A History of the Federal Writers' Project in Louisiana.

Ronnie Wayne Clayton
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, Ph.D., 1974
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A HISTORY OF THE
FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT IN LOUISIANA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

Ronnie W. Clayton
B.A., Louisiana College, 1964
M.A., Northwestern State University, 1968
May, 1974
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Ronnie W. Clayton

Major Field: History

Title of Thesis: A HISTORY OF THE FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT IN LOUISIANA

Approved:

[Signature]
Major Professor and Chairman

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signature]

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FOREWORD

Historians of Franklin D. Roosevelt's Administration, such as James MacGregor Burns, Frank Friedel, William E. Leuchtenberg, and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., generally ignore the artistic programs of the Work Projects Administration. They emphasize the more permanent and conspicuous WPA construction programs rather than the more transitory, inconspicuous, and relatively inexpensive cultural projects.

Recently, however, American scholars have begun to devote more attention to the WPA artistic projects. Several such studies are worth noting. Jane DeHart Mathews examines the Federal Theatre Project and its Director, Hallie Flanagan, in *The Federal Theatre, 1935-1939: Plays, Relief, and Politics*. One of the participants in the Writers' Project, Jerre Mangione, discusses his involvement with the program, as well as the program in general, in *The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project, 1935-1943*. Two interesting dissertations about the same project are Kathleen O'Connor McKinzie's "Writers on Relief: 1935-1942," and Ronald Warren Taber's "The Federal Writers' Project in the Pacific Northwest: A Case Study." The Federal Art Project is the
topic of Richard D. McKinzie's now published dissertation, "The New Deal for Artists." Francis V. O'Connor has edited a work also pertaining to the same program, entitled The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs.

As these titles indicate, the federal phases of the cultural projects are the major interests of the authors. There are perhaps several reasons why scholars neglect operation of the cultural programs in the states.

Availability of records is one factor undoubtedly influencing the authors. The cultural project records are for the most part housed in the National Archives and in the Library of Congress. Most of these items pertain to the federal administration of the programs, are often the only surviving project records, and are more accessible to researchers than are the state records.

Administrative complexity is also a factor affecting the interest of authors. Attempting to understand federal project operations is difficult enough without trying to understand project operations in all of the states, or even in one state.

The relative glamour and power associated with federal rather than state administrators perhaps also influences authors. The actions of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Work Projects Administrator Harry Hopkins, Director of the Federal Writers'
Project Henry Alsberg, and Director of the Federal Theatre
Project Hallie Flanagan received more national exposure than,
for example, the corresponding actions of Louisiana Governor
Richard W. Leche, Louisiana Work Projects Administrator
J. H. Crutcher, Director of the Louisiana Writers' Project Lyle
Saxon, or Director of the Louisiana Art Project Caroline Durieux.
More information is available to scholars about national figures
than state figures and there is generally a greater market for
publications about national leaders.

Examination of the federal rather than the state aspects
of the cultural projects, however, does not always result in a
complete understanding of the artistic programs. The federal
programs were essentially administrative in nature; the state
projects were basically operational in function. The national staffs
promulgated some of the project regulations; the state staffs ignored
some of these rules, and made others of their own. Most of the
national personnel were trained artists; many of the state employees
were white-collar workers. The federal leaders were interested
in having their projects approved by art critics; the Louisiana
project directors were concerned with having their programs
accepted by the general public. The national project officers
seemed to be interested in art for the sake of art; the Louisiana
Writers' Project Director was interested in art for the sake of employing needy white-collar workers. Some of the national project personnel apparently believed the cultural projects to be the first phase of nationally subsidized art programs; the Director of the Louisiana Writers' Project saw the funding as a temporary expediency to alleviate unemployment caused by the Great Depression. A few of the national project leaders apparently resented and resisted Congressional concern with project operations; the Louisiana Writers' Project Director understood and accepted Congressional control over the expenditure of public funds. The federal officials represented only the top part of project personnel the state project employees represented both the bottom and the majority of project workers.

Despite some of the differences between national and state operations, however, the Louisiana Writers' Project was dedicated to achieving the goal of the Writers' Program as originally enunciated by Henry Alsberg on October 26, 1935. "The first and primary object of our organization," he said, "is to take people from the relief rolls and set them to work. Our projects themselves, no matter how important and interesting, come second." The fact that the Louisiana Writers' Program also produced three significant publications was but an added bonus to the goal of providing temporary work for needy unemployed white-collar workers.
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ABSTRACT

This study of the Federal Writers' Project in Louisiana from the time of its inception in October, 1935, until its demise on January 1, 1943, examines the tribulations and qualifications of those who applied for work on the project and those who obtained it. It shows how material was compiled, edited, and produced. It analyzes the project's three published works (Louisiana: A Guide to the State, New Orleans City Guide, and Gumbo Ya-Ya), as well as several incomplete manuscripts never published. It also discusses the Dillard Project, a program of research into the history of blacks in Louisiana. Throughout the dissertation, the crucial figure is Lyle Saxon, state director of the Louisiana Writers' Project.

The Louisiana Writers' Project provides a good case study of a depression relief program that operated on the state rather than the national level. Although the Louisiana Writers' Project shared many characteristics with writers' projects in other states, it was in some ways unique. For example, Louisiana was one of the few states in which the project director retained his office throughout the project's existence. Unlike some other New
Deal cultural programs, the Louisiana Writers' Project was never plagued with charges that it was commumistic, nor did it have serious problems with state censorship. There were few genuine writers on the Louisiana project; the director, Lyle Saxon, did most of the writing and editing himself. To Saxon, the Louisiana Writers' Project was an emergency measure designed to provide temporary employment for unemployed white-collar workers and not a first step toward a national subsidization of the arts. In this and in many other ways, the project reflected Saxon's leadership.

The Louisiana Writers' Project illustrates Harvey Swados' suggestion that writers of the 1930's, out of a certain despair over their society's condition, sought to document its past in order to determine who they were and how they had reached their current crisis. Through the Louisiana Writers' Project, Saxon sought to describe for Louisianans their history and how they might preserve certain elements in it. In this respect, the Louisiana Writers' Project qualifies Kathleen O'Connor McKinzie's view that the Federal Writers' Project state and city guides stressed "locale" rather than interpretation. Saxon emphasized both, though his interests focused on the city of New Orleans more than on the state at large.

The Louisiana Writers' Project was a worthwhile New Deal program, due in large part to the efforts of Lyle Saxon. Saxon was
a romanticist in his understanding and description of the state's history, but he was a realist regarding the nature and purpose of the Louisiana Writers' program.

The dissertation derives almost exclusively from documentary materials in the National Archives, in the Louisiana State Library, Baton Rouge, and in the Lyle Saxon Papers in the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library of the Tulane University, New Orleans.
CHAPTER I

ORIGINS OF THE WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Floods, epidemics, fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, and wars are but some of the difficulties Louisianians have encountered since the first settlers arrived in 1699. During the early 1930's, however, a problem unlike previous ones faced the state citizenry. This one left families destitute not from acts of nature but from virtual collapse of the national economic structure. Able-bodied men and women walked the streets looking for work that did not exist.

Most Americans during the early 1930's felt that relief was a state and municipal responsibility; however, the tremendous strain placed upon cities trying to help the unemployed resulted in their granting increasingly meager assistance simply to avert starvation. This effort came during a period of declining revenue sources. The task facing the localities quickly became an impossible one of providing relief for all of the needy. 1

1Edward Ainsworth Williams, Federal Aid for Relief (New York, 1939), 18.
The City of New Orleans made a valiant but futile effort to meet the new economic crisis, as did other cities throughout the state. Officials of the New Orleans Community Chest tried un成功fully to provide relief for the growing number of unemployed as well as for those traditionally in need of assistance. The city fathers realized by May, 1932, that massive unemployment presented problems beyond the means of solution by the community chest or by other relief agencies. They held a special election of property owners to authorize a bond issue of $750,000 for the purpose of providing for the needy. Other cities within the state, however, lacked any means of offering aid to the depression-ridden unemployed. 2

The bond measure was but a futile effort to tide the gap until more meaningful relief efforts could be devised. As the depression worsened and affected an increasingly larger portion of the population, more and more citizens realized that persons other than the thriftless needed immediate help. The old system of providing rent, food coupons, and relief payments was grossly inadequate in meeting the

2"Final Report of the Louisiana Work Projects Administration," February, 1943, Federal Writers' Project-Louisiana (Record Group 69, National Archives.) Unless specifically cited otherwise the documents cited herein are held in Record Group 69, National Archives: Records of the Works Projects Administration, Records of the Federal Writers' Project, Records Relating to the WPA Writers' Project in Louisiana, National Archives. Hereinafter cited as FWP-La.
needs caused by the depression. Some method of national assistance was necessary.

President Herbert Hoover, who went as far in relief efforts as his political philosophy permitted him to go, broke new ground for relief assistance by signing the Emergency Relief and Construction Act on July 21, 1932. The bill had three major divisions and attacked unemployment and relief problems along the same number of lines. Title I dealt directly with relief by making available $300,000,000 to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to advance loans to the states and cities at 3 per cent interest per annum. The governor of each state had to make application for the loan by certifying that his state's resources were inadequate to meet the relief problem. In an attempt to stimulate the ailing construction industry, Title II of the act provided loans to the states and cities for self-liquidating construction projects. Title III allocated $322,224,000 for public

3 Harry L. Hopkins, Spending to Save: The Complete Story of Relief (New York, 1936), 102-105.

4 Harris Gaylord Warren, Herbert Hoover and the Great Depression (New York, 1967), 301. According to Warren, "There is reason to doubt that the country would have accepted the New Deal experimentation before 1932 even had President Hoover been willing to direct the laboratory." 301.

works. This law was the only measure passed during the Hoover administration providing relief for unemployment. 6

To enable the state to qualify for participation in the national appropriation, Governor Oscar K. Allen of Louisiana issued a proclamation creating an Unemployment Relief Committee. In his proclamation Allen specified the condition for obtaining a relief assistance. Depending upon the need of the applicant's family, each person obtaining assistance had to work from one to four days a week. The opportunity for employment did not last long, however, as funds for the program only lasted until April, 1933. 7

Unfortunately for the country and for Hoover, the Emergency Relief and Construction Act failed significantly to reverse the downward plunge of the economy and the upward swing in unemployment. The nation continued to suffer in the throes of unemployment when the voters ousted the Iowa-born engineer in the 1932 presidential election and replaced him with a New York-born lawyer, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The former Governor of New York brought with him to Washington some of his New York associates, such as Frances Perkins and Harry L. Hopkins. They, as much as anyone else,

6Hopkins, Spending to Save, 90-91.

7"Final Report of the Louisiana Work Projects Administra-

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were instrumental in guiding the President to adopt new relief assistance measures.

The first relief law under the new administration was signed by Roosevelt on May 12, 1933. In this measure Congress appropriated five hundred million dollars for grants to the states, as opposed to the loans provided by the Emergency Relief and Construction Act of 1932. To carry out the provisions of the act Roosevelt appointed Harry Hopkins to serve as head of the Emergency Relief Administration. The inadequacy of state and local relief funds made it necessary for the federal government to work more closely with the states in providing relief to the needy. In addition to the funds authorized by the act other monies were made available to the states through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation.

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Another attempt at relief was made when, on June 16, 1933, President Roosevelt signed the National Industrial Recovery Act. This law proposed a works program designed to assist "heavy" industries and sought to provide general employment for the jobless, regardless of their need. To administer the law Roosevelt created the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works (FWA) and appointed Harold L. Ickes as administrator of the new agency.10

The Public Works Administration was slow to get underway and it also failed to provide work rapidly for enough of the unemployed. With the approach of fall in 1933 came an increasing number of jobless and needy citizens. In an attempt to give work immediately to approximately four million jobless persons, Roosevelt used the Act to create on November 9 a Federal Civil Works Administration (CWA). He hoped that increased employment would raise the national purchasing power.11

Money for the Civil Works Administration came from several sources. The President in his executive order creating the CWA specified that $400 million be transferred from the Public Works


11 Executive Order 6420-B, November 9, 1933. See William F. McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts (Columbus, Ohio, 1969), 52.
Administration to the Civil Works Administration. The CWA received almost eighty-nine million dollars from the Federal Emergency Relief Appropriation, and on February 15, 1934, $345 million from Congress.\(^{12}\) This last allocation was not limited to construction projects. It thus became possible for the CWA to operate non-construction projects or white collar projects, such as the Public Works of Art Project.\(^{13}\)

The CWA was really an employment agency rather than a work-relief program. As such it was not required to take its workers from the relief rolls. All the prospective CWA employee had to do to qualify for employment was to show that he was a physically fit and unemployed but needy worker. Since the CWA was understood to be a very temporary program, the qualifications of the workers did not really matter. As a result many white collar workers sought work as common laborers on some of the "man-made" projects.\(^{14}\)

President Roosevelt realized that the CWA was not the answer to the problem of unemployment. He remarked that he was

\(^{12}\)Hopkins, *Spending to Save*, 117.

