Hearings on the Agricultural Department Appropriation Bill for 1946, 79th Cong., 1st Sess., 1945, p. 287.
$47,769.47 more than its income. Since neither amount was recoverable, the total deficit was $307,871.50.\textsuperscript{50}

Terrebonne's losses were due in part to handicaps over which it had little control. At first, Terrebonne was crippled by restrictions on the amount of cane and other crops that could be produced under AAA regulations. Harmount had originally intended to divide his cultivatable land into 700 acres of cane, 1,000 of corn, 100 of potatoes and vegetables, and 640 of pasture land for livestock. But AAA quotas limited Terrebonne to 398 acres of sugar cane, ninety of potatoes, and sixty acres of "truck" garden vegetables—a total of 548, or about nine acres for each of the sixty families living on the project.\textsuperscript{51} The AAA had initially based Terrebonne's sugar cane allotment on the fact that the project was operated as a single plantation; to have the acreage increased, the FSA asked for cane quotas for seventy-two individual family farm units rather than for one large plantation operated by a number of day laborers. As a result, Terrebonne received permission to cultivate a maximum of ten acres of cane per family, thus increasing the entire cane

\textsuperscript{50}House Agricultural Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Hearings on the Agricultural Department Appropriation Bill for 1947, 79th Cong., 2d Sess., 1946, pp. 1393, 1413; see A. D. Stewart, Memo to Frank Hancock, October 27, 1944, R. G. 96, National Archives. The Terrebonne Association discontinued operations as of December 31, 1943. A. D. Stewart, Memo to Frank Hancock, January 14, 1944, ibid.

\textsuperscript{51}Times-Picayune, July 15, 1940.
acreage possibly to 710 acres. The AAA did not revise its allotments for other crops at Terrebonne until wartime needs caused all quota restrictions to be dropped.\(^{52}\) If Terrebonne had been allowed to cultivate half of its arable acreage (about 2,700 acres), as Harmount wished to do, that would still have been only 22.5 acres per family.\(^{53}\)

Harmount offered a steady stream of apologies for Terrebonne's record in his "Annual Financial Reports."

Despite growing losses, he never waivered from his claim that project operations showed consistent improvement.

After Terrebonne was ordered to liquidate, he wrote:

> [In 1939] The Association took over this property, which was then made up of four old run down plantations, [with] poor drainage, insufficient cane, potato or vegetable quotas . . . , and for the last five years, at great sacrifice to themselves, fought their way upward, overcoming handicaps of floods, freezes, droughts, crop diseases, failures and faulty farm planning forced upon them.\(^{54}\)

In 1943, Harmount claimed, the members of the association "felt they were achieving their goals and could see success in the future."\(^{55}\) Claude Woolsey, regional chief of the

\(^{52}\)John J. Riggle, Memorandum for Brice Mace, Jr., April 15, 1940, R. G. 96, National Archives; see E. B. Whitaker to W. W. Alexander, June 24, 1939, ibid.; C. B. Baldwin to Joshua Bernhardt, May 28, 1940, ibid.; T. Roy Reid to W. W. Alexander, April 6, 1940, ibid.; J. O. Walker to T. Roy Reid, May 6, 1940, ibid.

\(^{53}\)Times-Picayune, July 15, 1940.


\(^{55}\)Ibid.
Cooperative Division, believed Harmount was over optimistic. He blamed weak management for Terrebonne's failure to work out its problems.  

During the Depression, the rural resettlement program sought to stabilize tenancy by taking low-income farmers off poor land and helping them get a new start as independent farmers with better land. On all except three projects in Region Six, the Resettlement Administration and the Farm Security Administration stressed the family-size farm of forty to sixty acres, enough land to keep one farmer and his family busy and give them a good living. The home management program encouraged each family to strive for economic self-sufficiency. Most resettlement projects centered around a cooperative association which subleased land to its members in family-size units for individual operation. The Farm Security Administration, in contrast, converted Terrebonne into a collective farm. In making a wide departure from traditional farm practice, Terrebonne illustrates the radical side of the rural resettlement program. Bad weather, faulty planning, and mismanagement doomed Terrebonne to failure, despite the optimism of Harmount and some of the project members. "I think we are going to put it over," said one settler soon after the project opened. "I think everybody  

will get together and work hard and put it across." But everybody would not get together and work hard in a community effort. Most had still not given up hope of owning their own land.

57 *Times-Picayune*, April 9, 1939.
CHAPTER IX

PUBLIC RELATIONS, POLITICS, AND RESETTLEMENT

The New Deal resettlement agencies were anxious to present a favorable image of their activities to the general public. The short-lived Division of Subsistence Homesteads engaged in public relations work to promote its community program, as did the Rural Rehabilitation Division of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. But neither of these agencies seemed more conscious of the power of public opinion or more determined to gain support for its programs than did the Resettlement Administration and its successor, the Farm Security Administration. In fact, public relations probably consumed more of the regional office's time than any other one task outside the immediate supervision of its rehabilitation and resettlement programs. Regional officials probed public opinion, molded it, and occasionally yielded to it, but they were always alert to what people were thinking and saying about resettlement. No public expression of disapproval escaped their notice; when facing opposition, they generally tried to clear up misunderstandings, compromise differences, or at least present the government's side to the public. Nor did the regional office
fail to note any expression of favorable opinion, especially if uttered by some influential citizen or organization and published in a newspaper or periodical. The RA and FSA also sought the support of all political leaders in Region Six—senators, congressmen, governors, state and local officials—but avoided political alliances with any group that would cut them off from rival factions.

The Resettlement Administration did not operate as if it were in a political vacuum, going about nobly uplifting the rural poor and blithly ignoring the realities of power. From the start, Administrator Rexford G. Tugwell consulted with congressional leaders when appointing men to top positions. In 1935, for example, Tugwell wrote President Roosevelt that T. Roy Reid was "a democrat and acceptable to Senator [Joseph T.] Robinson."¹ Before A. D. Stewart took over the regional directorship in 1941, Farm Security Administrator C. B. Baldwin cleared the appointment with Senators Pat Harrison and Theodore G. Bilbo of Stewart's home state.² As majority leader in the Senate and Senator from Arkansas,

¹Rexford G. Tugwell to the President, July 10, 1935, Record Group 96, Records of the Farmers' Home Administration, National Archives (to be cited hereafter as R. G. 96, National Archives).

²C. B. Baldwin to R. W. Hudgens (telegram), February 7, 1941, ibid.
Robinson could presumably have exercised a powerful veto over resettlement activities in his home state if he had wished; but he apparently approved of the RA and FSA's programs, although perhaps reluctantly. After a conference with Robinson in 1936, Reid reported that he held a favorable attitude toward resettlement work; "he seems," Reid wrote, "to be pleased that he helped push the passage of the Bankhead-Jones Bill through the Senate." But the RA and FSA also had the support of other members of the congressional delegations of the three states. In 1936, Senator Harrison wrote Tugwell that he had "followed the Resettlement Administration one hundred percent." Arkansas congressman Wilbur Mills, wrote Baldwin in 1939, "is very much interested in our program, and was to a large extent responsible for the fact that our part of the program did not strike any snags in [the House Banking and Currency Committee]." The same year, A. Leonard Allen, congressman from Louisiana, told a constituent: "I think I have often said that I was as much interested, or perhaps more, in the work this department [FSA] is doing, than any other agency created by the Roosevelt Administration. . . . This is one New Deal Agency that I would like to

3T. Roy Reid to W. W. Alexander, December 23, 1936, ibid.

4Senator Pat Harrison to R. G. Tugwell, July 16, 1936, ibid.

5C. B. Baldwin to T. Roy Reid, August 25, 1939, ibid.
see continued and I have no hesitancy in voting funds for it."6

Reid wanted to build up support among state political leaders, but he met widely different attitudes toward the plight of farm tenants and sharecroppers. In 1936, with the Southern Tenant Farmer's Union nipping at his heels, Governor J. M. Futrell appointed a farm tenancy commission to study tenant problems in the state and to recommend a program of reform. He apparently recognized the seriousness of the South's sharecropping system; "the evils arising from it have become so serious," he said, "that the problem must be met if Arkansas is to have peace among its citizenship and if agriculture is to continue to hold its rightful place as the state's chief resource."7 Futrell hoped other states in the South would set up their own commissions to examine tenant problems. Governor Richard Leche of Louisiana commented that "it never hurts to discuss a situation." Governor Hugh White declared "we have no sharecropping problem in Mississippi that I know anything about."8 Neither Louisiana nor Mississippi ever showed as much official concern for croppers and tenants as did Arkansas. Assuming that Governors


7Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), August 16, 1936.

8Ibid.
Futrell, Leche, and White accurately reflected public opinion in their respective states, one would not be surprised to find Arkansas more receptive to the New Deal resettlement program. Indeed, this may in part explain why the Resettlement Administration started eleven projects in Arkansas, four in Louisiana, and three in Mississippi.

Of all the political problems the RA and FSA had to face in Region Six, perhaps none was more difficult than Senator Huey P. Long and his political machine in Louisiana. Huey Long was a charter member of the FRBC group ("For Roosevelt Before Chicago"), but he broke with Roosevelt during the first Hundred Days. In the summer of 1935, while Long was voicing his determination to control all Federal relief spending in Louisiana, Tugwell established the offices of the Louisiana and Mississippi directors in Little Rock rather than in their own states. It was a blow aimed directly at Long. RA leaders also worried about how to set up a resettlement and rehabilitation organization in Louisiana, an organization that would have to go down into every rural parish in the state with hundreds of Federal jobs to fill.

After touring Louisiana, Robert W. Hudgens and George M. Reynolds, trouble shooters for the Washington office, submitted a report to Tugwell outlining three possible options

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9Arkansas Gazette, July 22, 1935. See ibid., July 20, 1935; and Chapter II.
for organizing the RA in Huey Long's state. First, they said, the Louisiana organization could be made in cooperation with the Long machine, an unthinkable choice since Long opposed New Deal programs at practically every turn. Second, it could be set up in alliance with the anti-Long forces in Louisiana. This was what the Louisiana Emergency Relief Administration had done, reported Hudgens and Reynolds, and it had cost the ERA much in independence and efficiency, besides diverting it from its relief work. The Resettlement Administration should not, they advised, allow itself to be used as part of an anti-Long machine, especially if this would defeat the purpose for which the RA was set up. Third, the RA could form a non-political organization, keeping it independent of any political faction. The latter was the best, most practical course, they argued; this approach was not expected to incur the wrath of the Long machine (Reynolds and Hudgens believed that the most Long hoped for was to neutralize the political effect of Federal spending in Louisiana, not actually control it). But they anticipated opposition from the anti-Long faction since the latter believed the RA's purpose was to help them build up an anti-Long machine. Ironically, the report ended: "to follow the third course and do an excellent piece of work is . . . in the long run the most effective opposition to Senator Long." Long's

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10 Robert W. Hudgens and George M. Reynolds, Memorandum to R. G. Tugwell, July 15, 1935, R. G. 96, National Archives.
death in September relieved the RA of its dilemma. In May, 1936, Reynolds wrote: "The Long faction has made peace in Washington—they evidently are taking the attitude they will vote in accordance with the wishes of FDR on any measure." He further reported that Governor Leche was favorably inclined toward the RA, as was Mrs. Huey P. Long. In 1936, Reid moved the Louisiana director's staff to New Orleans and the Mississippi office to Jackson.