\(^{13}\)"Preliminary Checklist," FWP-La.

unwilling to see the "vitality" of the American "people be further sapped by the giving of cash, of market baskets, of a few hours of weekly work cutting grass, raking leaves or picking up papers in the public parks." Although busy work kept the needy from starvation, it did little for "their self-respect, their self-reliance and courage and determination."^15

With the approach of spring, 1934, the president sought to terminate the Civil Works Administration. He became alarmed at the cost of the program and feared he was creating a group of workers who might become permanently dependent on relief work. Consequently he closed down the CWA and relied on the Federal Emergency Relief Administration once more to assume the relief burden as well as to continue the unfinished work projects of the CWA.16

During the winter of 1934 some of Roosevelt's advisors began serious consideration of a new program that would provide a more realistic solution to the relief problem. By the end of the year Roosevelt had in his hands the outline of a work plan prepared over the signatures of Ickes and Hopkins. Based on these suggestions as


well as those contained in other proposals, Roosevelt in his annual message to Congress on January 4, 1935, presented his ideas for a works program. A joint resolution authorizing the program the President had in mind was introduced in Congress on January 21.\textsuperscript{17} After months of heated but often entertaining debate\textsuperscript{18} the President was able to affix his signature on April 8, 1935, to the largest single appropriation measure ever enacted during peace-time by Congress, the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act. An initial appropriation of four billion dollars was given to the President to spend on relief programs of his choosing. Additional funds were also made available by the transfer of eight hundred million dollars from the FERA.\textsuperscript{19}

The President created the basic vehicle to spend these

\textsuperscript{17}Macmahon, Millett, and Ogden, \textit{The Administration of Federal Work Relief}, 24-25.

\textsuperscript{18}\textit{Cong. Rec.}, 74 Cong., 1 Sess. (Feb. 21-March 28, 1935), 3366-3613. For a more complete discussion see debate on H. J. Res. 117. Senator Huey Long of Louisiana, who actively participated in the debate on the bill, was speaking on the back of a train in South Carolina when he learned that the Senate had approved the four billion relief plan by a vote of 68 to 16. He replied: "Did they, sure enough? Well-I'll be damned." (Baton Rouge) \textit{Morning Advocate}, March 24, 1935, p. 2-A.

\textsuperscript{19}Original plans called for taking the bill by airplane to the President for his signature. He was on a fishing trip in the Bahamas. This plan was changed and the bill remained at the White House where Roosevelt signed it. \textit{Morning Advocate}, April 6, 1935, p. 1, and April 7, p. 4-A.
billions of dollars by Executive Order 7034. In this administrative order he created a tripartite organization to administer a new relief program. Roosevelt established a Division of Applications and Information to serve as the receiving agency of suggestions for projects and of applications for project funds. It also functioned as a general information clearing house about the works program. Roosevelt named Frank Walker, director of the National Emergency Council, to head this committee.

The second division Roosevelt created was an Advisory Committee on Allotments. This committee had the responsibility of advising the President on the approval of projects and on the allocation of funds. To head this group the President appointed PWA administrator Harold L. Ickes. The President knew Ickes to be a

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^Bibbs Myers (comp.) "Central Records of the Research Records Projects of the Works Progress Administration" (December, 1942), 1, FWP-La. This executive order was also to be flown to the President. According to journalist Rodney Dutcher, Harry Hopkins and Budget Director Dan Bell carefully framed it in great secrecy. Ickes, however, managed to find out what it contained. He strongly objected to Hopkins, who decided it best to hold the order in Washington until the President returned. Morning Advocate, April 14, 1935, p. 4-A. The President did meet with Ickes, Hopkins, and Walker on the evening of April 26, 1935, to discuss the executive order.

capable, honest, but doleful administrator. He felt, however, that Ickes would minimize the opportunities for graft in a program spending billions of dollars.\textsuperscript{22}

The third agency Roosevelt created by his executive order was a Works Progress Administration. He said this body was "responsible to the President for the honest, efficient, speedy, and coordinated execution of the work relief program as a whole, and for the execution of that program in such a manner as to move from the relief rolls to work on such projects or in private employment the maximum number of persons in the shortest time possible." The President said that he wanted the Works Progress Administration to "recommend and carry on small useful projects designed to assure a maximum of employment in all localities."\textsuperscript{23} These words, which seemed to appear almost as an afterthought by the President, were "the most significant ones in the whole series of initial organizing orders." For in them lay the fetus that grew into the monolithic

\textsuperscript{22}Schlesinger, Jr., \textit{The Politics of Upheaval}, 344.

\textsuperscript{23}Executive Order 7034 "Establishing the Division of Applications and Information, the Advisory Committee on Allotments, the Works Progress Administration, and for other Purposes." On July 1, 1939, the name was changed to Work Projects Administration.
Works Progress Administration. 24

Roosevelt did not name an administrator of the Works Progress Administration as such. Instead he specified that the Federal Emergency Relief Administrator would serve as Administrator of the Works Progress Administration. This person, as some economy-minded congressmen feared, was none other than Harry L. Hopkins. 25 Knowing of the intense rivalry between Hopkins and Ickes, Roosevelt purposely placed Walker to serve as a buffer between them in an effort to direct their mutual hostilities into constructive channels. 26

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24 Macmahon, Millett, and Ogden, The Administration of Federal Work Relief, 77. Donald S. Howard defined the WPA as "an agency responsible for providing employment on socially useful projects for as many needy unemployed workers meeting prescribed eligibility requirements as can be given with funds appropriated by Congress for this purpose from year to year." Donald S. Howard, The WPA and Federal Relief Policy (New York, 1943), 105.

25 The WPA had four chief administrators during its seven year history. Harry L. Hopkins served from the beginning of the organization until his appointment in December, 1939, as Secretary of Commerce. Army Colonel F. C. Harrington replaced Hopkins and served until his death in October, 1940. He was followed by Howard O. Hunter, who resigned early in 1942. In July, 1942, Roosevelt then asked administrator of the Federal Works Agency, Brigadier General Philip B. Fleming, to also assume the duties as administrative head of the WPA.

26 In the April 26 meeting that Ickes, Walker, and Hopkins had with the President, Ickes noted in his diary that Roosevelt was probably wise to include Walker in the triumvirate. "Hopkins will fly off on tangents unless he is watched, and I am quite likely to be bulldoggish and want to have my own way." Harold L. Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The First Thousand Days, 1933-36 (New York, 1953), 352.
theory but not in practice, the tripartite divisions were equal. As it turned out, however, Ickes was no match for Hopkins, who utilized the powers given him by the President to such an extent that his agency came to control the entire works program.\(^\text{27}\) As early as September, 1935, the Advisory Committee on Allotments ceased to exist as a clearing agency.\(^\text{28}\) Ickes' influence on the works program declined to such an extent that the program became known as the Works Progress Administration.\(^\text{29}\)

After many months of debate and compromise, the relief bill at last became law. The task of implementing the legislation and executive order then began. One of the first matters compelling the attention of the program planners and administrators was the

\(^\text{27}\) According to William Reeves, Roosevelt encouraged "competitive administration" whereby ideas or programs were "reviewed or fought over by two or more administrators." He felt that the President should have adopted a "goal directed process of administration rather than a competitive process," for this would have produced a larger as well as more rapidly produced public works program and possibly recovery" by the Public Works Administration. While this theory might explain the limited achievements of the PWA, it would not seem to be true for the WPA. William D. Reeves, "PWA and Competitive Administration in the New Deal," Journal of American History, LX (September, 1973), 357-72.

\(^\text{28}\) Macmahon, Millett, and Ogden, The Administration of Federal Work Relief, 73.

\(^\text{29}\) Schlesinger, Jr., The Politics of Upheaval, 345.
type of projects to develop. Should they be designed to strengthen the ailing "heavy" industries? If so, then most of the monies would go for materials and the remainder for the salaries of skilled workers. If, on the other hand, the main objective was work projects for the unemployed, then the major portions of the appropriation would be spent for wages and the rest for materials. This question was further complicated by the debate over whether to limit employment to all needy unemployed laborers or just to those registered for relief payments and certified as in need of assistance.  

The decision was made to adopt a work-oriented program that would increase consumer purchasing power and at the same time preserve the worker's talent for eventual utilization in the private sector. Only unemployed workers on the relief rolls or certified as in need of relief would be considered for employment. The adopted program evidenced a national commitment to the ideal of the right to work regardless of one's personal circumstances.

Despite the decision for a work-oriented program, the true

30 Macmahon, Millet, and Ogden, The Administration of Federal Work Relief, 35.


32 Macmahon, Millett, and Ogden, The Administration of Federal Work Relief, 1.
nature of the program was unclear. Neither Congress nor administrative officials were ever really able to decide whether work projects or relief employment had priority. As a result, the WPA came under conflicting criticism. When attacked for inefficiency, the program was defended on the ground that it was a relief program. When some persons sought to make it strictly a relief instrument, they were told that this was not possible due to the incompatibility of such an ideal with a work program. 33

This dual quality of work and/or relief made actual operation extremely difficult. Clashes frequently occurred among administrators of the program. Those responsible for relief sought to place on the payrolls persons in need regardless of their talents. Administrators responsible for project operations sought the most capable workers regardless of their financial needs. 34

Hopkins understood the difficulty of limiting employment opportunities to those on the relief rolls. Some very needy persons were unemployed but had not registered for relief payments. They had struggled to stay off the relief rolls because the "dole" was personally distasteful. Others had left the relief rolls to find

33Howard, The WPA and Federal Relief Policy, 246-47.
34Ibid.
temporary employment. Limiting employment eligibility to those on relief thus disqualified many who were needy but not on relief.

Hopkins, as early as November 15, 1933, said, "We are licked before we start if this is confined entirely to the relief rolls. It is telling every man unemployed...who fought this battle through from the beginning on his own, that he has to get on the relief rolls before he can get a job."\(^{35}\)

Despite Hopkins' objections the decision was made to restrict employment to those who had been on relief. Accordingly, he ordered that initial consideration be given only to persons on the relief rolls prior to May 1, 1935.\(^{36}\) This decision was particularly resented by many of the disqualified. This policy seemed to reward the least diligent and to punish the most resourceful. The disqualified tended to condemn themselves for their efforts and concluded that resignation rather than resistance to their fate was the policy favored by the federal government.\(^{37}\)

The nature of the program as a work agency meant that

\(^{35}\)Macmahon, Millett, and Ogden, *The Administration of Federal Work Relief*, 35.

\(^{36}\)Henry Alsberg to Lyle Saxon, November 9, 1935, FWP-La. Hopkins later set dates subsequent to this one.

consideration also had to be given to the quality of the finished productions. Since the technical proficiency necessary for employing large numbers of workers was not available exclusively among relief persons, provisions had to be made for hiring skilled non-relief individuals. This was achieved by exempting from ten to twenty-five per cent of the quota of workers from the relief requirement. 38

The needy worker, disqualified for employment, resented this regulation. The government hired workers from the private sector who did not need relief work, while it disqualified many who needed to work but could not obtain private employment. To the unemployed, this seemed an absurd way to operate a relief program. They also disliked the schemes devised to increase non-relief quotas. When Washington officials increased the proportion of certified workers, some local authorities got around this requirement by certifying previously non-certified workers even though no change occurred in their financial situation. Local officials also negated the intent of the ruling by decreasing the number of non-certified

38 Jacob Baker to State Directors of the Federal Writers' Project, December 6, 1935, ibid. Authority for the adjustment of non-relief quotas was based on Executive Order No. 7046 of May 20, 1935, and on Administrative Order No. 35, November 26, 1935, of the Works Progress Administration.
workers. These circumventions of the quota regulation ended in July, 1939. Washington administrators required local authorities to hire only certified workers, provided they were available and could perform required duties.40

Employment opportunities on WPA projects were also lessened by the requirement pertaining to relative need. The applicant had to be certified as being in greater need than other applicants before he could be given employment. This regulation, however, was more plausible in theory than in practice. Determination of need, much less relative need, was difficult. Project planners rejected granting wages on the basis of one's need and assets. They considered this method complicated and also meddlesome in the lives of applicants. The planners allowed either local or national relief agencies to determine the need of applicants.41

39Certified workers were known as "relievers" and as "relief-rollers." Certified employees were called "patronage appointees," "non-relievers," "non-relief rollers," and "ten-percenters."

40Howard, WPA and Federal Relief Policies, 359.

41Macmahon, Millett, and Ogden, The Administration of Federal Work Relief, 38. Selection of the needy unemployed in Louisiana was made by the Bureau of Intake and Certification, a division of the State Department of Public Welfare. The selection was made on the basis of need and employment potential. Eligible persons were referred to the WPA, and if they met the requirements of the law, such as citizenship and residency, they were certified.
Another factor limiting the chance a needy worker had for obtaining employment on the WPA was the regulation pertaining to his future employment opportunity. To be eligible for WPA work the applicant must have had training that qualified him for a particular job on a project. Thus his previous work experience as well as his relative need and future employment opportunity had to be considered before he could be assigned to work on the WPA.

Criticisms were made that certain WPA workers, especially actors, artists, musicians, and writers, had no previous work experience in their respective fields. Some who did could not expect to earn their living in the future from their profession. Musicians, for example, who played in certain bands were considered to be permanently displaced as a result of technological developments such as recorded sound, thus ending the great demand for live bands. Any work program designed to utilize their talents would misuse congressional funds. Some artists, writers, and actors were considered to have more aspiration than talent, and thus could never be expected to earn a living in the competitive professional world.42

Opportunities for meaningful employment on the WPA were

and placed on the "awaiting assignment list," pending such time as suitable WPA jobs could be found for them within the limitation of the state quota.