II

The Information Division of the regional office served as Reid's liaison staff between the operating divisions (like Resettlement or Rehabilitation) and the general public. O. E. Jones was the first Information advisor, followed by George Wolf and J. Lewis Henderson; all were professional newspapermen. The Information Advisor became in effect the press secretary for the regional office. The most important service he performed was to establish and maintain cordial relations with the public in Region Six. To do this, he had at his command an organization that included radio, photographic, correspondence, and editorial sections. The Information Division found the best and friendliest medium for conveying information to the public to be daily and


12 See John Fischer, Memorandum for O. A. Simmes, July 19, 1941, ibid.
weekly newspapers. Its staff wrote everything from simple press releases to feature stories for metropolitan Sunday magazine sections, distributing them through a network of 450 newspapers on a regular mailing list. They supplied the public with pamphlets on resettlement in Region Six, worked up exhibits for county and state fairs, and handled arrangements for dedicatory ceremonies at resettlement projects. Where possible, the Division worked through civic clubs, churches, fraternal groups, chambers of commerce, labor unions, farm organizations, schools and colleges. From January to August, 1939, for example, Wolf estimated that local personnel had given 884 luncheon club talks, regional and state personnel 150 talks.

As long as depression hung over the countryside, the resettlement agencies enjoyed their greatest public support in Region Six. In December, 1936, according to a Gallup poll, public opinion in the South strongly favored government help for low-income farmers. Gallup's question was, "Would you favor government loans, on a long-time and easy basis, to enable farm tenants to buy the farms they now rent?" In Arkansas, eighty-nine per cent of those polled answered yes, as did eighty-eight per cent in Mississippi, and eighty-four

13Report of Activities of Information Division from July 1, 1935 to December 31, 1936, ibid.

14John Fischer, Memorandum to all Information Advisors, December 10, 1940, ibid.

15George Wolf to John Fischer, August 16, 1939, ibid.
per cent in Louisiana. But whether these majorities favored the resettlement program specifically is another question. In his first annual report (1936), Reid stressed the good public relations enjoyed between the Resettlement Administration and the general public in Region Six. "The press," he wrote, "has been favorable and generally anxious to carry information about Resettlement." Such local groups as civic clubs, farmers organizations, and home demonstration councils were giving their support. "There have been no opposing organizations, and the public, generally, seems to be very favorable to the work which Resettlement is doing. There is, occasionally," he admitted, "criticism of procedures or of delays in activities, but the general objectives of the work seems to be meeting with strong public favor." Almost a year later, John Fischer, national information director, reported: "Newspapers continue to be extremely friendly both to work undertaken by RA and the new work of FSA. The opening of projects in Arkansas and the completed projects in Mississippi received wide and laudatory comment." Not all favorable comments went as far as that

16Birmingham News (Alabama), December 13, 1936; Arkansas Gazette, December 12, 1936.

17Annual Report, Resettlement Administration, Region VI, As of December 31, 1936, R. G. 96, National Archives.

of a farm wife in West Carroll Parish, Louisiana, who told a home demonstration supervisor: "The RA was thought of by God Himself." 19

Occasionally, regional officials had to deal with situations that might have caused an unfavorable influence on public opinion. Reid wanted to make sure good news got spread around, but he was equally determined to keep the lid on bad news. On June 9, 1939, the Lake Providence, Louisiana, Banner Democrat carried a brief story on the front page of an automobile accident near Tallulah in which two men and a girl were killed and another girl was hurt. No names and few details were given. George Wolf, regional information advisor, had persuaded the Banner editor to make no mention of the fact that the two men were FSA personnel assigned to the nearby Transylvania project--plus the fact that they were both drunk at the time of the accident. "We have had so much trouble down there," Wolf wrote, "I was afraid the crowning touch would be the project getting the reputation of hiring a bunch of drunks." 20 His attempt to cover up the facts almost worked, as it doubtless did in other cases, but the Banner editor apparently forgot to tell the society page editor about his agreement with the FSA. There it was, printed on an inside page of the same issue, the story Wolf

19Martha D. Dinwiddle to R. G. Tugwell, July 23, 1936, ibid.

20George Wolf to Jack [John Fischer], June 27, 1939, ibid.
wanted suppressed, and written with a strong dose of moral disapproval. This version of the accident told what the men did for a living, their names, Leroy Haggerty and J. G. Enright, but not the names of the girls (they were from upstanding local families presumably), and called attention to the fact that both men were forty years of age, the girls twenty or less, and that one man was married. The accident took place, the society editor further revealed, at four o'clock in the morning after the couples had just left the "Cat Head" club at Tallulah. The men "had no less than ten drinks each," but the girls, she assured the readers, had not been drinking at all.

One of the most dangerous public relation problems in Region Six was race. "At the risk of its political life," writes William E. Leuchtenburg, "the FSA was scrupulously fair in its treatment of Negroes."21 The Division of Subsistence Homesteads had plans for a Negro project at Camden, Arkansas;22 but it was the Resettlement Administration that built the first community projects for Negroes in Region Six: the Lakeview community in Phillips County, Arkansas; the Townes project near Earle in Crittenden County; and the Mounds community in East Carroll Parish, Louisiana. For a


22See Glenn E. Riddell to Bruce L. Melvin, March 1, 1934, March 4, 1934, R. G. 96, National Archives.
time, the FSA supervised farm operations at Mound Bayou, Mississippi, an all-Negro rural community of long standing. In addition, Negroes became members of predominantly white projects throughout the region. By 1941, the FSA had developed 791 units for Negro farmers in the Region Six resettlement program, or about thirty-two per cent of the total units.23

The Farm Security Administration's policy of fair treatment for Negroes meant public relations trouble—trouble from blacks as well as whites, with the regional office caught in the middle. Some Negroes were quick to protest what they believed to be racial discrimination in the resettlement program. Region Six officials, for example, ran into Negro protests over its handling of the Transylvania project in East Carroll Parish, Louisiana. When the RA made the Transylvania purchase, about 250 Negro families were farming the land under private ownership. But the FSA developed Transylvania as a white project, meaning that all 250 Negro families moved off and white families took their places. The American Negro Press, a wire service for such papers as the Pittsburgh Courier, the Kansas City Call, and the Louisiana Weekly (New Orleans), challenged this action on the ground

23U. S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Security Administration, "Resettlement Projects, Land and Source of Acquisition, Also Status of Unit Development, Vendor, Acre- ate and Number of Units Developed or Undeveloped, Region Six," January 1, 1941, mimeographed, ibid.
of racial discrimination. In response, Region Six officials appeared anxious to keep the confidence of the Negro press. In early February, 1939, E. B. Whitaker (assistant regional director), E. C. McInnis (Louisiana director), and O. E. Jones (regional information advisor), and others spent two hours in New Orleans with Leon Lewis, Pittsburgh Courier reporter. Specifically, Whitaker and McInnis presented a plan to ensure fair treatment for Negro farmers. The Mounds project, Lewis learned, would take care of qualified Negro families displaced at Transylvania. Lewis "was not only satisfied—he was enthusiastic," according to Jones' report of the meeting; his personal investigation convinced him that his race "was, if anything, getting the best of the bargain there." In reality, Lewis was still skeptical. There was no discrimination in the incident, he reported to his paper. "The same thing that is being done to Negroes is being done to whites, and they are complaining as much." The Information Division afterward made a conscious effort to keep the ANP informed of progress at Mounds. When the


25 O. E. Jones to Nathan Robertson, February 8, 1939, ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Leon Lewis to Claude Barnett, February 4, 1939, ibid.
construction contract was awarded, Jones wired them full details of building plans. As a result, the ANP let up on its criticism.28

At the same time, the Farm Security Administration was sensitive to the danger of alienating whites in the region. Regional officials always sought the support of the white majority before going ahead with proposals for Negro resettlement. On the Louisiana Farm Tenant Security project, for example, community manager Lee O. Sumrall not only sounded out local opinion on plans for resettling Negroes on some of the units, but asked reputable citizens and landowners to write letters expressing their approval of the idea.29 This request was standard procedure; without their support, no Negroes would have been placed on the project. Despite all precautions, however, white racism was a problem in Region Six. Concerning Negro participation in FSA programs, a Mississippi woman wrote: "I know that the aim of this Administration is to force racial equality on us here in the South, and the farm program is the biggest weapon they have. Government lending without security and wastefulness in general," she said, "is killing what little thrift and

28Division of Information, Farm Security Administration, to Associated Negro Press (telegram), February 7, 1939, ibid.

initiative our Negroes had to start with."⁴⁰

Perhaps more important, the FSA in Region Six en­
countered the race issue in its personnel policies. Negroes
were employed at lower levels of the regional organization. Most Negro employees were women serving as home management
supervisors on Negro projects, with a few in charge of home
management work for an entire project. A few Negro men
worked as farm management advisors and as field representa-
tives in the rural rehabilitation or tenant purchase pro-
grams.⁴¹ In 1939, the FSA had eleven Negro workers in
Arkansas, seven in Louisiana, and fourteen in Mississippi.⁴²
Despite this meager number, a group of Adams County, Missis-
sippi, citizens decided in October that the FSA had gone too
far. They drew up a resolution protesting the employment of
a Negro in the FSA office at Natchez.⁴³ (He was serving as
assistant rural rehabilitation supervisor for Adams County.)
They called attention to the fact that the FSA office was in
the courthouse, that "young white ladies" were employed in
the office and came into contact with the Negro employee.

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⁴⁰Ruby Pugh (Mrs. J. J. Pugh) to George Mitchell, September 9, 1941, ibid.
⁴¹William F. Littlejohn, Memorandum for George S. Mitchell, November 14, 1940, ibid.
⁴²See T. Roy Reid to W. W. Alexander, April 26, 1940, ibid.; Roy Héndrickson, Memorandum for George Mitchell, May 24, 1940, ibid.
⁴³Dan R. McGehee to C. B. Baldwin, October 31, 1938, ibid.
Senator Theodore G. Bilbo also strongly protested this "outrage." "You," he wrote Mississippi director M. T. Aldrich, "as a good Mississippian, should clean out this situation at once." "Mississippi is still a white man's country," he said, "and we do not want Negroes bumping up against our white girls in the official life of the state."  

The FSA quickly yielded to prejudice. There were 133 Negro clients in Adams County, Reid explained; "it is necessary for someone to contact them and go into homes and work intimately with them in the home and farm planning operations." The Negro employee "does not have an office with white people . . . ," Reid added. "It is not the desire of this office to place a Negro worker where it is objectionable to the people."  

FSA Assistant Administrator Milo Perkins thought the FSA had acted in accordance with a "well established principle throughout the South"—that of letting Negroes work with Negroes. In addition, Perkins noted, the Adams County assistant supervisor "was to operate entirely under the immediate supervision of the white rural rehabilitation supervisor and was to spend all his time in the field. Consequently, he would have had no occasion to enter into office relationships with the other employees of the county.

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34 Theodore G. Bilbo to M. T. Aldrich, October 29, 1938, ibid.

35 T. Roy Reid to Theodore G. Bilbo, November 4, 1938, ibid.
The unfortunate man was transferred out of Adams County, presumably to a more congenial location. Later, regional director A. D. Stewart expressed a desire "to employ Negro personnel when it can be done without creating a situation that would injure rather than improve the advancement of the colored people." In truth, the FSA had all the problems it could handle without getting involved with a crusade for racial justice.

III

From the beginning, the Resettlement Administration encountered skeptics and critics in Region Six. Free-lance writer Oren Stephens once told the story of a sociologist visiting Pine Bluff, Arkansas. He stopped a native Pine Bluffian on a street corner and asked him what he thought of the Farm Security Administration. "Well, it's this way," said the native:

The government spends a million dollars or so to buy a forty-acre farm for a down-and-out sharecropper. They give him a mule, a bathtub, and an electric shoelacer. They lay a railroad track to his house to carry the tons of forms he has to fill in. A bunch of experts figure his milking I.Q. Lo and behold, they teach his wife how to hook rugs and can beef and spinach, and they show the feller how to plant soybeans and prune an orchard—and by darn, Luke, them government people can actually do it! After we poke fun at

36 Milo Perkins to Pat Harrison, November 18, 1938, ibid.

37 A. D. Stewart to C. B. Baldwin, December 10, 1941, ibid.
their red tape for a year or two, they ups and proves their experiment is self-liquidatin'—
that the feller is makin' his payments and raisin' a family, too. And I don't know who's more surprised, me or the 'cropper.38

The native correctly stated the pro and con arguments over the resettlement (cost, frills, red tape), but not all critics were so open-minded. When Lakeview, a Negro project in Phillips County, Arkansas, was announced, the Helena World was openly skeptical: "We want to see how many families will succeed in becoming independent when the means to do so come handed out on a platter from a bountiful government."39 In 1937, an El Dorado, Arkansas, man complained that government assistance to low-income farmers was an unfair advantage to hard-working citizens, presumably like himself. "I believe we have too many farmers already . . . ," he told Secretary of Agriculture Wallace. "You or our National Government want to buy land and place more farmers to farm against each other." "The old pioneer citizen and taxpayer of the country [is] trying to live, and pulling himself up by his boot straps, while his neighbor [is] supported by the Government."40 Two years later, several members (not a majority) of the Arkansas General Assembly signed a statement protesting


39Helena World (Arkansas), November 11, 1935.

the FSA's policy of operating farms in "direct competition with private farmers." Much of the early criticism was sporadic, unorganized, and without any real consequence; but by the late thirties, FSA policies had antagonized certain interest groups, and opposition increased.

In a 1939 meeting at Biloxi, the Mississippi Bankers Association passed a resolution condemning FSA credit policies. The bankers' association was critical of government lending agencies for making loans in competition with private bankers. The FSA responded by sounding out the extent and nature of opposition among Mississippi bankers and by attempting to clear up any misunderstanding about FSA programs. Mississippi state director Marvin T. Aldrich contacted several bankers; and with some, he ran up against solid opposition. Frank Allen of Canton, one of the leaders behind the resolution, "was not in favor of any of the New Deal governmental agencies," an FSA official reported. "In his opinion the Farm Security Administration was not making any loans that the bank [sic] cared to make but [it] interfered with the banks' loans to the landlords, who were to furnish the tenants." But Aldrich found the banking community


42 T. Roy Reid to W. W. Alexander, May 18, 1939, R. G. 96, National Archives.

43 Sidney J. Johnson to Marvin T. Aldrich, June 17, 1939, ibid.
badly split over the resolution, with some of its members anxious to make excuses for their association. A. L. Rogers, president of the bankers' association, had not been behind the move to name the FSA specifically in the resolution. The bankers, Rogers told Aldrich, had directed their resolution primarily at such agencies as the Home Owners Loan Corporation, the Federal Housing Administration, the Farm Credit Administration, and the Farm Labor Board. They had included the FSA because of the fear on the part of some bankers that it might later encroach on the loaning functions of private bankers, not because of any of its current activities.44

Information advisor George Wolf also found that the resolution did not represent the feelings of rural bankers in Mississippi; he reported "a sharp division--the city bankers voting for the resolution and the country and small-town bankers voting against it."45 R. L. Goodwin, vice-president of the Farmers and Merchants Bank of Forest, wrote that the FSA in his county handled a large volume of loan and long-term credit "which was not available for any local bank."

"You have helped a great many farmers who could not have received this kind of help from any other source," he wrote Alexander. "I consider the Farm Security Administration the

44M. T. Aldrich to T. Roy Reid, May 31, 1939, ibid.; Reid to W. W. Alexander, June 7, 1939, ibid.

45George Wolf to John Fischer, May 27, 1939, ibid.
finest New Deal project established by President Roosevelt."46 With opinion divided, the FSA could count on support from at least some Mississippi bankers for its credit programs.

In 1942, the Farm Security Administration became involved in a different kind of controversy at Transylvania. On February 11, the Police Jury of East Carroll Parish, Louisiana, issued a statement sharply critical of the FSA as a whole and the Transylvania project in particular. With the nation at war, every unnecessary expenditure must be curtailed, they asserted, but the FSA was spending money at Transylvania that would never be returned to the government. Under FSA management, moreover, Transylvania's cotton yield per acre had dropped far below what the same land had produced under private ownership, and the land had suffered a reduction in its cotton acreage allotment simply because the land was not kept in cultivation. They backed this charge with a display of research done at the local AAA office. If Transylvania was operated so inefficiently, they asked, how could the government's investment be repaid? The Police Jury was even more disturbed over the fear, based on newspaper reports of congressional hearings on the FSA, that Administrator Baldwin "might favor" the exercise of eminent domain or of expropriation against absentee owners in order to break up large southern land holdings." "We are also advised," the

46R. L. Goodwin to Will W. Alexander, May 12, 1939, ibid.
statement read, "that they . . . plan to dispossess absentee owners of their holdings that they consider large enough to use for F. S. A. projects." This plan was "State Socialism," they asserted.47

The FSA faced the charges head-on, did some research of its own, the prepared a defense of Transylvania's operations. Regional resettlement director E. B. Whitaker went to Lake Providence and found that the statement was not an official statement of the Police Jury, although it did reflect the thinking of some of its members. "It was drawn up by several landowners," regional director Stewart reported to Baldwin, "and circulated over the state in such a manner as to make it appear as though it were a statement from the Police Jury."48 Transylvania's Board of Directors answered the charges in the Lake Providence Banner Democrat.49 True, cotton production was down at Transylvania. Under private ownership, about 250 Negro families had occupied the Transylvania land, each farming about twenty-three acres devoted exclusively to cotton. But the FSA reduced the number of


48 A. D. Stewart to C. B. Baldwin, May 6, 1942, ibid.

49 Lake Providence Banner Democrat, March 20, 1942.
families to about 150, gave each family about fifty acres, and developed a diversified farm management program. Rather than have the settlers entirely dependent on a single cash crop, the board of directors explained, Transylvania stressed food and feed crops, pasture, garden vegetables, poultry, milk cows, cattle, and hogs. Transylvania settlers produced cotton as their major cash crop, but they had a higher standard of living and more security regardless of the price of cotton. ⁵⁰

At least two local citizens, a landowner and a Police Jury member, supported the FSA's explanation. Norris C. Williamson, whose property was next to Transylvania, saw part of the project almost every day, he said, and the FSA was doing a good job operating the land. ⁵¹ But since many of the settlers were used to the light sandy soil of the Louisiana hills, they had to learn how to farm the richer delta soil and how to combat the obnoxious grasses of that area. In addition, the project had suffered from heavy rains during recent planting seasons; but despite its disadvantages, he pointed out, Transylvania's cotton yield per acre came up to about the parish average every year with one

⁵⁰See also R. W. Hudgens, Memorandum to EmergyE. Jacobs, September 4, 1942, R. G. 96, National Archives; A. D. Stewart to C. B. Baldwin, November 7, 1942, ibid.

⁵¹Norris C. Williamson to E. B. Whitaker, February 15, 1942, ibid.
exception. F. W. Holt, a member of the Police Jury of East Carroll Parish who was convalescing from an accident when the statement was issued, wrote that he "did not agree with his colleagues on the Police Jury or [with] those sponsoring these charges of communism, socialism, or any other kind of ism. . . ." Transylvania settlers operated cooperatives for their mutual benefit; but socialism, he contended, was a bogus issue since each farmer worked his own land and was striving toward individual farm ownership. 52

IV

The New Deal resettlement agencies ran into their most serious opposition, both political and ideological, from farm organizations in Region Six. All major organized farm groups operated in one or more of the three states. 53 In Arkansas, the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, Farm Bureau, and Farmers Union were active, as was the National Grange to a lesser degree. Louisiana farmers had to choose either the Farm Bureau or the Farmers Union, while Mississippians had only the Farm Bureau. Since both the STFU and the Farmers Union were dealing with basically the same class of people, they reached an agreement in 1941: neither would set up an organization in territory where the other was already

52 F. W. Holt to H. B. Staples, March 10, 1942, ibid.
53 T. Roy Reid to W. W. Alexander, May 7, 1940, ibid.
organized. For Region Six, this meant that the STFU would continue unchallenged in most of eastern Arkansas but left the rest of the state and all of Louisiana to the Farmers Union. Since the STFU tended to expand toward the newer cotton regions of the southwest rather than to the older lands of the east, the union never attempted to organize in Mississippi. The Farmers Union limited its efforts to Arkansas and Louisiana. Thus the Farm Bureau was the only farm organization which functioned in all three states of Region Six.