42 Howard, WPA Federal Relief Policy, 239.
reduced by other factors as well. Since retention of workers by the
WPA was theoretically based on the estimation of their opportunity
to make it on their own in the capitalistic system, the most talented
workers were often the first ones released, since many of them
obtained private employment, the least useful ones the longest
retained. This development caused major problems for the WPA.
Creation of books, bridges, and buildings required standards, without
reference to who produced them. No one wanted work so poorly done
as to be undesirable once completed. 43

Opponents of the WPA were always ready to complain about
the quality of relief work. When the WPA sought to raise the standards
of work by retaining the most qualified workers, critics complained
that work rather than relief was emphasized. 44 Relief programs
before the WPA, however, were criticized for giving the same job
and pay to each person regardless of his previous training. Largely
because of the inequities of such programs, WPA officials sought to
improve the system of assignment. Some persons seemed to object
more to the principle of government work relief programs than they

43 Ibid., 248.

44 Ibid., 247.
did to the quality of relief work. 45

The WPA was required by law to make periodical studies of the financial conditions of each project wage earner to see if he remained eligible for relief employment. He was released from employment if the reviewer learned that the worker had enough private income to disqualify him from relief eligibility. If the worker concealed private income when applying for relief, he was subject to criminal prosecution for receiving money under false pretenses. 46

By 1939 the WPA was also required by law to drop from its rolls all relief workers who had been continuously employed for eighteen or more months. They could not be reconsidered until after an expiration of thirty days, and then only when recertified as in need. This requirement had disastrous results for the cultural projects. Some of the most experienced and valuable workers were released when they were most needed for the completion of projects. No one could really replace a writer who had spent years preparing a book for publication, or an actor at the time a play was scheduled

45James H. Crutcher, "Work Projects Administration of Louisiana" (an address delivered to sponsors and public officials, n.d., but apparently March, 1940), 5, FWP-La.
46Ibid., 6-7.
Relief workers were also required by law to accept private employment when the opportunity arose, providing working conditions were reasonable, the pay similar, and the work in keeping with their training. For a period of six months after leaving the project the former WPA employee was given preference for re-assignment, if he was still in need, the project still existed, and an opening for him was available. In some instances the WPA worker would have been better off refusing private employment. Employers could release him at a time when re-employment on the WPA was not possible. 48

The productivity and quality of work by WPA employees was frequently compared to that performed by non-WPA workers. Such comparisons were not entirely fair due to the peculiar nature of the WPA as a work-and-relief organization. They were even more unreasonable due to the nature of the government as a service-rendering rather than a profit-seeking institution. Yet, WPA critics complained that the work done by the relief program was inferior to that done elsewhere. Just how valid was the comparison?

47 Ibid. Veterans were exempt from the eighteen months ruling.

48 Ibid.
Private employers recruited workers to perform particular jobs; the WPA created jobs to utilize the talents of particular workers. Private employers retained the most talented workers for as long as it was profitable; the WPA hired workers because their private employment was not profitable. Private employers had a continuous trained work force which it sought to retain; the WPA often had to train its employees for temporary employment and release them as soon as possible. Private employers kept only the most productive workers; the WPA hired workers on the basis of their need more than their ability.

Private employers used the number of workers they needed to perform a job; the WPA obtained the number of workers that the quotas allowed. These numbers frequently were inadequate for efficient and rapid productions. Private employers adopted policies benefiting them rather than the government; the WPA implemented policies that would ultimately aid private employers. Private employers hired the fewest number of people possible on non-rotating jobs; the WPA rotated employees in order to give some work to the maximum number of people. Private employers expected workers to go where the work was; since they were not expected to move as a condition for employment, the WPA had to make work where the workers were. Private employers hired workers in their most
productive years; the WPA hired persons eighteen years old and older, regardless of their productive abilities. Private employers sought workers on the basis of their relative talents; the WPA hired workers on the basis of their relative needs. Private employers paid their employees amounts needed to obtain and retain their services; the WPA paid employees amounts slightly above relief payments but below private wages. Some private employees had relative assurance of work for the life of their company or the completion of projects; WPA employees were never sure their programs would be funded from one month to the next. This meant that WPA administrators were never certain of the future of their work, but had to work as if their projects had a future. Private workers had the possibility of earning extra pay for overtime; WPA employees had the possibility of overtime work without pay, but with subsequent time off as compensation.

49 James H. Crutcher, Administrator of the Works Progress Administration of Louisiana, wrote to Jacob Baker, Assistant Administrator of the Works Progress Administration: "I have no idea as to what the future has in store for the program in this State. . . . I do hope that somewhere in the program, provision will be made for a continuance of Federal Project #1 during the ensuing year." J. H. Crutcher to Jacob Baker, April 28, 1936, ibid. Lyle Saxon, Director of the Federal Writer's Projects in Louisiana, also expressed in his correspondence uncertainty about the future of his projects.

50 These observations are made on the basis of examining NA, RG 69, as they pertained to Louisiana, and on the general discussion of Howard, WPA and Federal Relief Policy; and Macmahon, Millett, and Ogden, The Administration of Federal Work Relief.
The idea that white-collar as well as blue-collar laborers deserved work in time of need, and the realization that society would benefit from their employment, was not entirely new in 1935. Earlier the Treasury Department and the Civil Works Administration provided funds to employ professional artists to improve the appearance of public buildings. In addition to this program for artists, the Civil Works Administration and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration created a few small projects for financially needy writers and musicians. Although the CWA employed but 3,000 writers and artists on its 4,264,000 work force, some critics opposed even this small number. Hopkins replied to their criticisms by saying: "Hell! They've got to eat just like other people."\(^{51}\)

Perhaps because Hopkins realized that artists had to eat, he insisted from their beginning that the WPA white-collar projects be designed to provide relief first and artistically useful programs second. For artists, the end product of WPA planners was "Federal One." Also known as "Federal Project No. 1" and as the "Four Arts Projects," Federal One was placed within the Division of Professional and Service Projects on September 12, 1935. The

program was designed to provide employment for artists, actors, musicians, and writers on local relief rolls. 52

As if further to dwarf the diminutive artistic projects within the colossal WPA, five other federally sponsored projects were created within the Division of Professional and Service projects. These were: Federal Project No. 2, Historic American Building Survey; Federal Project No. 3, Staffing of State Planning Boards; Federal Project No. 4, Survey of Federal Archives; Federal Project No. 5, Inspection of Plumbing Installations; and Federal Project No. 6, Historic American Merchant Marine Survey. 53

These projects were of short duration. Critics complained that these federally sponsored projects benefited the states more than the federal government. As a result of these complaints all federally sponsored projects, with the exception of Federal Project No. 1, were abolished as of June 30, 1937. When this abolition occurred the Survey of Federal Archives staff was temporarily

52 Frances T. Bourne (comp.), "Preliminary Checklist of the Central Correspondence Files of WPA and its Predecessors, 1933-1944," (March, 1946), FWP-La. The Historical Records Survey was a part of the Federal Writers' Project until October, 1936, when it was set up as an independent unit.

53 Ibid., 61.
transferred to the Historical Records Survey Projects until new state projects could be approved in an administrative change from federal to state sponsorship. However, even Federal Project No. 1 was terminated on June 30, 1939, when Congress required states rather than the federal government to serve as sponsor of these projects.56 Some members of Congress were convinced that the Federal Theater Project was dominated by Communists. They killed this project in July, 1939.57

The general demise of federally sponsored cultural projects did not surprise many persons in 1939. Several signs existed indicating that Congress would kill Federal One as soon as the President lacked sufficient political influence to sustain it. His unsuccessful efforts to pack the Supreme Court, to reorganize the administrative structure of the federal government, and to defeat certain congressmen in the election of 1938 all evidenced a reassertion of congressional independence. With the approach of war in 1939, came the opportunity of Congress to reorganize the WPA. The work of the white collar projects was more closely coordinated

56Bourne (comp.), "Preliminary Checklist," 64. Before 1939, the WPA served as sponsor of the Art Projects, with state or local public agencies or private institutions as co-sponsors.

with the war effort. Two new projects were created, the War Services Project and the Defense, Health, and Welfare Project. Within the War Service Project were placed the projects of art, research, and records. They operated on a reduced scale until the end of the WPA. 58

On December 4, 1942, President Roosevelt ordered the liquidation of the WPA, granting it two months in which to cease all operation. This order was but the death of an organization critically ill since 1939, since after this date most creative life was gone from the cultural projects. Between its creation and its demise, however, Federal One had a richly varied history. Louisiana offers one such variation.

58 Bourne (comp.), "Preliminary Checklist," 64.
CHAPTER II

LAUNCHING THE FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECTS
IN LOUISIANA

Works Progress Administrator Harry Hopkins sought and found capable directors to head the cultural projects. Holger Cahill agreed to direct the Art Project. As an authority on American folk art, he had been associated with the New York Museum of Modern Art and with the Newark, New Jersey, Museum. Heading the Music Project was Nikolai Sokoloff, well-known conductor of the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra from 1918 to 1933. One of the most colorful and controversial directors was Hallie Flanagan. Hopkins knew of her work in experimental theater and asked her to direct the Theater Project.¹

Selecting a capable director of the Writers' Projects was an easy task for Hopkins. He picked fifty-seven year old Henry Alsberg of New York. Alsberg was certainly qualified by past experience to direct the writers' program. He was a graduate of Columbia University from which he received the degrees of A.B.

¹Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, 53.
and LL.B. He spurned the practice of law in favor of a journalism career. For several years he was one of the editors of The Evening Post, New York City. For two years during World War I he served as secretary to the United States Ambassador to Turkey, Abram I. Elkus. After the war he resumed his journalism career by working as a foreign correspondent in Europe. He contributed articles to several American and English newspapers and periodicals, such as the New York Times, the New York World, the Nation, and the London Daily Herald. He also did relief work in Russia as director of an American organization providing famine relief.

Alsberg, following his tour as a foreign correspondent, returned to the United States and became director of the Provincetown Theater in the Greenwich Village section of New York City. When Roosevelt first assumed office in 1933, Alsberg served on Jacob Baker's staff as supervisor of the reports and bulletins issued by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. When Baker became a WPA administrator, he brought Alsberg with him into the national administrative staff.

Baker knew Alsberg's strengths and weaknesses. Alsberg was innovative, compassionate, experienced, widely-traveled, and able to deal with all types of persons. He did, however, lack administrative ability. To minimize this weakness, Baker placed
next to Alsberg two men with administrative talents. He named Reed Harris, former associate of Alsberg in the FERA, to be responsible for most of the Projects' administrative problems. Baker asked George W. Cronyn, former English professor at the University of Montana, to be in charge of editorial matters. Associate Director Cronyn had written plays and books.²

More than the appointment of a national staff was necessary for a successful launching of the Writers' Projects. Program planners had to decide what kind of writers' program to implement. Several proposals were considered, but the prospectus written by Mrs. Katherine Kellock and Clair Laning was the one finally adopted. Since the United States did not have a reliable and comprehensive guidebook, as Europe had with the Baedeker, white-collar workers such as writers, librarians, research workers, craftsmen, and clerical workers could be put to work writing guidebooks. The feasibility of such a plan became evident when Connecticut produced a guidebook under the auspices of the CWA and FERA. Program designers suggested that the FWP prepare an American Guide consisting of five volumes, each one some 600 pages in length.³


³Lyle Saxon, "The Federal Writers' Project in Louisiana," The Bulletin of the Louisiana Library Association, II (September,
After the FWP accepted the guidebook idea, Alsberg's staff divided the United States into five regions, on the basis of topographic features, historical factors, and common automobile, rail, and air routes. The regional arrangement approximated the five regions for which the current American Automobile Association maps were prepared.

The guides were to be priced so that persons of moderate means could buy one or all of them. They were to contain material on "scenic, historical, sociological, geological, commercial, and other matters of general public interest." The guides would be unique by providing in one source information available only in a number of works. They would give readers an understanding of rural and urban America, and they would also serve as a convenient reference source for persons interested in tours, sight-seeing, and landmarks.  


Obviously mindful that some Americans might charge the Writers' Projects with competing against private publishers, project officials quickly pointed out that the guides supplemented, rather than superseded, road guides and other commercial publications. They would in fact, noted the FWP, be of service to all private tour agencies, public carriers, local and national conservation associations, chambers of commerce, civic bodies, and recreational clubs and societies.

Publication of the five regional guides would, in theory, offer other benefits to the public. The depression-ridden tourist traffic could greatly increase: Europeans, seeing the guides in their libraries, would be so inspired from reading them that they would travel to the United States. With a better source of information about their country, Americans would likewise explore their native land. Families having to move would read the guides and then seek to settle in an area with pleasant surroundings, educational opportunities for children, and employment possibilities for the family. Members of hiking and nature clubs could better plan their excursions.

Students as well as travelers would benefit. Since the guides would contain historical information, students would be encouraged to learn more about their country. Community residents
would make greater efforts to preserve their literary and historic
shrines and to exploit their scenic wonders and natural advantages,
because they would have "their notable features presented to the
world through an authentic publication of the government."5

Alsberg explained why the guides were a necessity for
every American. "Right in your own back yard," he wrote, "may
be the beginning of a trail which ends on a mountaintop; or, just
across the road, may meander a small stream which would carry
your canoe to canals and rivers, through mountain ravines and
meadow stretches, to some inland sea or to the very ocean itself."6
But before the traveler could begin his excursion, he first had to
overcome his ignorance as to where the trail or waterway led.
This he would do by reading the guide--or so ran the hopes of the
FWP.