Regional officials tried to work with all national farm groups operating in the three states. They encouraged membership in farm organizations without becoming active partisans for any one group. Nor did they attempt to hinder the development of any organization. Many resettlement projects had their own "farm bureaus," and STFU membership was not uncommon among resettlement clients in eastern Arkansas. In 1940, for example, the STFU set up a local at Dyess. The FSA firmly refused to recognize it as a bargaining agent but allowed the union members themselves to remain

54H. L. Mitchell to James G. Patton, September 11, 1941, ibid., see also H. L. Mitchell to George S. Mitchell, September 2, 1941, ibid.


56T. Roy Reid to C. B. Baldwin, October 25, 1940, R. G. 96, National Archives.
No further attempts were made to unionize resettlement projects in the region. Yet a policy of neutrality did not guarantee the cooperation of all farm groups. In Region Six, opposition from farm groups came from both sides of the political spectrum, the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union on the left and the Farm Bureau on the right.

The newest farm organization in the region, the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, originated in protest against AAA policies which favored landlords over tenants and sharecroppers. The STFU sought to awaken the nation's conscience to the evils of the Southern farm tenancy system through strikes, marches, and protest demonstrations. As a result, union leaders interpreted the appointment of the President's Special Committee on Farm Tenancy and the Arkansas Farm Tenancy Commission as union victories; more important, they claimed credit for New Deal programs which assisted low-income farmers.

In 1941, STFU secretary and former president H. L. Mitchell told a Congressional committee: "That a government program to aid tenant farmers, sharecroppers and other low income farmers was initiated is due in part to the work of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union . . .

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57 W. W. Alexander to T. Roy Reid, March 4, 1940, ibid.; see E. B. Whitaker to H. E. Trulock, April 4, 1940, ibid.


59 Mitchell, Columbia Oral History interview.
succeeded in making America conscious of its most pressing problems."60

But from the start, STFU leaders found themselves in disagreement with the New Deal's basic approach to farm tenancy. When the President's Committee on Farm Tenancy recommended privately owned family farms as the best means for eliminating tenancy, the union's representative on the committee, W. L. Blackstone, dissented in a minority report. A program to encourage small homesteads, he said, was "an economic anachronism, foredoomed to failure."61 Instead, he urged the establishment of cooperative farm projects; no doubt Blackstone had in mind Delta and Providence Farms, two private resettlement projects being operated by Sherwood Eddy in Bolivar and Holmes counties, Mississippi.62 For the same reason, STFU was cold to the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant bill. Although gratified that farm tenancy was receiving some attention from the Federal government, the union charged in 1935 that the bill pointed backward and not forward. "It was really thought of 70 years ago when men were talking of 'Forty acres and a mule.'" The Bankhead-Jones bill would

60 Statement of H. L. Mitchell to the Committee Investigating the Farm Security Administration, dated May 26, 1943, R. G. 96, National Archives.

61 National Resources Board, Farm Tenancy: Report of the President's Committee (Washington, 1937), 22.

possibly, union leaders feared, lead to "a subsidized peasantry in America." While mentioning cooperative farming, the bill did "not lay sufficient stress upon this type of farming which many far seeing Americans regard as the only practical solution to our rural problems." "Through cooperative farming," they asserted, "a new and altogether high type of rural life may be developed in the South. By drawing groups of farmers together into a co-operative community they may have at their disposal all of the resources of modern civilization."^3

In reality, however, STFU leaders thought the New Deal was good as far as it went; the problem was that it did not go far enough. The union was not opposed to a policy favoring small farms, Mitchell later claimed, but he questioned whether many tenants and croppers were qualified for small farm ownership, since they had always been accustomed to supervision.64 To Mitchell, the ideal solution would have been for a group of farmers to rent a plantation, divide half of the proceeds from the sale of the crops among the tenant families, and, since the other half did not have to go to a private owner, put it into a pool to pay the rent,

^3 A Statement Concerning Farm Tenancy Submitted to the Governor's Commission on Farm Tenancy by the Executive Council, Southern Tenant Farmers' Union [c. 1936], Socialist Party of America Papers, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

^4 Mitchell, Columbia Oral History interview.
buy needed farm equipment and supplies, and eventually purchase the plantation outright. The tenants themselves would select a manager to supervise farm operations. "We wanted . . . a village economy where the workers lived in a village and worked out on the farms with a certain small acreage of land where each man could have his own garden and raise his own food," Mitchell explained. "We visualized something similar to what they have in Europe where the workers all live in one central village." 65

In addition to ideological differences, the STFU was critical of the local administration of the resettlement and rural rehabilitation programs. In a 1936 statement, union leaders complained that the Resettlement Administration's decentralized organization kept it from fulfilling its obligations. Too much authority had been given to local and state committees, committees that helped decide who received loans and other assistance. "If the Resettlement Administration is to adequately serve the people who need its services, political and anti-social officials should be removed and replaced by men who have a broad knowledge of the problems involved and sympathy and interest in the people." 66 In Arkansas, the Southern Farm Leader charged, STFU members had been thrown off RA programs after they protested graft.

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65 Ibid.

66 A Statement Concerning Farm Tenancy Submitted to the Governor's Commission on Farm Tenancy.
According to the STFU paper, the Resettlement Administration had made loans in Louisiana

... to people who do not need them and denied them to needy croppers and tenants. Croppers and tenants who do get loans are told what and where to buy and very seldom see the cash. Not one Resettlement farmer we know of has a copy of the Resettlement contract. The field agents act as complete dictators.67

In 1940, the union's sixth annual convention adopted a series of resolutions which summed up their criticisms of the resettlement agencies. The FDA's "greatest drawback," the delegates said, was "faulty local administration." The convention went on record recommending (1) that "dirt farmers" be put on local administering committees; (2) that Congress appropriate larger sums of money to make the program more effective; (3) that more large cooperative projects be set up; (4) that special projects be set up to care for migrant farm workers in Southern cotton regions; (5) that the FSA be created as a permanent agency independent of the Department of Agriculture. The Farm Security Administration, they were saying, was not doing enough, was doing some things wrong, and could do everything better.68

In 1940, the STFU and the FSA began to move closer together, and before long they found much common ground.


Charles M. Measles, Labor Relations director for Region Six, sought to improve relations between the two organizations by taking part in the STFU's 1940 annual convention. Speaking to the delegates, Measles expressed pleasure that the STFU favored larger appropriations for resettlement work and promised the union sympathy and cooperation from his office. "I believe that you are fighting for the same things we are," he told the delegates, "and I pledge you our full cooperation. All we need is more money and a chance to help."  

In a question and answer session, some delegates still showed suspicion, but Measles was not easily ruffled. What should we do when local officials of the FSA fail to cooperate? someone asked him. Surprisingly, Measles admitted that some project managers and other officials should be changed.  

During the coming months, STFU-FSA relations continued to improve. Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard, in a memorandum dated March 21, 1941, stated that the STFU was a "group to be considered as a worthy effort to improve the position of low income farm people and one . . . which it would be entirely proper for your field people to have a cordial relationship with." About the same time, Reid wrote that the FSA was already doing everything the STFU was

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69Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Quoted in C. B. Baldwin to Ernest S. Morgan, July 2, 1941, Box 36, Folder 662, Southern Tenant Farmers' Union Papers, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
currently proposing. Perhaps projects like Terrebonne and Lake Dick were concessions in part to STFU demands for experimentation with cooperative farming. But Reid's statement was made possible because the union itself seemed to be moderating its demands somewhat. In their eighth annual convention (1942), the union delegates passed a resolution "that the STFU seek to preserve the family type farm a way of life, to help provide cooperative services for purchasing goods, marketing and preserving farm products, and to fully support all programs designed to reestablish farm people on the land." What brought the STFU and Region Six officials even closer together, however, was the Farm Bureau's campaign against the FSA.

V.

The Farm Bureau was just as devoted as the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union to promoting the interests of farmers—but not the same farmers. While some critics have charged that the Farm Bureau did not represent farmers at all, its

72 T. Roy Reid, Memorandum to C. B. Baldwin, October 4, 1941, R. G. 96, National Archives.

73 H. L. Mitchell to C. B. Baldwin, January 16, 1942, ibid.

74 See, for example, "Farm Bureau Advocates Abolition of Tenant Program," Tenant Farmer, I (July 15, 1941), 1; Leonard G. Herron, "How Farm Security Administration Is Helping Tenant Farmers, Sharecroppers, Farm Laborers," Tenant Farmer, I (August 15, 1941), 2.
membership consisted mainly of large-scale, commercial farmers, the kind of farmers who would benefit most by the Bureau's concern with commodity prices and its unconcern with rural welfare programs. In the 1930's, the American Farm Bureau Federation was a powerful conservative farm organization. After the Depression struck, Farm Bureau leaders were quick to define agricultural problems in terms of national responsibility and to look to Washington for action. "Unless something is done for the American farmer," warned AFBF president Edward A. O'Neal in January, 1933, "we will have a revolution in the country-side in twelve months."

Not surprisingly, the Farm Bureau rode an inside track in the early New Deal. Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace consulted with all farm organizations during the Hundred Days, but the Farm Bureau played a crucial role in early New Deal agricultural policy by uniting farmers in both the Midwest and the South behind the Agricultural Adjustment Act. While Farm Bureau leaders deserved little credit for helping to formulate agricultural policy, the AAA did favor the interests of landlords and large farmers, which exactly fit the Farm Bureau idea of whose interests national


76 Senate Agricultural and Forestry Committee, Hearings on the Agricultural Adjustment Relief Plan, 72th Cong., 2d Sess., 1933, p. 15.
farm policy should favor. But as the New Deal began respond­ing to the needs of farm tenants and small farm owners, the Farm Bureau found less and less to be happy about. When President Roosevelt created the Resettlement Administration in 1935, Farm Bureau leaders at first adopted an indifferent attitude; they were equally unenthusiastic about the Bankhead-Jones bill of 1937. They offered neither active opposition, nor active support. In Region Six, all farm organizations, Reid wrote in 1940, had given support to the Farm Security Administration. "The Farm Bureau has probably been less active in its support of the activities of the Administration than any of the other organizations." Within a matter of weeks, the Farm Bureau launched a vicious attack against the Farm Security Administration on both the national and local level.

The Farm Bureau-Farm Security Administration conflict was only part of a larger power struggle between the Farm Bureau and the United States Department of Agriculture. Essentially, the Department of Agriculture wanted to free itself of dependence on the Extension Service for the local administration of its action programs and to rely on an independent, centralized system of administration. In other


78T. Roy Reid to W. W. Alexander, May 7, 1940, R. G. 96, National Archives.
words, agencies like the Farm Security Administration and the Soil Conservation Service could take federal action programs directly to individual farmers, short-circuiting all intermediaries. The Farm Bureau, on the other hand, fought to have the Extension Service administer practically everything. O'Neal, for example, favored giving the FSA's farm and home management programs to the Extension Service and turning over its loan activities to the more cautious Farm Credit Administration. The Farm Bureau eventually mounted a sweeping attack on all FSA programs and the way they were being handled; but O'Neal concentrated his heaviest fire on the resettlement program, the FSA's most vulnerable spot. In reality, the Farm Security Administration's greatest crime was being outside the Farm Bureau's sphere of influence. Since Farm Bureau leaders could not control the FSA, they determined to kill it.79

The role of the Agricultural Extension Service and the land grant colleges of Region Six injected an element of irony into the Farm Bureau-Farm Security Administration fight, an irony that was not lost on contemporaries. Watching the conflict develop, O. E. Jones, editor of the Batesville (Arkansas) Daily Guard and formerly regional Information Advisor, could not hold back his dismay. The Arkansas

79Campbell, The Farm Bureau and the New Deal, 156-178; J. C. Futrall to Raymond A. Pearson, April 2, 1938, R. G. 96, National Archives.
Extension Service, he noted, was dominated by the American Farm Bureau Federation; Extension agents in Arkansas were actively soliciting Farm Bureau memberships "to swell the coffers of a private lobbying organization." "The Farm Bureau, on the one hand, is waging a fight to the death in an effort to kill the Farm Security Administration, a branch of the Department of Agriculture, with a campaign of vilification and misrepresentation; and the Extension Service, a branch of the Department of Agriculture, is actively engaged at the same time in trying to build the agency [the Farm Bureau] that is slashing a dagger at the back of its sister agency." "I am loath," Jones added, "to sit idly by and see the Farm Bureau blitzkrieg the Farm Security Administration out of existence." In Region Six, perhaps the groundwork for this conflict had been prepared in the early days of the Resettlement Administration.

Since many RA programs overlapped agricultural extension and home demonstration work, Reid sought the cooperation of the region's Extension Services and land grant colleges, which operated the Extension programs. At first, there was a natural alliance between the Resettlement Administration and the region's farm leaders—an alliance that was

80 O. E. Jones to M. L. Wilson, March 26, 1942, ibid.
81 Raymond A. Pearson to Dan T. Gray, April 1, 1936, ibid.
especially close in Arkansas. In 1935 and 1936, the regional office was largely staffed with men on leave from the College of Agriculture at the University of Arkansas or from the state's Extension Service. Reid himself had served twelve years as assistant director of the Extension Service in Arkansas. Indeed, a large proportion of personnel at every level had some connection with either Fayetteville or Extension work, or both; many project managers, for example, were former county agents with agricultural-college degrees. To bring the region's agricultural leadership into general policy planning, Reid in early 1936 set up three state land committees whose memberships included (among others) the dean of the college of agriculture and director of extension in each state.82 The committee's function was to approve resettlement areas and make general recommendations in regard to the resettlement program, but it was also a way of securing the endorsement of agricultural leaders on resettlement projects. As regional director, Reid no doubt hoped to make use of his ties with the Extension Service, but he ran into trouble where he probably least expected it—in Arkansas.

The Resettlement Administration got off to a bad start with Dan T. Gray, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Director of the Extension Service, when it established the regional headquarters at Little Rock rather than at

Fayetteville. In the spring of 1936, still feeling resentful and suspicious, Gray complained that "RA authorities never did consult with authorities of the College of Agriculture before their policies were announced. . . ." "The RA," he continued, "has simply announced what is to be done in Arkansas and then come around in a very friendly way and asked cooperation of those associated with the College of Agriculture." "The two organizations--ours and theirs--are, as a matter of fact, just moving along side by side, without any serious attempt at fundamental cooperation."83

Specifically, Gray disagreed with the RA's selection of resettlement areas. Concentrate the resettlement program in the hill country of northern Arkansas, he advised, thin out farmers on poor lands, increase the size of farms, and stress livestock production. Disagreeing, Reid argued that northern Arkansas was too thickly settled, good farm land was scarce and high priced, and much of the land was submarginal. He favored buying up submarginal land, moving people off (not keeping them on it), and resettling them on alluvial land in the river bottoms.84 "I do not think that he is critical of our particular purchases," Reid wrote of Gray, "but that he is critical of the fact that we are attempting to resettle farmers on family-size farms rather

83Dan T. Gray to Raymond A. Pearson, April 20, 1936, ibid.
84T. Roy Reid to W. W. Alexander, May 15, 1937, ibid.
than on larger commercial farms." But in 1937 and 1938, the College of Agriculture became perhaps more unsympathetic with resettlement activities, feeling that the program in Arkansas was being carried on with a "lack of capable planning and failure to utilize proven knowledge and experience." They naturally felt they could provide the proper advice.

The Farm Bureau began its attack against the FSA in 1940. After publishing an article critical of the Lake Dick project, the Memphis Commercial Appeal received a large number of letters from Arkansas and Mississippi citizens requesting that its reporters make surveys of other projects and FSA programs in certain counties. Regional director A. D. Stewart watched and waited; then in early 1941, he summed up what was happening in his region:

I am afraid that these letters and requested studies are inspired by "a certain organized" group that is using this method of attack to offset an inspired public confidence in connection with the Farm Security Administration program in its extension of help to low-income families. The most dangerous attack that could be made would be to have presumably disinterested citizens pick the weak spots in our program and magnify them. We shall then watch every step taken in this direction carefully and prepare to meet the situation when it arises.

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86C. D. Kinsman to M. L. Wilson, July 20, 1937, ibid.

87Commercial Appeal (Memphis, Tennessee), July 5, 1940.

88A. D. Stewart, Quarterly Report, January-March, 1941, R. G. 96, National Archives.
Soon the Farm Bureau launched a barrage of criticism in newspapers, through the mail, and in special meetings. By early 1942, Stewart wrote that the Farm Bureau attack had become his "foremost" problem. Farm Bureau opposition, as Stewart saw it, came principally from state Farm Bureau officials, with very little criticism from county officials. He reported receiving resolutions and letters from Farm Bureau members in many counties indicating that they did not concur in the FSA fight. "It is quite evident," he wrote, "that state farm bureau [sic] leaders did not consult county bureau units before launching the attack on our program. There is abundant evidence to show that farm bureau ranks have broken at many points and that there is clearly much resentment among bureau members over the position some of their leaders have taken." But in this struggle, the FSA could take little comfort in the knowledge that its opposition was divided.

The Farm Bureau conducted its campaign against the FSA on more than one level. In the newspapers of the region, the Farm Bureau's most common charges were excessive administrative costs, misuse of funds, and poor management. Perhaps a typical exchange took place in Jackson, Mississippi, papers in 1942. On March 26, Mississippi director Dallas C.

89 A. D. Stewart, Quarterly Report, January-March, 1942, ibid.

90 Ibid.
Vandevere reported that 25,397 families in the state with FSA loans had increased their net income from $328 before becoming clients to $571 at the end of 1941—an increase of seventy-four per cent. During the same period, they raised their net worth (all assets from furniture and clothes to farm equipment) from $443 to $567. Vandevere's report drew immediate fire from the Farm Bureau. His figures were accurate, a Farm Bureau news release admitted, but misleading. The net income increase for FSA families was indeed seventy-four per cent, but all farm income in Mississippi had increased eighty per cent during the same period. "Being an FSA client kept 25,000 farmers from getting 6% additional increase in farm income," the Farm Bureau charged. Vandevere's claim of a gain in new worth was equally misleading, since the FSA had made an average loan of $942 to each client; "it took $942 of FSA money to increase the net worth of clients by $124." For good measure, the Farm Bureau also criticized the high number of employees in Mississippi, excessive administrative costs, the misuse of grants, collective farming projects, and government policies to acquire "as much land as possible."

It was Vandevere's turn again, and he replied promptly. The Mississippi Farm Bureau was out "to discredit the work being done by low income farmers under FSA guidance."

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91 *Jackson Daily News*, March 26, 1942.

Vandevere said. "Like all of the accusations made by the Farm Bureau, the recent outburst is another exhibition of statistical gymnastics and comparison of unrelated facts and figures." When discussing income, he contended, the FSA referred to net increases in income, while the Farm Bureau used gross increases. Actually, he said, the increase in gross cash income was six per cent, not eighty per cent. What about charges of over-staffing and excessive administrative costs? Consider Coahoma County, Mississippi, for example, Vandevere said. There, the FSA had three field workers, two clerks, and one person on temporary assignment, a force of six which supervised 128 borrowers. In Mississippi, Vandevere said, it cost taxpayers seventy-two dollars a year per family to administer the FSA programs including all losses and expenses.93

On its lowest level, the Farm Bureau attack was unequalled for bitterness and vituperation. In July, 1942, for example, the Tate County Farm Bureau, at Senatobia, Mississippi, adopted a series of resolutions critical of "civilian agencies of alphabetical fame, now being maintained at the expense of the American taxpayer. . . ." According to the resolution, such alphabetical agencies "sponsor and support many practices, projects and programs which are economically unsound, socialistic and communistic in their tendency, wholly un-American and contrary to the principles

93Jackson Clarion-Ledger, April 3, 1942.
of our form of government, which must be discontinued and the agencies abolished." The Farm Security Administration, "with the cooperation of their socialistic friends," was attempting to overthrow the legitimate American farmer and was using "approximately forty per cent of their appropriations for administrative costs." The next month, at a Farm Bureau meeting at Greenville, Mississippi, a speaker insinuated that the FSA was opposed to private ownership of land and advocated Government ownership of all land. If this was what we were fighting World War II for, the speaker was saying, there was no point in the United States winning the war. This kind of attack was more difficult to deal with because of its unthinking and unreasoning quality. More suggestive and spectacular, it dealt less with hard facts and figures and, in its most extreme form, was more common in private meetings than in the public press.