The FWP listed still other benefits from the guides: local
communities would, according to the FWP plans, have their traditions,
customs, and folklore preserved in the guides. Authors employed on
the Writers' Projects could do white-collar work directly related to
their talents and training and thereby retain their self respect and
morale. Publishers would have a new source of publishable

5 Ibid.
6 "John Doe," 3.
materials without having to finance the authors producing them.

Bookstores would benefit by getting a new type of customer, "not the habitual reader, but one who had learned to depend upon the Guides for vacation plans." 7

Plans that first called for five regional guides to be combined into a one-volume guide of the nation were dropped in favor of the plan to produce guidebooks to each of the states. Associate Director George Cronyn felt that the five regional and one national plan would cause too many problems. States would bicker over how they were grouped and over the amount of space given to each state and city. Cronyn urged adoption of a plan that would produce a guidebook for each state and for certain major cities. If this plan worked, then regional guides could be written, as could a one-volume national guide. The planning group saw the wisdom of Cronyn's plan and proposed it to the WPA officials who decided to implement it. Before doing so, however, directors of the state Writers' Projects had to be appointed.

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7Henry Alsberg to All State Directors of the FWP, October 15, 1936, ibid.; "Work of the Federal Writers' Project," Publishers' Weekly (March 18, 1939), a reprint, n. p., ibid. As in this title, "project" was frequently used in the singular sense. Project officials, including national director Henry Alsberg and state director Lyle Saxon, used the plural concept and thus called it the Federal Writers' Projects, since there was more than one project undertaken by the federal writers.
Henry Alsberg chose wisely when he selected Lyle Saxon to head the Writers' Projects in Louisiana. Of all state directors of the FWP, Saxon ranked among the best and quite possibly as the best. Almost every writer discussing the FWP makes reference to Saxon's success as director of the Louisiana FWP. Under his guidance the Louisiana writers' staff wrote one of the best guides produced by the FWP, the New Orleans City Guide. It was on the New Orleans "Best Sellers" list and stands today as a tribute to the FWP and to Saxon.  

Lyle Saxon was born September 4, 1891, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the son of Hugh and Katherine Chambers Saxon. He attended the public schools in the city of his birth where his grandfather, Michael Chambers, owned a bookstore and was city treasurer for forty years. Even as a child Saxon loved books and spent much time in his grandfather's bookstore. He attended Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge from which he was graduated in 1912 with a B.A.

Saxon began his writing career at an early age and perhaps acquired his interest in letters from his mother, society editor for the Baton Rouge State Times. He also associated with the paper as a reviewer of vaudeville shows. He taught school in Florida for one

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8Henry Alsberg to Ellen Woodward, August 17, 1938, ibid.
year but decided writing rather than teaching was his forte. He spent ten years writing for newspapers throughout the country but mainly with the New Orleans Times-Picayune as a reporter, special feature editor, and Sunday editor.

Saxon then decided to devote his time to creative writing, most of which was done in a cabin on the Melrose Plantation in Melrose, Louisiana. He also maintained residences in New York City and New Orleans. He contributed articles to Dial, the New Republic, and Century magazine. Several of his short stories were translated into German and "Cane River" won for him the O. Henry Memorial Prize for 1926. His most notable books were Father Mississippi (1927), Fabulous New Orleans (1928), Old Louisiana (1929), Lafitte, the Pirate (1930), and Children of Strangers (1937). Children of Strangers was on the National Book Retailers list of Best Sellers. With good reason Saxon was known as the "Dean of New Orleans Writers."  

Saxon was appointed State Director of the Louisiana Federal Writers' Projects in October, 1935. Jacob Baker informed Frank H. Peterman, Administrator of the Works Progress Administration in

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Louisiana, that Saxon was the best qualified person to fill the head position of the Writers' Projects in his state. His appointment, according to Field Representative Dariel McConkey, "met with the general favor in Louisiana." McConkey noted that Saxon had no enemies, nor had he "drawn fire from the [Huey] Long political faction."¹⁰

Saxon notified Alsberg by telegram on October 7, 1935, that he was "glad to accept" the position and would start work when instructed to do so. On October 15, 1935, he reported to Peterman, who assigned him office space in the Canal Bank Building of New Orleans. Two days later he wrote Alsberg: "I believe this will be an interesting job and I hope that we can make the Louisiana section of 'The American Guide' worthwhile."¹¹ His hope became a reality.

From the correspondence between Saxon and Alsberg, and that of Alsberg to his staff, the respect the national director had for the state director is very apparent. Both men seemed to have a special understanding of the other's problems and responsibilities. Each seemed to be content with his own position and harbored no


¹¹ Lyle Saxon to Henry Alsberg, October 17, 1935, ibid.
jealousy toward the other. Alsberg constantly gave Saxon an increasing role of importance in the projects.

Saxon's responsibilities were considerable. In addition to serving as director of the Writers' Projects, he was also responsible for the Historical Records Survey until it was separated from the Writers' Projects to become a separate unit in Louisiana in 1937.

Alsberg wanted Saxon to continue as Supervisor of the HRS, as did Dr. Luther Evans, National Director of the HRS. Evans got the impression however, that the State Administration wanted to separate the two projects in Louisiana. Reed Harris, Assistant Director of the Federal Writers' Projects, told Saxon that Evans felt "that in Louisiana it would be very unfortunate if the projects were separated. Under the circumstances, Mr. Alsberg would like to have you continue to handle the Historical Records Survey."

James A. Crutcher, Administrator of the Works Progress Administration of Louisiana, also wanted Saxon to direct both programs. He wrote to Evans: "Mr. Lyle Saxon, who has directed the project since its inception, is well known and highly regarded throughout the State, and possesses the qualities which I feel are so necessary to its proper functions. . . I feel sure that we will have no cause for regret if Mr. Saxon is continued as Director of this project, at least for the time being."
Saxon, however, wanted to separate the two projects as soon as his replacement could be found. He told Evans that he hoped it did not appear he was trying to "keep control of the Historical Records Survey." Saxon recommended John Andreassen for the position of State Historical Records Director. He assumed direction of the project on March 10, 1937.  

Saxon's responsibilities did not, however, lessen with Andreassen's appointment. In October, 1936, Saxon became Acting Field Supervisor of the Coordinating Projects of the Writers' Projects. In this position he was responsible for the guide work in the states of Arkansas, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Louisiana.  

In February, 1939, he became Director of Region VI and was given an increase in salary from $2,900 to $3,200. This appointment was in keeping with the plan to regionalize the FWP work.

As more and more state guide material flowed into Washington, the

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12 Reed Harris to Lyle Saxon, November 3, 1936, ibid.; James H. Crutcher to Luther Evans, October 30, 1936, ibid.; Lyle Saxon to Luther Evans, November 13, 1936, ibid.; Edward A. Davis to Luther Evans, December 4, 1936, ibid.; John C. L. Andreassen to Luther Evans, March 10, 1937, ibid.

13 Reed Harris to Lyle Saxon, October 6, 1936, ibid.
national staff became overburdened with work. Regional offices
were thus established to supervise the editing of state guides and
other works flowing in from the states of each region. After Saxon
edited the work from Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Texas,
and Oklahoma, it went to the Washington staff which then only had
to examine the manuscripts to see that they conformed to their
editorial policy. Saxon's salary was paid by the Louisiana Project,
but travel expenses resulting from his duties as Regional Director
were charged to the Central Office in Washington. 14

Alsberg called on Saxon to assist him in other ways as well.
The personnel of the Arkansas Writers' Project had considerable
difficulty in preparing the state guide. Alsberg said that the guide
needed "considerable editorial work and supervision." He wondered
if Saxon and his "excellent staff" could do the final editorial work on
the Arkansas Guide, work normally done by the Washington office.
Saxon also accepted this assignment from the national director. He
knew that the Arkansas staff might resent his intervention into their
work. His correspondence with them indicates that he was very
aware of this and used considerable diplomacy to minimize their

14 Henry Alsberg to Florence Kerr, February 20, 1939, ibid.;
Henry Alsberg to Lyle Saxon, March 3, 1939, ibid.
resentment. 15

There was a limit to how much Saxon would do for Alsberg. The National Director asked him in September, 1937, to come to Washington to discuss the possibility of "taking the New York City work, ..." Saxon made the Washington trip, but apparently a problem developed in the plans. After a few days in the national capital, Saxon requested and was granted permission to return to his native state, Louisiana, where he preferred to work. "I am," he wrote to Alsberg, "a little embarrassed about all this, inasmuch as I did not apply for the job and would only have taken it because you needed me in New York. I am asking permission to leave Washington today for Boston to settle certain publishing matters with regard to the forthcoming New Orleans book, then to return to Louisiana." 16

There are other indications that the national staff had much respect for Saxon's administrative and editorial abilities. Howard Hunter, Assistant Administrator in charge of Region IV, invited him to attend a conference in Chicago on August 19, 1938. Alsberg also encouraged him to attend this meeting. He stated that Hunter was "very anxious" to meet him because he felt "that you can be very

15 Henry Alsberg to Lyle Saxon, February 17, 1939, ibid.

16 Lyle Saxon to Henry Alsberg, September 20, 1937, ibid.

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helpful on some work that he has undertaken. "17

Reed Harris informed Saxon that Alsberg had received the New Orleans guide. The national director "did not make a careful check of the facts in the New Orleans copy," noted Harris, for he knew that Saxon had assured the "accuracy of all statements." Harris also noted that Alsberg had the impression that some of the material sent in with an earlier submission had been left out to fit the strict editorial guidelines. "Mr. Alsberg urges that you put back any of it that is your judgment would add to the interest of the book." Saxon's judgment was good, and he included materials that made the New Orleans City Guide one of the most successful examples of what could be achieved through "cultural collectivism."18

Alsberg, after selecting Saxon, described the duties of the newly appointed state director. He was authorized "to prove or disapprove, on the basis of their fitness as units of the Federal Writers' Projects, projects calling for the employment of writers and persons of related abilities in the State of Louisiana."19

18 Reed Harris to Lyle Saxon, August 8, 1938, ibid. Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, 42. According to Mangione the FWP was "a governmental adventure in cultural collectivism, the like of which no nation has experienced before or since." 42.

19 Henry Alsberg to Lyle Saxon, October 19, 1935, Louisiana Collection (Louisiana State Library, Baton Rouge). Hereinafter cited as LaCol-LSLBR.
-Henry Alsberg and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt*

-Attending a Louisiana State University v. Tulane football game (left to right) John K. Overton, United States Senator from Louisiana; National WPA Administrator, Harry Hopkins; New Orleans District Attorney, Joe Keenan; Mayor of New Orleans, Robert S. Maestri**

-(left to right) State Director of the WPA in Louisiana, James H. Crutcher; National WPA Administrator, Harry Hopkins**

-Director of the Louisiana Writers' Projects, Lyle Saxon*

*Pictures located in The Dream and the Deal
**Pictures located in the National Archives
Henry G. Alsberg, director of the Federal Writers' Project, and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt
Lyle Saxon,
director of the Project in Louisiana
Saxon selected as two of the major projects the production of a guide to the state and a guide to the city of New Orleans. He then located State Operating Projects in each of the eight congressional districts to assist in the gathering of information for the state guide. These district offices were in New Orleans, Gretna, Lafayette, Shreveport, Monroe, Baton Rouge, Lake Charles, and Alexandria. The Gretna office was soon absorbed by the central office in New Orleans. The other district offices were in operation for more than a year. Each disbanded after completing its assignments or as a result of quota reductions.  

In addition to the State Operating Projects, Saxon organized the State Coordinating Project in New Orleans. It performed all state administrative duties for the FWP as well as the editorial work connected with their activities. Hopkins hoped by creating it to remove the state director of the FWP and his staff from the payroll.

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and staff of the state administrator of the WPA. He felt this would reduce friction between the two and would give the arts programs more independence.  

In July, 1936, all district offices were organized as a statewide project. Among other things this meant that supplies and materials were requisitioned through the state office rather than through the district offices. Under the old system district offices estimated the supplies they needed for a period of six months, but under the new arrangement detailed supply needs for each month were sent to New Orleans.

Another organizational change occurred in late 1939, when the Writers' Projects went from federal to state sponsorship. A problem immediately arose over the question of appointment: did federally appointed officials retain their appointments under state sponsorship? State WPA Administrator J. H. Crutcher thought not, but wanted an official ruling on the question.

Leo G. Spofford, Chief Regional Supervisor of the Division of Professional and Service Projects, responded to Crutcher's inquiry.

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22 Cathryn Cassibry to Mary Jane Sweeney, July 22, 1936, ibid.
Since the projects were no longer federal projects, Spofford would ask the Washington office to cancel letters of appointment. In regard to the state supervisors of the cultural projects she felt it was necessary for both the regional office and the Washington office to approve their positions, but no letter of appointment was necessary. Thus under state sponsorship federal authorities approved persons they previously appointed, and state officials appointed persons they once approved.  

Alsberg not only authorized Saxon to create projects, but "projects calling for the employment of writers and persons of related abilities in the State of Louisiana." Finding qualified personnel for the Writers' Projects was a difficult task. Before the creation of the FWP, white collar workers such as clerks and bookkeepers could obtain relief work more easily than could writers. Realizing this, writers registered for relief as clerks and bookkeepers. Saxon could thus find few writers registered for relief.  