Farm Bureau speakers swarmed all over the states of Region Six criticizing the FSA in meetings for local Farm Bureau personnel and county agents. On May 8, 1942, Milton Tainter, Louisiana Farm Bureau secretary, spoke to a group of county agents and Farm Bureau officials at Minden, Louisiana. A. E. Robinson, district rural rehabilitation


95 J. Lewis Henderson to Jack H. Bryan, August 20, 1942, ibid.; Delta Democrat-Times (Greenville, Mississippi), August 2, 1942.
supervisor in northern Louisiana, attended the meeting to gain first-hand information regarding Farm Bureau activities. His report provides some insight into the nature of such meetings and an example of how the FSA reacted.

Recognizing Robinson as a FSA employee, Tainter explained at the outset that he was not directing his remarks at "any individual or any agency," and specifically not at the Farm Security Administration. Judging from Robinson's report, Tainter seemed to make two main points: Government agencies were helping low-income farmers while neglecting large farmers, and the Extension Service should run all government farm programs, anyway. He condemned "certain governmental agencies" for placing too much emphasis on subsistence farming "to the advantage of the tenant farmers and at the expense of the large landowner farmers." Tainter disparaged FSA efforts to aid low-income farm families, a category which, he explained was "made up of seventy-five per cent negroes [sic] and twenty-five per cent fairly low-class white people." He objected to "giving such people an advantage that was being denied to the average farmer."

Besides, Tainter added, this time really punching below the belt, the Farm Security Administration program was "bringing about certain conditions in which Negroes in Louisiana were assuming the attitude that the government was endorsing a program whereby they would receive equal rights." Tainter went on to attack what he called "bureaucracy."
Department of Agriculture, he charged, was dictating all agricultural work in Washington and eliminating local control of agricultural programs. He contended that county and home demonstration agents should handle government programs at the local level. At one point, the meeting chairman recognized a lady—Robinson missed her name—who stated that "it was time for us to wake up to the fact that our government was turning socialistic." She put it better than he could have, Tainter remarked when she sat down. He had supported President Roosevelt for three consecutive terms, but now, he suggested, the President was too busy with the war and leaving domestic affairs to Mrs. Roosevelt.96

After the meeting adjourned, Robinson and Tainter met for lunch. Robinson tried to clear up certain errors that Tainter had made earlier or to set him straight on FSA programs and policies. But again, Tainter told Robinson "that he hoped we [FSA officials] would not assume that his remarks were addressed specifically toward our organization." The purpose of this tactic may have been to throw the opposition off guard or simply to remain on good terms with local FSA personnel. In March, 1942, speaking to the Lafourche Farm Bureau at Thibodaux, Louisiana, Tainter charged that the Farm Security Administration and the Department of Agriculture were permeated with men who leaned to the left. With Terre-

96A. E. Robinson to E. C. McInnis, May 12, 1941, R. G. 96, National Archives.
bonne project manager George Harmount sitting in the audience, Tainter explained that he did not mean any FSA men in the field; officials in Washington were the ones leaning to the left. Nor did he have any criticism, Tainter made clear, of the Terrebonne project or the way it was being handled. "You can take this for what it was worth," Harmount wrote Whitaker, "but I think he did not dare, with me being there, to try to start anything. . . ."\textsuperscript{97}

Regional director Stewart managed to find some good results coming out of the Farm Bureau controversy. It was "gratifying," he wrote in 1942, "to observe that Farm Security has many supporters which he did not know about before; a large number of editors, civic clubs, preachers, educators, organizations, and individuals have openly expressed their support of the Farm Security Administration." Other groups had sided with the Farm Bureau against the FSA, he admitted, but it was a far smaller number. "On the whole," Stewart added, "the controversy has given us the opportunity to acquaint many people with the FSA program who had not understood it before. Hundreds of unsolicited letters have been received from people in all walks of life, expressing their wholehearted support and endorsement of the FSA. Also, when the Farm Bureau criticized specific projects, FSA clients "have enthusiastically repudiated statements attributed to them and conditions reportedly existing." At Biscoe Farms

\textsuperscript{97}G. D. Harmount to E. B. Whitaker, March 21, 1942, \textit{ibid}. 
in Arkansas, the families themselves issued statements answering the attacks. "A strong public reaction has developed against the Farm Bureau," Stewart asserted, "because of its attack on the FSA. This reaction is general, except possibly among certain of the large farm operators who depend on tenant as day labor." At best, however, these were only short-term gains for the FSA.

Before World War II, the Resettlement Administration and the Farm Security Administration enjoyed a friendly environment in Region Six. With a program as controversial as rural resettlement, both agencies sought to minimize conflict through good public relations. In Louisiana, the Resettlement Administration had to play consensus politics, seeking friendships with two rival factions but becoming the tool of neither. The Information Division sought to win support by stressing resettlement's positive side and, if necessary, by suppressing the negative. When running into opposition, regional officials seemed to play it by ear; they answered the Police Jury's charges at Transylvania, tried to divide the opposition in the case of the Mississippi bankers, or gave ground on the race question. Typically, the resettlement agencies were willing to challenge Southern traditions on race, but only if no objections were raised. But by the start of World War II, Farm Bureau opposition and

\[98\] A. D. Stewart, Quarterly Report, January-March, 1942, *ibid.*
congressional disapproval had begun eroding FSA support at the local level and eventually succeeded in killing the FSA in 1946.

The FSA's ultimate fate was not decided in Region Six. But the opposition of the two most important farm organizations in the region does provide insight into the nature of the resettlement agencies. The Farm Bureau criticized the FSA from a conservative point of view almost diametrically opposite to the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union's socialistic viewpoint. To the Farm Bureau, for example, the FSA was spending too much money; the STFU argued it was not spending enough. The Farm Bureau wanted the Extension Service to exercise more influence in FSA programs; the STFU thought the large farmer-dominated Extension Service already occupied too many positions of influence. The Farm Bureau opposed the FSA's "impractical socialized farming projects," perhaps the most notorious of the FSA's crimes; the STFU hoped to see more such projects established. In every instance, the FSA's position was in the middle of two extremes. Regional officials, for example, were never enthusiastic about cooperative farming, they had always stressed the individualistic family farm, and they had been gradually phasing out the cooperative projects. This doubles the irony of the Farm Bureau-Farm Security Administration struggle. The Farm Bureau attack came when the resettlement program was becoming somewhat more conservative than it had been a few years before, and the STFU came to the defense of
an agency that was far less radical than they would have preferred. Neither left-wing nor right-wing farm organizations wholly endorsed what the FSA was doing, and at various times both had actively opposed it. Perhaps the opposition and dissatisfaction of both liberal and conservative groups suggests that the Resettlement and Farm Security programs were rather moderate in nature after all.
CONCLUSION

"The fight over the abolition of the Farm Security Administration," writes Paul Conkin, "was one of the most bitter domestic issues during World War II."¹ It was a fight the FSA had little chance of winning. From 1937 on, a congressional coalition of conservative Democrats and Republicans engaged in a running battle with the Administration over almost all New Deal programs. After Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt was unwilling to take strong stands on domestic issues and risk alienating congressional support for vital wartime programs. As a result, the conservative bloc seized the opportunity to dismantle as much as possible of the New Deal. In addition, the Resettlement Administration and its successor, the Farm Security Administration, had antagonized a coterie of powerful opponents. Southern landlords and large farm corporations relied on the labor of the very groups the FSA befriended: tenants, sharecroppers, and migrant farm workers. As the FSA took them under its wing, the large farm interests began to worry about losing their cheap labor supply. For similar reasons, private processors

¹Paul K. Conkin, Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program (Ithaca, N. Y., 1959), 220.
and retailers felt threatened when the FSA made loans to farm cooperatives. Unfortunately, the landlords, large farm corporations, and middle men had powerful backers in Congress, while the people the FSA helped most usually did not even vote. The FSA's most dangerous and determined enemy, however, was the American Farm Bureau Federation. With congressional assistance, the Farm Bureau led the attack on the FSA that eventually killed it.

The battleground of the struggle was the committee hearing rooms on Capitol Hill. At the House Appropriation Committee hearings of 1941, the Farm Bureau opened an ambitious campaign to remake the entire U. S. Department of Agriculture in its own image, but achieved little except to force small reductions in appropriations and to keep FSA personnel out of Civil Service. Afterward, Farm Bureau president Edward A. O'Neal decided to zero in on a more vulnerable objective: the Farm Security Administration. In early 1942, he appeared before the Byrd Committee--officially known as the Joint Committee on Reduction of Nonessential Federal Expenditures. Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia and other anti-New Deal congressmen were raising the cry of economy as an excuse for demolishing New Deal agencies; and the Farm Security Administration was one of their main targets. A shrewd showman, O'Neal began his testimony with the revelation that FSA supervisors regarded the poll tax as a proper expense in an individual client's farm and home.
management plans. Having gained the committee's full attention, O'Neal outlined the Farm Bureau case against the FSA. Most Farm Security programs were no longer necessary, he claimed, and the rest should be turned over to other agencies. He went on to make a series of sweeping charges: the FSA established quotas of clients in order to spend all funds appropriated and to maintain full personnel employment, "solicited" clients to meet quotas, burdened clients with more loans than they could repay, established "socialistic and impractical farming projects," made emergency grants to enable repayment of loans and conceal the record of failure, used renewal notes and variable payment plans to disguise low payment on loans, employed pressure groups to maintain congressional appropriations, wasted funds in excessively high administrative costs, and exercised rigid control of business and farm plans of clients. After the Byrd Committee hearings, Congress cut off all funds for collective farms like Lake Dick and Terrebonne and requested the rapid liquidation of all resettlement projects. Later in 1942 and in 1943, the Farm Bureau repeated substantially the same charges before the House and Senate committees on appropriations.  

2See ibid., 223, 224; Grant McConnell, The Decline of Agrarian Democracy (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959), 97-111; Sidney Baldwin, Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration (Chapel Hill, 1968), 342-52.
The Farm Security Administration fought its Armageddon in 1943 and 1944 at the Cooley Committee hearings. For two years, Representative Harold D. Cooley, Democrat of North Carolina, had sought a resolution calling for an investigation of FSA activities; the House finally passed it in March, 1943, setting up a Select Committee of the House Committee on Agriculture. The Cooley Committee offered an open forum for criticism of FSA programs; and after taking testimony for more than a year, it published two fat volumes (four parts) of *Hearings on the Farm Security Administration.*

The Farm Bureau again marched out its familiar repertoire of accusations, but this time gave them a new emphasis. From past experience, Farm Bureau leaders had learned what issue would have maximum effect: the community program. The resettlement projects were costly, unsuccessful, and worst of all, similar to the collective farms of Soviet Russia. To the Farm Bureau, the resettlement program was the best proof that the FSA was a socialistic effort to destroy traditional land policy in the United States. The FSA had leased a few projects (Terrebonne, for example) to cooperative associations on ninety-nine year leases, and these leases were supposedly evidence of the FSA's rejection of fee simple ownership. The rural poverty programs, Farm Bureau leaders

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3 Select Committee of the House Committee on Agriculture, *Hearings on the Farm Security Administration,* 78th Cong., 1st Sess., 1943-1944.
urged, should be placed in a new agency in order to "save the low income farmer from political exploitation and save American agriculture from collectivism and Government landlordism." In defending itself, FSA officials often came close to disavowing the entire resettlement program with the explanation that it was only managing projects initiated by other agencies.