The cultural projects were considered preferred positions on the WPA. The FWP offered writers employment for which they

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} J. H. Crutcher to Lawrence Westbrook, September 22, 1939, FWP-La.; Leo G. Spofford to J. H. Crutcher, October 6, 1939; \textit{ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Lyle Saxon to Henry Alsberg, October 19, 1935, LaCol-LSLBR; Lyle Saxon to Paul Chasez, November 1, 1935, \textit{ibid.}
\end{itemize}
were trained, and provided training for workers to obtain private employment. Many were able to get such work as the Depression lessened. This development kept the Writers' Projects in a state of flux and slowed down the publication of its guide books. The FWP was especially sensitive to the speed with which its books were produced. Before any books were published, the Federal Writers' Project was criticized for wasting the time of writers with useless tasks. This criticism was made less and less as publications appeared and received favorable reviews. Ironically the FWP had more funds from sponsors during the last few months of operation than at any other time.\(^{25}\)

Many writers sought employment on the Writers' Projects. The hours of work were not long, the pay was relatively good, and the work was not too demanding. The program was designed this way in order to give writers time to do creative work during their spare time. In Louisiana the FWP employee normally worked six hours a day, five days a week. The coordinating staff, however, worked four hours on Saturday. The total time of work each month was 132 hours. The payroll periods were from the fifth to the

nineteenth and the twentieth to the fourth of each month. 26

There was a tendency for writers to congregate in publishing centers and in large cities. This caused an unequal distribution of talent across the state. Since the Writers' Projects were statewide, a dearth of writers existed in most areas, a surplus in others. Fortunately for the state director, the employment of a large number of highly skilled writers was not necessary. Training programs enabled the FWP to employ school teachers, lawyers, clergymen, and persons from other learned professions. This diversity of talent actually strengthened the FWP. 27

Writing for the guides and related projects differed from newspaper, magazine, and other feature writing. The news writer began each article with a news point, and the fiction writer with an emotional appeal. According to project publicity, both types of writers were compelled to alter these methods of approach and to develop new ones when presenting information for the guides.

Since in actual project operations major emphasis was given to the compilation of materials, one did not have to be a trained writer to do this work. The editors in New Orleans did the final

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26 Lyle Saxon to Reed Harris, December 29, 1936, LaCol-LSLBR.

writing and editing of guide materials. Not every one on the Writers' Projects wrote. Stenographers, typists, file clerks, messengers, interpreters, and others were vital to the project, although they were not writers. 28

There were four classifications of workers on the FWP: unskilled, intermediate, skilled, and professional. According to the "American Guide Manual," professionals were those who had made writing their profession or who had submitted articles, stories, or reports for publication. Such persons were journalists, editors, historians, research workers, art and literary critics, architects, genealogists, map draftsmen, and other specialists in the fields covered by the guide. Skilled workers were assistants to those in the above mentioned disciplines, as well as secretaries. Intermediate workers had less experience than those persons in the above cited fields. Unskilled workers were even more vaguely defined in the Guide Manual as "those necessary for operation." 29

There were apparently only three classes of workers in the Louisiana Writers' Projects: intermediate, skilled, and professional. In August, 1936, for example, they received a general prevailing wage

28Ibid.


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of $39.60, $52.80, and $58.30 respectively. This meant that the "historian senior" received 44-1/2 cents an hour, the "historian junior" 40 cents, and the typist 30 cents.30

Saxon and members of the state coordinating project earned monthly salaries rather than hourly wages. These were considerably larger as the following indicates: Lyle Saxon, State Director $216.66; Cathryn Cassibry, Secretary to the State Director $100.00; Edward Dreyer, Assistant State Director, $150.00; Joseph Newbrough, State Research Editor $100.00; and Percy Viosca, Jr., State Research Editor, $100.00.31

30Cathryn Cassibry to Mary Jane Sweeney, August 18, 1936, LaCol-LSLBR.

31Lyle Saxon to Edna Brenan, May 26, 1936, ibid. Relief wages were generally larger than non-relief wages. There are instances however where the lower relief rates were the same as the higher non-relief rates. In Baton Rouge, for example, the high relief rate of $68.20 equaled the low-non-relief rate of the same amount, and in New Orleans $81.90 was paid in both categories. The salaries of non-relief project supervisors were basically the same across the state. For example Blanche G. Oliver, Maude T. Helm, and Marguerite Ellis, Project Supervisors of Monroe, Shreveport, and New Orleans respectively, earned a monthly salary of $100.00. Velma Juneau, however, Project Supervisor of Alexandria and Lake Charles, made $125.00 a month, probably because she had responsibility for project operation in two cities, although not necessarily for more project employees.

In addition to establishing salaries by classification of workers and by relief and non-relief status, the FWP also determined salaries by the region a state was in, and the size of the city within each region. There were four regions for pay purposes. Louisiana, along with Arkansas, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Texas, and Virginia, was
Alsberg authorized Saxon to approve projects employing writers and persons with similar abilities, but he could hire only as many as his quota permitted. Saxon originally planned a project to employ 154 persons and began operations based on this number. To his dismay, Acting Field Supervisor Dariel McConkey informed him that his quota was 63 rather than 154. The larger quota was impossible until figures from all of the states went to Washington and a correlation of workers and available funds could be made.32

in Region III. Within the state, cities were classified in four groups according to population. The larger the population, the greater the pay.

There were five cities in Louisiana where Writers' Projects were located with 10 to 25 thousand persons, two with 25 to 50 thousand, one with 50 to 100 thousand, and one with 200 to 500 thousand persons. Class I cities were Alexandria (23,000), Baton Rouge (31,000), Bogalusa (14,000), Gretna (10,000), Lafayette (15,000), Lake Charles (16,000), and Monroe (26,000). There was one Class II city, Shreveport (77,000), and one Class IV city, New Orleans (459,000).

The relief rates for intermediate, skilled, and professional workers in Class I Baton Rouge were $47.30, $61.60, and $68.20 respectively. This compared to the rate paid in Class IV New Orleans for the same classes of workers of $57.20, $74.67, and $81.90. The money each relief worker earned thus depended on all of these factors—job classification, relief status, the region his state was in, and the population of the city in which he worked.

32Lyle Saxon to Henry Alsberg, November 25, 1935, FWPLa.; Dariel McConkey to Lyle Saxon, November 21, 1935, LaCol-LSLBR.
Saxon wrote McConkey that he was "distressed at the possibility of having to hold down [the] quota of workers to 63 for the entire state." He would continue to assume that he had a quota of 154 until Alsberg informed him to the contrary. He then asked Alsberg to permit him to carry out the plan for employing 154 workers. He assured the national director that this was a moderate figure but a necessary one based on the amount of work that had to be done in the state. He would have to alter his plans if the lower figure were required. If he did, the quality of work would be affected. Since publicity had already appeared in newspapers about the project covering the entire state, criticisms would be made if the plans were changed.33

Despite Saxon's protestations, Alsberg limited his initial quota to 63 persons. He assured the state director that he would increase this number as soon as he learned he had sufficient money to do so. "We appreciate the situation you face in Louisiana," he said, "and only can regret our inability to be more helpful in the matter of additional workers."34


34Henry Alsberg to Lyle Saxon, November 30, 1935, LaCol-LSLBR.
After settling the quota dispute, Saxon began the task of employing capable workers for his projects. He received considerable correspondence from persons inquiring about the program, from those applying for positions, and from influential persons writing on behalf of particular applicants. Since his staff was only 63 he was able to travel about the state to interview job applicants. He informed Alsberg on November 19, 1935, that he had spent a week in Shreveport setting up the Writers' Projects and interviewing applicants. He put twelve persons to work out of a quota of sixteen. "Each of these workers," he wrote Alsberg, "I interviewed personally."35

Saxon was not always able to place on the project the quality of worker he desired. When he first began project operations in New Orleans, he received a list of job applicants from the Orleans Labor Assignment Office. All of the applicants were interviewed, but only ten were employed out of a quota of twenty-five. It then became necessary for him to call in persons certified after May 21, 1935, the date required for initial consideration of applicants.36

Alsberg understood the difficulty Saxon had in securing relief workers to report upon particular topics such as art and

35Lyle Saxon to Henry Alsberg, November 19, 1935, ibid.
36Lyle Saxon to Paul E. Chasez, November 1, 1935, ibid.
ORGANIZATIONAL CHART
OF THE
WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION

DIRECTOR OF FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT
DIRECTOR OF WOMEN'S AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES DIVISION

WRITERS' PROJECT
REGIONAL DIRECTORS

DIRECTOR OF LOUISIANA'S WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION

DIRECTOR OF LOUISIANA'S FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT

DIRECTORS OF DISTRICT WRITERS' OFFICES
architecture. In the event he was unable to find them on the relief rolls, he was to get non-relief applicants. If he still had difficulty then he was to check with the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects, or with the local district officer of the Historic American Buildings Survey. These two organizations could help him locate the right persons for his projects and they could also assist him by reviewing guide articles and by collecting materials.  

The State Director of the Writers' Projects could regret not maintaining his maximum quota of workers. Hopkins periodically ordered "freezes" on the number actually employed, regardless of the quota. He sent such an order on March 5, 1936, temporarily prohibiting the addition of persons to the Writers' Projects. This order came at a time when Saxon had not employed his full quota of workers, a matter displeasing to the national director.

Alsberg informed Saxon that replacements could be made when vacancies occurred on the Writers' Projects. These replacements were not specifically restricted to the districts or to the wage classification in which they occurred but could be made anywhere in the state. Since Hopkins' restriction did not apply to the survey of state and local historical records, Saxon could transfer several

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37 Henry Alsberg to Lyle Saxon, November 14, 1935, ibid.
persons working on the guide project to the survey project in order to provide leeway for the additional workers. 38

Despite Alsberg's letter of March 17, 1936, pertaining to Hopkins' quota freeze, and his explanation as to how Saxon could work around it, the Louisiana Director again wrote Alsberg about the matter. He complained that the freeze made it impossible for him to place needed workers upon the payroll. It had held up the project in Baton Rouge, although funds were allocated and released for this project. Saxon requested the national director to permit him to open this office which he needed for completion of the guide.

Saxon explained to Alsberg why the Baton Rouge Office was so important. "I have," he wrote, "secured the cooperation of the Louisiana State University. As you know, this was Mr. Huey Long's greatest stronghold, and there had been some friction in that quarter until very recently." He noted that the President of the university, James Monroe Smith, was very cordial when he went to see him and promised him every consideration possible. "I think it is important that this work be started immediately, for it is difficult to explain this delay to President Smith after my promise to him that the project

38 Henry Alsberg to Lyle Saxon, March 17, 1936, FWP-La.
would set up at once."39

The office in Baton Rouge was eventually opened, but closed when the state quota on July 15, 1937, was reduced by almost half. When Saxon got an increased quota of ten persons in June, 1938, he explained to Alsberg why he wanted to re-open the Baton Rouge office. He wished to recheck part of the guide which dealt with the Baton Rouge area, and he wanted to make use of the "excellent library at the Louisiana State University." He offered a third reason which he considered more important than the others: "It seems necessary to me that a friendship be cemented between the Louisiana State University, Governor Leche and the Writers' Project, for we will need help probably with the Louisiana Guide and with the folklore book which is also nearing completion." To assure this friendship with the university, he planned to spend at least one day of each week in Baton Rouge to "establish a real bond with the Louisiana State University so that we may have its backing now and in the future." Alsberg concurred with Saxon and replied: "I think it a very good idea to re-open the Baton Rouge office and make the contacts in Baton Rouge that [seem] important, especially with the Governor and the University."40


40Lyle Saxon to Henry Alsberg, June 1, 1938, ibid.; Henry Alsberg to Lyle Saxon, June 8, 1938, ibid.
Because of the administrative complexity of the relief program, conflicts in quota assignments occasionally occurred. Assistant Administrator Ellen Woodward said that the quota of workers on the Writers' Projects in Louisiana had to be held down to seventy-four workers. At approximately the same time Alsberg informed Saxon that he was authorized a quota of eighty workers. The Louisiana Director set up the projects on the basis of this number and had funds available for this figure. Upon becoming aware of the conflict Saxon requested Alsberg to inform Woodward that he had authorized a quota of eighty workers. 41

Although quotas were theoretically assigned on the rational basis of correlating workers with funds available at a given time, in reality they seemed to have been made on the basis of old fashioned "horse trading." The state director in Louisiana generally protested quota reductions and insisted that he needed more workers than he was assigned. The national staff apparently expected this reaction and occasionally permitted slight quota increases.

Quotas could be suddenly and drastically reduced. On July 15, 1937, the employment quota was lowered from fifty-two to thirty-six persons. This cut came at a time when members of the

41 Lyle Saxon to Henry Alsberg, August 1, 1936, ibid.
Writers' Projects were engaged in completing the compilation of the state guide, in rewriting a history of the Negro in Louisiana, in editing the final proofs on a book about Louisiana folklore, and in reading the proofs on the guide for New Orleans.

Saxon became desperate. "I am really up against the wall here," he wrote Alsberg, "and it seems a shame to ruin the project just when the work of these people is so essential to its success. I know you will do what you can, but I cannot expect much help from the local WPA set up, as they run everything according to orders. . . . Won't you do what you can to help me keep the project intact. . . ." 42

The local WPA office did, however, try to help Saxon.

Leo Spofford informed Ellen S. Woodward that the drastic cut "resulted in seriously handicapping the efficient operation of this project" and would "mean extending the work over too long a period to achieve the best possible results." She asked the Assistant Administrator to increase the quota from thirty-six to forty persons "in order that this project might operate on a more efficient basis." According to a note written on the bottom of Spofford's letter, the increase was granted. 43

42 Lyle Saxon to Henry Alsberg, June 28, 1937, ibid.
43 Leo G. Spofford to Ellen S. Woodward, August 4, 1937, ibid.
Quotas varied from year to year and often from month to month. In Louisiana they ranged from thirty to eighty-six. They were really the life blood of project operation, since they affected the level of production, the morale of project workers, and the opportunities for employment. They created a great deal of anxiety among project employees and consumed a large part of the time of administrators.