The resettlement projects proved to be the FSA's greatest embarrassment, despite the fact that they were a very small part of the total work of the agency. Unfortunately, the resettlement program, never a congressional favorite, lacked definite legislative authority for its existence. The Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937 had given the FSA authority to complete existing projects, but it could not start new ones. The FSA, in fact, did not have authority to purchase land under the Bankhead-Jones Act. As early as 1938, Congress limited the use of funds in the resettlement program to "liquidation and management." Relying on executive orders, however, the Farm Security Administration continued to expand some of the projects, but did not begin liquidating the program. In 1939, Congress refused to allot any more funds for the completion of community projects. Until this time, Region Six director T.

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4Ibid., 802.

5Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 220.
Roy Reid was still looking for land to purchase for resettlement purposes. "Though the large number of resettlement projects have been now largely completed and are now offering challenging problems of management," wrote Reid in early 1940, "the development work still continues on some projects and new land is yet being added to develop other projects." After 1940, the FSA could not make loans to new cooperative associations, an essential step in the development of almost every resettlement community. When America entered the war, the regional office began acquiring still more land in a new housing program for defense workers.

In May, 1944, the Cooley Committee found the FSA guilty of ignoring the Bankhead-Jones Act and defying the will of Congress. The FSA, the committee further charged, was

... financing communistic resettlement projects, where the families could never own homes, or be paid for all that they made or for all the time they worked, and was supervising its borrowers to the extent of telling the borrower how to raise his children, how to plan his home life and, it is strongly suspected in some cases, how to vote.  

As a result of the Cooley Committee's findings, Congress reduced the Farm Security Administration to a powerless organization without funds. Although the FSA lived on for

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6T. Roy Reid, Annual Report, Region VI, December 31, 1940, Record Group 96, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, National Archives.

two more years, its primary task was the liquidation of the resettlement projects. In 1946, Congress created a new agency, the Farmers Home Administration, which absorbed both the FSA and the Farm Credit Administration. The Farmers Home Administration carried on the rural rehabilitation and tenant purchase programs but rushed the liquidation of any resettlement units the FSA had not already sold.®

The controversies of World War II should not obscure the real nature of the New Deal resettlement program. The Resettlement Administration and the Farm Security Administration were never as radical as the Farm Bureau and other critics pictured them. Yet New Deal agricultural policy did break sharply with the past. Before the 1930's, federal aid to agriculture had consisted mainly of grants-in-aid for agricultural education and long-term credits. But the New Deal set up action programs which carried the influence of the Federal government down into every rural county in the nation. Rexford G. Tugwell hoped to devote the Resettlement Administration to the broad problems of rural poverty and, most important, land reform. Never before had the Federal government bought up submarginal land, converted it to other uses than crop production, and resettled the families living there on better land. Although Tugwell soon left government service, the Farm Security Administration went on to experiment with cooperative farms, long-term leases (as opposed to

8Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 227, 229.
fee simple ownership), medical care cooperatives, and migrant labor camps. Even the Agricultural Adjustment Administra-
tion plunged into the uncharted seas of crop destruction and acreage allotment—expedients which old agrarians accepted
with reluctance. But if New Deal methods were new, what about New Deal objectives?

The Farm Security Administration, the most important and longest lived of the New Deal resettlement agencies, represented a conservative attempt to deal with the problems of farm tenancy. The FSA based its overall program squarely on the traditional agrarian principle of owner-operated family-size farms. The ideological heritage of the FSA, Sidney Baldwin has recently written, gave it "a sense of dis-
advantage, an optimistic reformist zeal, a nostalgic yearning for restoration of traditional institutions, such as subsis-
tence agriculture and the family farm."\(^9\) Above all, Region Six officials were not revolutionaries, and the reforms they pushed did not amount to a revolution. They believed the FSA program was fully in accord with American rural traditions. Given the background of the regional leadership (Southern birth, agricultural education, and Extension Service experience), it is hard to imagine them caught up in a vision of a "new world" that would eliminate the family farm. "The funds available to the RA," wrote regional director Reid, for example, in 1936, "are sufficient only to

provide a demonstration of the possibilities of rural resettlement. But there is no reason why its methods should not be embodied in a permanent, family-sized owner-operated farm program of the government." "I know of no better means of reconstructing our agriculture on a thoroughly sound and permanently desireable basis," he added, "than to make as its foundation the family-size owner-operated farm." The people who became clients of the resettlement program could not have agreed more. On the whole, the resettlement program was designed for people who had always made their own way and who would not need help except for the Depression. They were the kind of people who would be most concerned with owning their own little plots and homes.

Thus the central purpose of the New Deal community program in Region Six was farm ownership for tenants, sharecroppers, and submarginal farmers who had no other chance to escape the plight of Depression. Whether started under the Subsistence Homesteads Division, the FERA, or the RA, almost all resettlement projects in the region operated on a family-farm basis. The family-farm projects were not only more numerous, but they cost more money and helped more tenant families than the region's three cooperative farms. For

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example, the Resettlement Administration and the Farm Security Administration invested $2,629,567.82 in Terrebonne, Lake Dick, and Marcella, the only cooperative farming communities in the region, but poured $13,719,818.70 into twenty-three family farm projects. The regional office resettled about 2,602 families on the individual farm projects, while the cooperatives involved only about 207 families. Beyond the community projects, the FSA's tenant purchase and rural rehabilitation programs, which were also aimed at individual farm ownership, expended an additional $120,000,000 in Region Six. The cooperative plantation projects like Terrebonne were new and startling. But what seems more important about the New Deal community projects as a whole is that the Federal government for the first time was operating a program to give direct aid to tenant farmers and sharecroppers. This fact also represented a break from tradition. The community program was a radical means to achieve a conservative and traditional goal.

If the New Deal resettlement agencies sought to

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11Computed from House Agricultural Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Hearings on the Agricultural Department Appropriation Bill for 1947, 79th Cong., 2d Sess., 1946, 1405, 1411-1413. These figures do not include funds spent for Dyess Colony or the Mississippi subsistence homesteads, all of which should be added to the $13,000,000.00

restore the family farm, how well did they do it? More important, how successfully did they alleviate the suffering of tenants and croppers? Obviously, the New Deal did not spark a revival of family-size farms. Tugwell was correct when he pointed out the anachronism of the family farm in an age of technology and large-scale, commercial agriculture. Nothing could have brought back the family farm. In this sense, the resettlement program was not merely conservative; it was a bit reactionary. As for farm tenancy, the number of Southern tenant farmers dropped dramatically during World War II and afterward. In Region Six, the average rate of tenancy fell from a high of 67.2 per cent in 1930 to 59.6 in 1940, 51.0 in 1945, and 42.9 in 1950, and 26.4 in 1959.13 But most of the families who left tenancy became farm laborers, an even lower status than tenancy, not farm owners; or they left the land entirely during the war and went into the cities and towns. Even so, the New Deal could take credit for only a small part of what actual improvement did take place. The resettlement projects, tenant purchase, and rural rehabilitation programs were simply not large enough in themselves to produce a change of great magnitude. In Region Six, the resettlement program involved only about 2,800 families in all three states, although more

participated in the tenant purchase and rural rehabilitation programs. The RA and FSA did not measure up to the problem of farm tenancy, much less to the broader problem of rural poverty. Yet neither agency ever intended to do more than assist a relatively small number of the best qualified tenant families.

Today, few people remember the excitement of Dyess Colony in 1934, or the optimism of Plum Bayou in 1936, or even the radical spirit of Terrebonne in 1939. But at a crucial time in American history, such resettlement projects brought hope into the lives of a few members of an unfortunate class of people. Perhaps the New Deal did not do enough to combat rural poverty, but it did more than had ever been done before. At least, the New Deal tried to help.
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

No adequate study of the New Deal resettlement program could be written without the records in the National Archives. The most important collection of correspondence, memoranda, and reports is Record Group 96, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, which contains 2,443 cubic feet of material on the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Resettlement Administration, and the Farm Security Administration. Stanley W. Brown and Virgil E. Baugh (comps.), Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Farmers Home Administration, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, Publication No. 118 (Washington, 1959) is the best available guide to this all-important record group. Unfortunately, Region Six is the only one of the twelve regions with no records for either the regional director's office or the Resettlement Division. Despite this disappointment, National Archives records relating to Region Six are still so vast that one person could literally spend weeks looking through them all. What was lost in the destruction of these records, however, can be glimpsed in Works Projects Administration, Survey of Federal Archives, Inventory of Federal Archives in the States, Series IX, The Department of Agriculture, No. 4,
Arkansas (New Orleans, 1938-1939).

Four other record groups in the National Archives contain indispensable, but relatively small quantities of, records on Region Six activities. Since the Resettlement Administration became part of the Department of Agriculture in 1937, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the "Secretary of Agriculture, contains material relating to the Region Six resettlement program. Record Group 48, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, is disappointing on the early subsistence homesteads program in Mississippi. Record Group 69, Records of the Work Projects Administration, includes the records of the Works Progress Administration, the Civil Works Administration, and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. The WPA records are an important source of material on W. R. Dyess and the rural rehabilitation program in Arkansas. Record Group 207, Records of the Housing and Home Finance Agency, contains material concerning the last years of the Mississippi subsistence homesteads and their liquidation.

In addition, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park, New York, contains much correspondence relating to the Region Six resettlement program in the President's official File and the Harry L. Hopkins Papers. The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union Papers in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, includes several folders of material relating to Dyess Colony and other resettlement activities. The Socialist Party of
America Papers in the Duke University Library at Durham, North Carolina, contain correspondence concerning Norman Thomas' interest in Arkansas sharecroppers and STFU activities in Arkansas.

Government documents provide a convenient source of descriptive and statistical information on the resettlement program. The Resettlement Administration, *Interim Report* (Washington, 1936) is a polished piece of work covering the agency's earliest activities. Equally well done, the RA's *First Annual Report* (Washington, 1936) is valuable for its comprehensive summary of every aspect of resettlement work, showing what has been done to date in elaborate statistical tables. The Farm Security Administration's *Annual Reports* (Washington, 1937-1946) never measured up to the RA's high standards. Descriptive material is sketchy and sometimes statistical data are non-existent. The annual reports of the Farmers Home Administration contain the ultimate repayment figures in FSA loan programs, but they are largely silent on the liquidation of the resettlement projects. Of some value for the final disposition of the projects are the annual reports of the United States National Housing Agency (1945-1947) and its successor, the United States Housing and Home Finance Agency (1947-1953).

The Division of Subsistence Homesteads, the Resettlement Administration, and the Farm Security Administration all published hundreds of booklets, pamphlets, reports, bulletins, and circulars for the use of local supervisors, client
families, and the general public. This material often presents a romanticized view of resettlement projects, but it does convey the mood that permeated the program's early years. There are several bibliographies covering most such material. The most useful one in Saul M. Katz and Joseph W. Eaton, Research Guide on Cooperative Group Farming (New York, 1942). The editors' use of the libraries of Columbia University, the University of Chicago, the Rural Settlement Institute of Chicago, and the New York Public Library, along with its relatively late date, make it the most comprehensive of all bibliographies published within the FSA's lifetime. In addition, the listings of government publications and Department of Agriculture and WPA research monographs give the Katz and Eaton guide special value. Two other bibliographical aids are Katherine McNamara, Bibliography of Planning, 1928-1935 (Cambridge, Mass., 1936); and Helen E. Heunefrund, Part-time Farming in the United States. U. S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Agriculture Economics, Agricultural Economics Bibliography No. 77 (Washington, 1939). The bibliographies in National Resource Board, Farm Tenancy: Report of the President's Committee (Washington, 1937); and U. S. Department of Agriculture, Farmers in a Changing World: The Yearbook of Agriculture, 1940 (Washington, 1940) include selected government publications and contemporary magazine articles.

The many congressional committee hearings, reports, and documents supply much cold, hard factual information on
the resettlement projects. The Cooley Committee published almost 2,000 pages of testimony and statistical data on the FSA: Select Committee of the House Committee on Agriculture, Hearings on the Farm Security Administration, 78th Cong., 1st Sess., 1943-1944. Part Three contains a valuable summary of the resettlement projects, although omitting most subsistence homesteads and FERA communities. The committee summarized its findings and recommendations in U. S. House of Representatives, Activities of the Farm Security Administration, Report No. 1430, 78th Cong., 2d Sess., 1944. The Resettlement Administration prepared an elaborate statistical analysis of its programs for Congress while almost all its resettlement projects were still in the planning stage: U. S. Senate, Resettlement Administration Program, Senate Document No. 213, 74th Cong., 2d Sess., 1936. The annual hearings of the Senate and House Agricultural Subcommittees of the Committees on Appropriations for 1941 through 1947 convey the headlong haste with which the FSA resettlement program was dismantled. Especially useful for demonstrating congressional determination to scrap the resettlement program are U. S. Senate, Agricultural Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Hearings on the Agricultural Department Appropriation Bill for 1943, 77th Cong., 2d Sess., 1942; and the Senate Agricultural Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Hearings on the Agricultural Department Appropriation Bill for 1944, 78th Cong., 1st Sess., 1943. The Senate Agricultural Subcommittee's Hearings on the
Agricultural Department Appropriation Bill for 1946, 79th Cong., 1st Sess., 1945, contains a specific attack on the Terrebonne project. The House Agricultural Committee of the Committee on Appropriations, Hearings on the Agricultural Department Appropriation Bill for 1947, 79th Cong., 2d Sess., 1946, contains the last published figures on the liquidation of almost all resettlement projects, including their total cost, the average unit sales price, operating and maintenance expenses, and income. Many contemporary critics accused the FSA of juggling figures in order to show resettlement projects operating at a profit. This is an exaggeration, but the tables of FSA figures in appropriations committee hearings are misleading if given only a cursory glance, although the information is there. The Congressional Record shows the growing displeasure with FSA resettlement activities.

Three other public documents deserve mention. John B. Holt, Analysis of Methods and Criteria Used in Selecting Families for Colonization Projects, Social Research Report No. 1, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Security Administration, and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics (Washington, 1937) is an excellent study of the family selection programs of all resettlement agencies, with a special look at Dyess Colony. Arkansas Emergency Relief Administration, A Review of Work Relief Activities in Arkansas, April 1st, 1934, to July 1st, 1935 (Little Rock, 1935) contains minute detail on the development of Dyess Colony. A similar work but with less detail is Arkansas
An invaluable source of information on the local work of the resettlement agencies is the newspapers of the region, both small-town weeklies and large-city dailies. Newspapers not only reflected local attitudes toward resettlement, but they published information about land purchase, family selection, project development, and in some cases operation, although most papers lost interest in local projects once the new wore off and the clients settled down to everyday living. Even the most humble weeklies provide indispensable information, since such papers often served as a kind of "official journal" for the announcements of county and parish FSA supervisors. Front-page coverage was the rule. One example of unusually close cooperation between local project officials and a local paper is the McComb Enterprise (Mississippi) in 1934 and 1935. The editor of the paper, J. O. Emmerich, was also the project manager of McComb Homesteads, and he gave the project a big play. Another example is the Houma Courier (Louisiana), which followed every move made at the Terrebonne projects from 1937 to 1940. The Richland Beacon-News (Rayville, Louisiana) showed interest in FSA activities all over the state, but especially at nearby Crew Lake. The Lake Providence Banner Democrat and the Madison Journal (Tallulah) were strong boosters of both the
Transylvania and Mounds projects in northeast Louisiana. The Caldwell Watchman (Columbia) ran a series of short articles written by Joyce Mullins, Caldwell Parish home management supervisor, under the general heading "A Few Facts About Resettlement." Both the Osceola Times and the Blytheville Courier News, the two leading newspapers of Mississippi County, Arkansas, gave excellent coverage on the development of Dyess Colony, but they both seemed to ignore the colony's troubles after 1938.

The Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock) is the most valuable single paper for news about resettlement in Region Six. It was located in the same city as the regional headquarters and always carried any news release concerning Arkansas resettlement activities or any release of region-wide importance. The Gazette, like other large-city dailies of the region, offers special advantages not available in the rural weeklies. Its reporters visited resettlement projects and interviewed officials and clients, and the numerous feature articles they wrote are an important source of detailed first-hand information on such projects as Dyess Colony, Lake Dick, Plum Bayou, and Lakeview. Resettlement projects were news, at least when they were new or when troubled with any suggestion of discontent or scandal. They were also the source of much human interest material. The New Orleans Times-Picayune published several long stories on the Terrebonne project, as did the Item-Tribune. The Monroe Morning News gave the Crew Lake project favorable treatment.
The Pine Bluff Daily Graphic, unofficial spokesman of southeast Arkansas, was in an excellent position to cover resettlement activities, since two large projects, Plum Bayou and Lake Dick, were located just across the Arkansas River. The Jackson Clarion-Ledger and the Daily News (Mississippi) are important papers, but they had less resettlement activity to cover. The Memphis Commercial Appeal and especially the Press-Scimitar (Tennessee), both of which circulated widely in eastern Arkansas, reported news from Dyess, Plum Bayou, and elsewhere, and generally favored resettlement as a means of helping farm tenants.

In the past decade, students of the New Deal have begun to give the resettlement program the attention it deserves. Most recently, Sidney Baldwin, in Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration (Chapel Hill, 1968), has written an excellent administrative history of the FSA and its predecessors. A political scientist, Baldwin is preoccupied with institutional survival, goal formation, goal succession, and other such concepts, but he has contributed insights that historians might have overlooked. The most valuable book on the resettlement program itself remains Paul K. Conkin, Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program (Ithaca, N. Y., 1959). Conkin traces the origins of the back-to-the-land movement of the Depression, discusses the subsistence homesteads program, the FERA communities, and the RA and FSA
projects, giving five communities separate treatment. He stresses the discontinuity of the resettlement program from previous experience. What he has to say about Region Six projects, of course, is meager. An early but still valuable study is Joseph W. Eaton, Exploring Tomorrow's Agriculture (New York, 1943). Written under the auspices of the Rural Settlement Institute, Eaton had access to certain FSA files in Washington, interviewed FSA officials, and visited several projects in early 1941. He attempted specifically to explain the theory and practice of what he called the "cooperative group farms" (like Terrebonne and Lake Dick), which he believed to be the wave of the future; but much of what he says about project development, organization, and operation applies to all FSA communities.

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Rouge, 1967) contains a good summary of Arkansas tenant troubles and the New Deal's response.

Among the collections of primary sources in print, most supply only incidental material on the resettlement program. Samuel I. Rosenman (ed.), The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt (13 vols.; New York, 1938-1950) contains executive orders, speeches, and other official material relating to the resettlement agencies. Edgar B. Nixon (comp.), Franklin D. Roosevelt and Conservation (2 vols.; Hyde Park, 1957) does not provide much help on the New Deal's resettlement work. The published memoirs of New Deal insiders also gives minimal help. Harold L. Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes (3 vols.; New York, 1953-1954) makes clear what he thought about the subsistence homesteads program on a trip through Tupelo, Mississippi. Rexford G. Tugwell, The Democratic Roosevelt (Garden City, N. Y., 1957) gives insight into the development of the entire Resettlement Administration program. Raymond Moley, After Seven Years (New York, 1939); and Eleanor Roosevelt, This I Remember (New York, 1940) are of little value so far as the RA and FSA are concerned.

The periodical literature on the New Deal is voluminous. Of the literally hundreds of contemporary articles on the community program, few deal specifically with Region Six activities. The most helpful, however, are Will W. Alexander, "Rural Resettlement," Southern Review, 1 (Winter, 1936), 528-39; Oscar Ameringer, "No Thoroughfare to Utopia,"


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James Donald Holley was born in Vernon, Alabama, on February 24, 1940, and attended public schools in five Southern states, including all those of Region Six. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Louisiana Polytechnic Institute in 1962. Later that year, he entered Louisiana State University to study in the Department of History and received a Master of Arts degree in 1964. He is a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the summer of 1969.
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Candidate: James Donald Holley

Major Field: History

Title of Thesis: THE NEW DEAL AND FARM TENANCY: RURAL RESETTLEMENT IN ARKANSAS, LOUISIANA, AND MISSISSIPPI

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

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Date of Examination:

May 23, 1969