After employing his quota of workers, the State Director of the Writers' Projects in Louisiana began program operations, which in large part consisted of gathering information for possible inclusion in the state guide or in other publications. To assist the project in this task, use was made of newspaper editors, volunteer assistants, and volunteer consultants.

From the start of the Writers' Projects, Alsberg sought to get persons not officially connected with his program to assist him in gathering information. On November 30, 1935, he wrote to state newspaper editors asking them for such assistance. He presented a plan which he hoped would obtain for them exclusive stores about their communities. The information they gathered could also be used to assure their cities of a "first-class write-up in the American guide."44

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44 Henry Alsberg to Editors or Publishers, November 30, 1935, ibid.
He reminded the editors that most communities had historic buildings or other physical objects such as trees, valleys, and lakes about which legends had developed. Quite possibly some of the oldest local residents recalled the incidents making these objects legendary. In order to avoid permanently losing the information, they needed to be interviewed as soon as possible. As an added incentive to gather information for the FWP, Alsberg told the editors that more tourist trade would come to their communities if they gathered colorful and unique data. 45

Another source of information available to the editors came from families and individuals possessing old books, manuscripts, letters, and other valuable records. When properly appraised they could find their way into a local library or museum where everyone would have the opportunity to examine them. As an example Alsberg noted that one FWP worker had already found a valuable letter written by Abraham Lincoln. 46

Alsberg's effort to get newspaper editors to assist the FWP gather information did not work as planned. A little over a month after writing the editors he notified state project directors about what

45 Ibid.

46 "WPA Writers' Projects locates long-lost Lincoln manuscript," February 12, 1936, Ibid.
had gone wrong. Editors were gathering information, but not for the FWP. Instead, they used the materials for feature stories in their own papers. The distressed Alsberg wrote: "Almost daily clippings or letters arrive to show that the editors have been carrying out the plan--without notifying us. Hence, we are in danger of losing the benefit of their cooperation." He urged the state directors to notify the newspaper editors in their respective states to inform the FWP when they gathered information in order that project officials might collect it.47

Alsberg also relied upon volunteer assistants to aid the FWP. There was little likelihood, he wrote Saxon, that towns with less than ten thousand persons would have members of the Writers' Projects working in them. He would thus have to rely upon volunteer assistants living in these towns to provide him with information. Alsberg instructed him how to obtain their help. After getting a list of these small towns from a United States Official Postal Guide, he would divide them into groups corresponding to the WPA districts in the state. The list would be sent to each District Supervisor who would confer with his local consultants for suggestions on ways to reach persons willing to serve as volunteer assistants.

47Henry Alsberg to State Directors, January 14, 1936, ibid.
In the event there were no local consultants, librarians, school principals, or other suitable individuals were to be contacted to see if they would serve as volunteer assistants. Those agreeing to help were to be impressed with the importance of writing thorough reports. These were to be sent to the District Supervisor, who would then forward them to the State Office in New Orleans. There they would be filed alphabetically by towns and then checked for accuracy against reliable sources about the communities.\textsuperscript{48}

Somewhat similar to the functions performed by volunteer assistants were those carried on by local and state consultants serving on advisory committees. The State Advisory Committee consisted of selected authorities on topics covered in the guide. Local supervisors also formed local advisory committees. Unlike volunteer assistants, whose primary responsibility was the collection of data, advisory committee members criticized essays submitted to them by project officials.

Saxon and his assistant, Edward Dreyer, had a state advisory committee of twenty-four persons. Some of them apparently were appointed as honorary members to lend prestige to the Writers' Projects, or else interpreted their appointments as such. When the

\textsuperscript{48}Henry Alsberg to Lyle Saxon, December 17, 1935, \textit{ibid}.
latter occurred no great harm resulted, for specialists other than those on the advisory committee were asked to comment on particular essays.49

During the winter of 1935, unemployed persons desiring work on the Writers' Projects were not primarily interested in the determination of project plans, the appointment of state directors, the adoption of work quotas, or the selection of projects. Their main concern was convincing Lyle Saxon that they deserved work on the Louisiana Writers' Projects.50


50 The names and occupations of the members of the Advisory Committee were as follows: Roger Baudier, on the staff of The Catholic Action; Nicholas Bauer, Superintendent of New Orleans Public Schools; Frans Blom, Head of the Department of Middle-American Research; Essae M. Culver, Librarian, Louisiana Library Commission; N. C. Curtis, Architect and author; Herman Deutsch, Author and on staff of New Orleans Item; Caroline Durieux, Director, Louisiana Art Project; Dr. Edward A. Ficklen, Surgeon and scholar; Moise H. Goldstein, architect; Richard Kirk, poet and professor of English; Dr. Fred B. Kniffen, Department of Geology at Louisiana State University; Richard Kirk, Architect and Director of Historic Buildings Survey in Louisiana; Dr. Leon Ryder Maxwell, Director, School of Music, Newcomb College; Rt. Rev. James Craik Morris, Episcopal Bishop of Louisiana; Dr. Roger P. McCutcheon, Dean of Graduate School, Tulane University; Charles A. O'Neil, Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Louisiana; Dr. Charles W. Pipkin, Dean of Graduate School, Louisiana State University; Rt. Rev. Joseph Francis Rummell, Catholic Archbishop of Louisiana; Cleveland Sessums, Critic on staff of New Orleans Times-Picayune; George E. Simmons, Head of the
Department of Journalism, Tulane University; Dr. H. W. Stropher, Director, School of Music, Louisiana State University, Dr. Martin ten Hoor, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Tulane University; and Robert J. Usher, Librarian, Howard Memorial Library. The name of one committee member was not legible.
CHAPTER III

APPEALS FOR WORK

As State Director of the Louisiana Writers' Projects, Lyle Saxon corresponded with many persons seeking employment on his projects. The letters he received reveal much about his responsibilities as administrator and also indicate the various appeals correspondents used in seeking a job. The appeals varied but were similar in certain respects. Some applicants played on Saxon's emotions by explaining their dire economic conditions. Some appealed to his vanity by profusely praising his books as great literary masterpieces. Other applicants sought to force him to hire them by having influential politicians or community leaders intervene on their behalf. A few who knew Saxon before he became State Director hoped their past friendship would give them an edge over other applicants.

Saxon understood the difficult time most of the job applicants were having. Unlike some WPA administrators he answered all correspondence with personal letters. He offered more encouragement to the qualified than to the unqualified applicants. Saxon tried to be forthright and honest without hurting those who had already
experienced many disappointments in life. He seemed to hope that every applicant could find employment, if not on the Writers' Projects then with other WPA projects or with private enterprise. Saxon did not hesitate to tell some applicants that they stood a better chance for employment on some other WPA program. He would provide the applicants with the name and address of the official they should contact and encouraged them to do so immediately.

Hugh Evans Wall of Napoleonville sought to use his past association with Saxon as a leverage to get employment on the Writers' Projects. When first learning of the writers' program he contacted United States Democratic Senator Pat Harrison of Mississippi. The Senator, in turn, wrote to Alsberg who suggested that Wall get in touch with Saxon.¹

Wall was delighted to learn that his old friend Saxon had been appointed Louisiana Director. "I just this minute found the story about you having been appointed... and frankly hasten to write you," he said. The last time he had written Saxon he failed to mention that his family had been on relief for almost a year. He now believed that Saxon could get him a job on the writers' program.²

¹Henry G. Alsberg to Pat Harrison, October 18, 1935, La Col-LSLBR.
²Evans Wall to Lyle Saxon, October 17, 1935, ibid.
Saxon informed Wall on October 21, 1935, that the LWP had not yet begun operations, but he soon expected them to start. He was uncertain about the salary scale, but he hoped it would be fairly high. He suggested that Wall make an application for a position in Napoleonville. After receiving this letter, the unemployed writer concluded that with the backing of a Senator and the friendship of Saxon, he had a job. "It is a great relief to hope that something will evolve by the 1st of November," he optimistically wrote to Saxon. "I surely need it."  

The first two weeks of November passed but Wall heard nothing from Saxon. He desperately wrote the State Director: "The grocer has stopped my credit and we are about to be put out for non-payment. Vering on desperation. Can you possibly tell when I may expect something to do on the Writers' Project? Nobody here expects any WPA project to get underway until about January. I can't possibly hold out until then."  

This plea placed Saxon in an embarrassing situation. He informed his friend that he hardly knew what to tell him since

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3 Lyle Saxon to Evans Wall, October 21, 1935, ibid.
4 Evans Wall to Lyle Saxon, October 23, 1935, ibid.
5 Evans Wall to Lyle Saxon, November 11, 1935, ibid.
Washington had not yet released funds necessary to start the Writers' Projects in his district. He hoped that the money would arrive within fifteen days. 6 Eleven days later he again wrote Wall informing him of Washington's tardiness in releasing funds necessary for starting work in his district. In an obvious attempt to cheer up Wall he wrote: "I am sorry that you are having such a bad time, but what you say about your own creative writing is the best news that I have had in some time. My own creative writing stopped the day I took this job." 7

Wall next shifted his attention from Saxon to the District Supervisor of his area, Miss Mary Jane Sweeney. On February 9, 1936, he asked for an appointment to see her. He anxiously waited for her reply during the remainder of the month and through the first week of March. 8 On the seventh of March he again wrote Sweeney, "I have heard nothing further from you and the suspense is terrible! Won't you write me," he implored, for his hope was "wearing a bit thin." 9

Sweeney finally answered Wall's letter on March 7 and

6 Lyle Saxon to Evans Wall, November 19, 1935, ibid.
7 Lyle Saxon to Evans Wall, November 30, 1935, ibid.
8 Evans Wall to Mary Jane Sweeney, February 9, 1936, ibid.
9 Evans Wall to Mary Jane Sweeney, March 7, 1936, ibid.
explained why she had been so tardy in writing him. Only the day before was she able to secure a typewriter and a typist. The demands on her time by her new position also caused her to delay her reply. After explaining her woes, Sweeney then informed Wall why she would not hire him. His wife worked and made more money than the workers on her project. She concluded that it was "best your wife be the one to be employed." She also said that there was no certainty as to how long the project would last and that Wall would have to move to Lafayette or be separated from his family if he got a writers' job. In short, she could "do absolutely nothing to help" him.  

Wall next decided to attempt more direct action. He visited friends and relatives in Baton Rouge hoping that they would see Saxon on his behalf. He then notified Saxon that Judge John Fred Odom, W. B. Hatcher, and his cousin Bob Petit might see him. "Lyle," he pleaded, "things are really getting desperate--I mean the absolute necessities. For the sake of whatever Gods there used to be, before this depression swept away everything--if you can help me to something in Lafayette, New Orleans or Baton Rouge--please do it soon!" As an afterthought he observed to Saxon: "Glad you are out of the stress of all this. It's hell. Write me something either

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10 Mary Jane Sweeney to Evans Wall, March 7, 1936, ibid.
good or bad. Anything is easier to face than suspense."^{11}

Wall, however, was kept in suspense for another two months. Sweeney on August 26 again apologized for her procrastination. The "rush in the office" had "not permitted an answer to your letter, note and card any sooner." She assured him that her "answer was not 'intercepted' as you were lead [sic] to believe." Although only an administrator for a few months, she dismissed Wall's request with the following sentences: "Your application is on file. Should the Federal Writers' Project have need of one of your qualifications at a later date I shall keep you in mind. That is all that can be said at present."^{12} It is not difficult to imagine, however, that Wall probably had much more to say about the Writers' Projects, Sweeney, and his friend Saxon. Finally, after nine months of writing letters, filling out application forms, visiting WPA offices, offering to move, and basing his hope on a friendship with Saxon, Wall's suspense at last had come to an end. He failed to obtain employment on the Louisiana Writers' Project.

One of the more despairing letters to Saxon came from Oliver M. Thomason of Leesville. Thomason seemingly resented

^{11}Evans Wall to Lyle Saxon, March 7, 1936, ibid.

^{12}Mary Jane Sweeney to Evans Wall, August 26, 1936, ibid.
being in economic straits he had no part in creating, while at the same time having to apply for relief work he had no hope of getting. When the WPA was created Thomason followed the procedures he felt necessary for securing relief employment. He qualified for relief work, secured a relief card, got endorsements from Democratic politicians, and corresponded with WPA officials in Washington and Louisiana.

Since he had experience as a news writer Thomason applied for a position in the Writers' Projects in December, 1935. On March 3, 1936, he decided to go through his letter file to re-examine all of the letters he had written and received pertaining to his job application. He asked Saxon if it would do any good to send the letters back to the "head office at Washington for another 'sifting' down." Thomason doubted that it would, for although he was on relief, a WPA official in Alexandria advised him that he did not have "the proper quality and vintage of relief. Mine was only 'surplus commodities' relief, and besides I went on after a given date, which served the charm string," he complained.13

Thomason concluded that he had mistakenly tried to sustain himself and his family during the depression: "I thought I was doing

the big, brave thing and even boasted about it" in managing to keep a
car, typewriter, and a few favorite books by occasionally getting
temporary newspaper employment. "But I see I should have thrown
up my hands and sat down--then I would have been eligible for some
of this 'made work.'"14

Thomason continued his tale of woe to Saxon perhaps to
impress the State Director with his writing abilities or to cause
Saxon to feel so sorry for him that Saxon would offer him a job.
Thomason could not understand why he, a loyal democrat, should
have such a hard time. "And here I am," he lamented, "plugging
for the Administration (because I believe if given time and the power
Mr. Roosevelt is headed right), and nothing in sight but a food we
call 'slumguillion,' and the prospects for that not very brilliant."15

Nor could Thomason justify his economic plight with what
he, a devoted father, had done for his country. "I confess I grow a
little sarcastic once in awhile. Because I had the good judgment to
do my share in the propogation [sic] of the species a long time ago,
and am not therefore, now the daddy of a house-full of kiddies (God
bless 'em), I am not considered worth saving." What made this so

14Ibid.

15Ibid.
hard to take was that he once had a son who "volunteered to help make the world safe for democracy (or was it Democracy?), and was never returned to me, yet....[W]ell, I'm not complaining," he said, in obvious misstatement. 16

Saxon must have wondered why Thomason selected him as an audience for the man's troubles. Thomason answered this question in the last paragraph of his letter: "My motive in writing this letter was to see if you had any suggestion to make. Your letters were the most 'human' of all that I have received." 17

"Human" letters were no substitute for jobs, however, and it was work that Mrs. Mary Noble wanted. Mrs. Noble felt qualified to work on the FWP because of the education of her daughter, the kindness of her parents, and her own association with the Eastern Star. She feared Saxon might think her unqualified because she had neither a college degree nor a high school diploma. She assured him, however, that she was an educated woman. "I have gained much, that one does not get through books," ran her conventional argument, "therefore do not think this would hamper my progress." Then, after suggesting that formal education was not important, she tried

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
to show how much formal education she actually had. Although she had gone only through the tenth grade, she had graduated from a business college in Shreveport with majors in "shorthand and typewriting." She had also associated with educated people and from them learned much that one does not gain from books. The educated person with whom she closely associated was her daughter, a college graduate and high school teacher. Her daughter "traveled extensively also, which is an education within itself," she informed the State Director, "and through her, I have learned a great deal." Mrs. Noble also argued that she was qualified for work on the Writers' Projects because her parents were so wonderful. "My parents celebrated their sixty-fourth wedding anniversary February 1st. My mother is eighty-two and my father eighty-eight years young." In addition to their antiquity they were also wonderful because they were "active, live in their own home, take care of themselves, are independent, attend church, social and political meetings, take an interest in all civic affairs, and everything fun." These active parents had managed during their married life to have five children, "all of whom are living."
Saxon also learned that Mrs. Noble's mother "was the first lady to register and vote in Louisiana. She also had the pleasure of riding on the first train in Louisiana." And, undoubtedly the most important event of all: "When Jefferson Davis visited the college she attended and was introduced to the girls, he kissed her hand, she being the only one thus honored."²¹

In addition to associating with an educated daughter and wonderful parents, Mrs. Noble had contact with ladies of the Eastern Star. She did more than associate, however, for she held important positions within the organization and was several times honored by it. She even held one high position for three years, "an honor conferred upon one only in a life-time, and for three years only."²²

Saxon thus had information about Mrs. Noble's Eastern Star accomplishments, her daughter's education, and the virtue of her parents, but little about her qualifications for the Writers' Projects.

Some applicants apparently felt that personal qualifications were not as important as one's desire to become a member of the Writers' Projects. Mrs. D. W. Derrick of Mansfield asked Saxon: "Is there some way I may assist you? Am not eligible for relief but

²¹Ibid.
²²Ibid.
I would so like to aid in the research work. Honest confession! I want to be a recognized genealogist—and must prove my efficiency along certain lines—This seemed an opportunity—was it? 23

Mrs. R. B. Murphy of Minden also felt that her interest in genealogy might qualify her for a position. She admitted that she had no writing experience, but she believed that she had the ability to "'get on' to the knack of doing this work." She also wrote: "I have, for some time been interested in genealogical work, having gathered quite a lot of material on various sides of my family." If Saxon doubted her genealogical talents, she suggested he contact her first cousin, Prentice L. Smith of New Orleans, Saxon's former associate on the staff of the New Orleans Times Picayune. 24

After receiving so many letters from applicants using subtle and not too subtle appeals, Saxon must have found the letters of Miss Laura Lee Spencer both refreshing and pathetic. She first learned of the Writers' Projects from an article in the Louisiana Weekly, a Negro newspaper. After reading it, she contacted John P. Davis, Secretary to the Joint Committee of National Recovery, who instructed her to write Saxon.

24 Mrs. R. B. Murphy to Lyle Saxon, June 18, 1936, ibid.
On Christmas Day, 1935, Spencer informed the State Director that she was a writer who was interested in obtaining employment. "I am a writer," she said. "Have plenty of Dramas. Both School and Church. I have a Book on a Composition. Sub. Our Progress since Slavery. I think is very interest." In the light of certain social standards of his day, Saxon did two unusual things. He courteously answered her letter and addressed her as "Miss" Spencer. He informed her that the project in her district had not yet begun as funds from Washington were late in arriving. He suggested that she complete an application form in Lafayette, after which she might be interviewed.

On January 11, 1936, Spencer notified Saxon that she had received his letter but could not understand his instructions. She asked him to "write and please explain to me what to tell the one in Lafayette. please answer soon and explain. please help me Mr. Saxon to get in" the Project. "[I am] very anxious to be a writer of my race or in my city." Saxon again recommended that she write Isaac Wooster,

25 Mrs. R. B. Murphy to Lyle Saxon, June 18, 1936, ibid.
26 Lyle Saxon to Laura Spencer, January 7, 1936, ibid.
27 Laura Spencer to Lyle Saxon, January 11, 1936, ibid.
District Director, Lafayette, stating that she wished to make application for work. He asked her to provide information about her qualifications as a writer, her education, and her publications, if any. He then advised: "As the number of workers for our project will be necessarily small, I would suggest that you also make application for work with the Teachers' Projects or some similar project now underway." 28

In mid-February she again wrote to Saxon saying that Wooster never replied to her letter of January 19. She was about to give up but wondered if Saxon might not write Wooster instructing him to send her an application form. 29 She also wrote to Wooster and said: "Mr Wooster I Wish to make application with the Federal Writers. I am not no high school gradute. I stop in sixth grade. My desire always Was to beCome a Writer. When at school I Wrote Wrote good stories. My teachers always admire them. I rather Write Dramas both School and Church Dramas. poems-song to." 30

Spencer wrote to Saxon once more telling him that Wooster would not answer her correspondence. Every day she waited for a

28 Lyle Saxon to Laura Spencer, January 18, 1936, ibid.
29 Laura Spencer to Lyle Saxon, February 15, 1936, ibid.
30 Laura Spencer to Isaac Wooster, April 15, 1936, ibid.
letter from him but to no avail. She begged Saxon to help her get on the Writers' Projects. "Our Sunday School is practicing a Church Drama," she continued, "Lazarus at the Rich man Door it seem to be interesting. We very seldom have church Dramas I mean right from the Bible." She felt sure Saxon would help her since he "took, pain enough to tell me how to Write for a application." She planned to visit him in June when she attended a National Sunday School Convention in New Orleans. 31

After three months the correspondence with Spencer came to an end. Saxon informed her on April 21 that he could not presently hire any additional workers and that the project in her district was almost completed. "I am sincerely sorry that we cannot find work for you on the Writers' Projects," he concluded. 32 But while he could not find work for Spencer, a movement was underway to make possible the hiring of qualified Negroes on an all-black project writing the history of their race from the time of their arrival on slave ships until the 1930's. The person partially responsible for generating the momentum for this project in Louisiana was James B. LaFourche.

31Laura Spencer to Lyle Saxon, April 15, 1936, ibid.
32Lyle Saxon to Laura Spencer, April 21, 1936, ibid.
LaFourche contacted John Davis, Executive Secretary of the Joint Committee on National Recovery, hoping that Davis could help him get a position on the FWP in Louisiana. LaFourche reminded Davis that he was qualified for such a position, for he had a B.A. from New Orleans University, had done additional study at New York University, had received editorial training at the Columbia University School of Journalism, and had served for several years as editor of the Negro Louisiana Weekly newspaper. Despite these credentials, however, when LaFourche applied for work on the WPA he was given a card to work as a common laborer "digging and ditching."33

Impressed with the credentials and need of LaFourche, Davis contacted Alsberg who suggested he write to Saxon in Louisiana.34 Apparently not satisfied with Alsberg's suggestion, Davis then wrote to Jacob Baker about LaFourche. The only information Baker could give was that he had given and would continue to give instructions to the directors of all projects to "pay careful attention to the employment of Negroes as well as whites for work which they are best suited."35

33James B. LaFourche to John Davis, November 30, 1935, FWP-La.

34Henry G. Alsberg to James LaFourche, December 30, 1935, ibid.

35Jacob Baker to John Davis, December 19, 1935, ibid.
Davis became convinced that no real effort was being made to employ LaFourche on the Writers' Projects. He thus wrote to Aubrey Williams and sent copies of his letter to Hopkins and Alsberg. Davis said that a serious problem existed in getting Negro white-collar workers on the various art projects. The excuses given for this varied with each correspondent. Alsberg said that few Negroes were hired on his project "due to the lack of applications from Negroes." Davis said that this was simply not so. In reality Negroes applied for white-collar positions but were normally assigned to the unskilled manual projects. He alone had received as of the date of his letter 300 applications from blacks seeking employment on the art projects. At least two-thirds of them, Davis estimated, were qualified to work on these cultural projects. 36

Failure to hire Negroes on white-collar projects was nothing new, Davis told Williams. Negroes had the same problem when they sought employment with the CWA, FERA, and the WPA projects. Whenever they complained about discrimination they were told to document its existence, a request which was made to discourage them in a mire of "red tape." Negro leaders "met with the sophistic statement" that no funds existed to make documentary studies of

36 John Davis to Aubrey Williams, December 6, 1935, ibid.
racial discrimination "or that the social mores of the South will not admit of such appointments." Because of "failure on the part of the Works Progress Administration to cry out against such treatment," thousands of qualified blacks were compelled "to live in conditions of indescribable misery." 37

Davis was convinced that conditions for blacks could not improve unless his "realistic solution" to the problem was adopted by officials of the WPA. This solution was the utilization of an "equitable percentage" of WPA funds for the creation of a board in Washington for the purpose of reviewing applications of Negroes seeking WPA white-collar employment. Davis maintained that a precedent for this idea occurred when the N. Y. A. retained funds to hire Negro graduate students. 38

Another aspect of his solution was the appointment of Negro administrative assistants for each of the major white-collar WPA projects. Davis said that he was aware of the "hackneyed excuse" that would be raised - that if a Negro were appointed to each of these projects then a representative of every other minority group would similarly have to be appointed. Davis assured Williams that other

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
groups would not make such a demand, but even if they did, appointment of all of them "would not be too much of a price to pay for relief of injustice." 39

Davis asked Williams to say in "plain and unequivocal" language whether or not his two proposals would be implemented. Davis reminded Williams that his letter had the backing of all the officers and members of the organizations appearing on his letter head. 40

Jacob Baker apparently ignored this veiled threat and informed Davis that it was "not possible to give effect" to his suggestion. He assured Davis that Negroes were already employed on the various arts projects, and that he would continue to instruct the directors of these projects to "give careful attention to the employment of negroes as well as whites for work for which they are best suited." He further informed him that he was asking Louisiana officials in regard to LaFourche "to make the most effective use of [LaFourche's] abilities." 41

Davis continued to show his interest in LaFourche by writing this time to Saxon. Davis noted that despite Alsberg's assurances

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39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Jacob Baker to John Davis, December 19, 1935, Ibid.
that regional directors were not opposed to hiring Negroes on their projects, he found it odd that the South had no Negro white-collar workers, nor funds to hire them. He felt that "common justice" would require a proportional employment of Negroes in white-collar projects, since only they could write the account of Negro life in New Orleans for the American Guide. He hoped that Saxon would drop the "excuse" that a lack of funds was the only reason for not hiring "Negro writers every bit as capable and doubly as needy as white writers you have employed." Davis then told the Louisiana Director, "...I shall expect to hear a favorable reply from you." 

Saxon responded to Davis by saying that he was surprised by the implications of the letter. He quickly pointed out that Negro workers were employed in the South, for Louisiana had on the Writers' Project a Negro writer, Robert McKinney. He assured Davis that he employed writers strictly on the order of their application and writing ability, not on the basis of race. "Robert McKinney was the first Negro to apply, and he was given the last available job with the Writers' Projects," wrote Saxon. To show that he was without prejudice he informed Davis that he interviewed all Negro applicants for the writers' projects. He suggested work on other projects

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42 John Davis to Lyle Saxon, December 12, 1935, ibid.
because he was aware of the difficulties of the educated Negro in the South. "I have gone out of my way to do what I could," he told Davis. 43

LaFourche, Saxon said, was but one of several Negroes he would like to employ if he but had the money. He had come to the conclusion that the best hope of their employment was the creation of a project employing Negroes to gather material for a history of the Negroes in Louisiana for possible inclusion in the American Guide. Since Davis was so interested in Negro employment, Saxon suggested he use his influence to help him get funds from Alsberg for such a project. 44

Alsberg was apparently unaware of Saxon's intentions to create this new project when he wrote to Davis about LaFourche soon after Saxon had. He noted that the only problem he could foresee in hiring him was that LaFourche wanted to be considered before all other applicants, and that he desired to do research outside the scope of the American Guide program. In regard to racial discrimination on the FWP, Alsberg assured Davis that none existed in the states


44 Ibid.
where he had made investigations. For instance, in New York all qualified Negroes on the relief rolls were employed. In Washington "a very fair proportion of negroes" were also employed on the FWP. His staff would soon be in the field to learn if discrimination existed and to end it if it did. He further assured Davis that he would appoint a Negro to supervise the American Guide work dealing with "the Negro population of the country," provided he got permission from Hopkins to do so.45

45Henry Alsberg to John Davis, December 16, 1935, ibid. Although WPA officials such as Alsberg and Williams denied racial discrimination on the art projects, their conclusions varied from the ones reached by Negro leaders, especially those in New York City. According to "A Brief prepared by the Negro Arts Committee Federal Arts Council," Negro discrimination existed from "the inception of WPA." Various organizations, such as the Urban League, the Negro Actors Guild, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Negro Conference, and the WPA Division of the Newspaper Guild, "tirelessly protested every form of Negro discrimi-
ination on the arts projects."

In June, 1937, a delegation of seventy-five workers on the Arts Projects demanded to see Aubrey Williams in Washington and refused to leave until they did so. Williams assured the group that the WPA would not tolerate any Negro discrimination.

The brief, however, maintained that discrimination did exist. The FWP in New York also attested "to the fact that Negroes suffer discrimination... Of 525 workers employed on January 16, 1936, only 37 were Negroes; of 58 clerical workers only two were Negroes; and of 50 supervisors there was... only one Negro."

Racial discrimination also existed on the Theater Project in New York City. Negro modern dancers asked to be used in general dance productions. "They were politely and round aboutly informed that those of them with light complexions might be used. For the dark complexioned Negro modern dancer, there is apparently no place in New York City Federal Theater."

In regard to play production, most of the plays that were
Saxon was not only irritated that Davis claimed racial discrimination in his administration for not hiring LaFourche, he was also upset that Alsberg wrote LaFourche telling him to again see Saxon in regard to assignment. Saxon assured Alsberg that although LaFourche was intelligent and had some "interesting information," he was but one of twenty Negroes referred to him by Davis. He could not hire them for they applied after the quota was filled. He simply could not in good conscience place LaFourche before the Negroes who had applied before him. To do so would cause them to complain "to say nothing of the 75 applications for work with the Writers' Project made by white persons."

Saxon told Alsberg that the "plight of the educated Negro in the South [was] most unfortunate." He wondered if Alsberg could not do more to help them as well as himself by setting up a project for blacks to write the history of their people in Louisiana from the time they first arrived until the 1930's. He believed that a publisher produced were written by white American playwrights. "The Negro playwright had begun to look upon the Federal Theater with apprehension. He has met with very little success" and was "turning to other forms of fiction in expressing himself," stated the brief.

46 Henry Alsberg to Lyle Saxon, December 13, 1935, LaCol-LSLBR.

could be found for such a book which he was willing to edit. This project, he felt, would be the best solution to the "delicate... situation" he found himself in, despite his efforts to avoid being "influenced in any way by local politics."\(^48\)

As Alsberg considered Saxon's request for a Negro project in Louisiana, he also had to bear in mind Baker's instructions to him about the state's project. Baker felt that the Negroes in Louisiana could get a "fair chance" under Saxon only if Alsberg sent him a letter of instruction to give them a chance. Baker further warned Alsberg that he should be on guard against Saxon, who might "use the desirability of putting on some Negroes as a lever to squeeze out of us more money than he needs."\(^49\)

The movement for a Negro project in Louisiana gained new impetus when Edgar B. Stern, President of the Board of Trustees at Dillard University, a Negro school in New Orleans, informed Alsberg of his desire to cooperate "to the fullest possible extent" in developing a FWP Negro project in New Orleans. Stern assured Alsberg that Dillard had an excellent faculty which could supervise the work done by some of the institution's needy students. He felt

\(^{48}\) Lyle Saxon to Henry Alsberg, December 18, 1935, ibid.

\(^{49}\) Jacob Baker to Henry Alsberg, December 23, 1935, ibid.
certain that Alsberg was aware of "the traditional difficulty in the lower South of mixed projects" and could for this reason understand his desire "for getting the granting of funds for an all-Negro project...".

Enthusiasm for the Dillard project was also expressed by Lawrence D. Reddick, a member of the Department of History at Dillard. He told Alsberg that it was only fair that he allocate the necessary funds for the project to begin at once. Materials were available for a study of the history of the Negro in Louisiana, competent unemployed Negroes to compile the history were registered for relief, and the need for such a history was "overwhelming.

Alsberg must have been convinced that the Dillard Project was worthy. He noted to Saxon, "I have been cudgeling my brains, trying to find out what I can do about this whole business of employing some more negroes in your state."

In January, 1936, he authorized

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51 Reddick in 1934 was instrumental in getting the Federal Emergency Relief Administration to gather ex-slave narratives. He felt that the true history of slavery and Reconstruction could not be told "until we get the view as presented through the Slave himself."

52 Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, 257; Lawrence D. Reddick to Henry Alsberg, January 8, 1936, FWP-La.

Saxon to hire ten extra people, five of whom could serve on the Negro project at Dillard. The details of the all-Negro project were worked out by Saxon and Reddick and will be discussed in another chapter.

Besides revealing the various appeals the job applicants used, Saxon's correspondence also is instructive as to the woes some workers experienced while on relief. This story provides an informative narrative of life on the Writers' Projects.

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^ Henry Alsberg to Lyle Saxon, January 10, 1936, ibid.
Disappointments arose for those obtaining employment on the Writers' Projects as well as for those who did not. Employed writers did not hesitate to besiege Saxon with unending complaints. The problems they encountered were partly the result of their own personalities as well as the nature of the WPA as a relief program.

Lyle Saxon was a man of remarkable patience. This trait was severely tested as a result of his association with Miss Mary Jane Sweeney, one of the more colorful persons with whom Saxon worked on the Writers' Projects. A politician to the core, Sweeney used all of her influence to get her appointment as District Supervisor of Lafayette.

She first wrote Saxon on October 17, 1935. "I am not a writer," she quickly pointed out, but rather a school teacher. She taught English in a number of Louisiana towns, including Natchitoches, Abbeville, Terrebonne, Tallulah, and Jennings. She received an A.B. degree from Louisiana State Normal College (now Northwestern State University) and an M.A. from Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee. She was especially proud of her thesis, "A Study of the..."
Carnival of New Orleans," and constantly offered to let people read
the study of Mardi Gras, although they had not requested to do so.
She informed Saxon, an authority on the subject, that she had done
extensive research for her thesis. This research consisted of
spending three months in New Orleans. "Not only did I confer from
time to time with the Captains of Comus and Proteus and the
Manager of Rex," she told Saxon, "but I had been in correspondence
months prior to my arrival with Mr. Perry Young the author of
'Mistik Krewe.'" She further observed that she had "seen every
invitation ever issued with exception of Comus in 1858."1

Sweeney reasoned that if Saxon was not impressed with her
academic credentials, then he might be by the number of persons
sending letters of recommendation. He was literally swamped with
correspondence from men praising the virtues of Sweeney. Besides
others, letters came from J. O. Modisette, President of the Louisiana
Library Association; Dr. Frank M. Lett of the Lecompte Sanitarium;
Charles S. Pendleton, who, according to his letter head, was
"Professor of the Teaching of English, George Peabody College for
Teachers," Nashville, Tennessee; O. Gauthier, Postmaster,
Jennings; F. C. Wren, D.D.S., Winnfield; V. L. Roy, Assistant

1Mary Jane Sweeney to Lyle Saxon, October 17, 1935, LaCol-
LSLBR.
Director, National Youth Administration for Louisiana; and Frank O. Hunter, President of the C. A. Schnack Jewelry Company, Alexandria.

Hunter wrote one of the more revealing letters about Sweeney, as well as about himself and his opinion of the WPA. He told Frank Peterman, Administrator of the Works Progress Administration of Louisiana:

I have a letter today from a former Alexandria girl, Miss Mary Jane Sweeney. Miss Sweeney has been a school teacher for a number of years and, as I understand it, was let out this year perhaps for her political views. Her sister is married to Dewey Dunn, one of the clerks in Johnny Rush's Piggly-Wiggly Store on Bolton and Jackson. I am just mentioning this so you can identify who I am talking about.

Miss Sweeney is trying to get a position with Mr. Lyle Saxon, who I understand is the State Director of Writers' Projects. She feels she can hold the position of District Supervisor of Writers' Projects. If you can get Mr. Saxon to consider this young lady I will appreciate it. Frankly, she has always voted the way I suggested and will continue to do so no doubt....

In December, 1935, Sweeney obtained an interview with Saxon. Upon returning home she found a letter intended for Saxon written by V. L. Roy. She wrote Saxon that Roy, like her, had "long appreciated the efforts you have put forth in collecting and presenting Louisiana material in such a readable and therefore

\[\text{footnote}^2\]

\[\text{footnote}^2\text{Frank O. Hunter to Frank H. Peterman, November 8, 1935, ibid.}\]
admirable form." Roy, she noted, wanted her to present his letter to Saxon during her interview. She was glad, however, that the letter had arrived after her visit, for Saxon received her "so cordially--of your own free will and accord; and not just because some friend wanted you to be kind." Since Roy intended the letter for Saxon she decided, after reading it, to forward it to him.³

Saxon was impressed with the number of persons recommending Sweeney. He noted this fact in a memorandum to Frank H. Peterman,⁴ who also requested her appointment to the position of district supervisor.⁵ Saxon was able to comply with this request and wrote Sweeney: "You win. The number and variety of your endorsers are astonishing."⁶ His capacity for astonishment must have increased after she began work.

After her appointment Sweeney began sending Saxon periodic letters of complaints. She did not have an office to her liking and lacked adequate telephone service, a satisfactory means

³ Mary Jane Sweeney to Lyle Saxon, November 1, 1935, ibid.
⁴ Lyle Saxon to Frank H. Peterman, November 19, 1935, ibid.
⁶ Mary Jane Sweeney to Lyle Saxon, February 21, 1936, ibid.

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of transportation, or a sufficient supply of paper. Her major
complaint was about her office. She wrote Saxon a four-page letter
about her office woes. George Gardiner, Secretary of the Lafayette
Chamber of Commerce, offered to share his office with her in the
Lafayette Courthouse. She refused his offer because she feared that
the two other men in Gardiner's office would permit her no privacy.
She also objected to the WPA offices in the Elks Building in Lafayette
because there was no space "for even a small private office," and
because there was "too much friction known to exist there." 7

She then shared with Saxon some rumors she had picked up
immediately after associating with the Project. "Mr. Wooster, the
Assistant Director of the WPA, gave me a confidential tip and
suggested I do all possible to secure a place separate from the WPA--
if I wanted my project to succeed." Based on a few days of observa-
tion she further told Saxon: "Personally, I feel that both Mr.
Wooster and Mr. Jefferson will cooperate 100%, but both know
Mr. Jefferson is unpopular with even some of those in his office.
So this tip given me I feel was given in all kindness in behalf of the
success of the project." To assure Saxon that he was one of her
close confidants and thus the future recipient of the rumors she heard,

7Mary Jane Sweeney to Lyle Saxon, February 21, 1936, ibid.
Sweeney admitted that her letter was "rather personal and confidential in nature." She wanted him to know what was going on for fear she "might not have the opportunity to tell you all of this when you arrive." 8

One week later Sweeney again wrote Saxon: "Greetings! Are you as happy as I am this morning? I have just moved into the basement of the Lafayette Postoffice Building." 9 Saxon must have wondered how she found an office to her liking, especially in this particular federal building. Several months later she informed him as to how she performed this feat. "In regard to a move from the basement of the postoffice building, I feel I should lay the cards on the table--the joker exposed." She confessed to knowing that federal postoffice regulations prohibited the housing in the postoffice building of any project not connected with the postoffice. Somehow she got E. A. O'Brien, Postmaster of Lafayette, to ignore this regulation. In his reports to the Federal Government, "Sweeney told Saxon, "he never acknowledged the presence of our office here." 10

O'Brien asked his successor, Sidney Voorhies, to continue

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8Ibid.

9Mary Jane Sweeney to Lyle Saxon, February 27, 1936, ibid.

10Mary Jane Sweeney to Lyle Saxon, January 12, 1937, ibid.
this ploy in his capacity as Acting Postmaster. Voorhies agreed to continue the illegal activity, but he soon began to worry about getting caught. Sweeney used so much electricity that Voorhies came under criticism by his superiors. He asked for a larger allowance on expenditures for electricity. "This request was granted and I was told everything was satisfactory and to make no plans about moving unless I just wanted to move," Sweeney commented.¹¹

Voorhies again came under criticism for the amount of electricity he was using. He feared that if Sweeney stayed he would be investigated. This he did not want to occur, said Sweeney, for it would "mean that Mr. Voorhies who is only 'Acting Postmaster' would not receive the appointment of 'Postmaster,' which he is most [sic] anxious to get." She assured Saxon that Voorhies was courteous to her and said: "Don't hurry--but I would hate to have any criticism--even though I am not entirely to blame. I should have reported your occupancy of the room from the very first, perhaps."¹²

Ousted from the postoffice building, Sweeney once more looked for suitable office space. She again resisted moving into

¹¹Ibid.
¹²Ibid.
the Elks building but apparently feared Saxon would request her to do so. She asked him to visit her to "see exactly the conditions I would have to work" in at the Elks building. If forced to move there her files would have no locks. Assuming that Saxon failed to understand why locks were desirable she remarked: "I would have no way of protecting the files from any wanderer throughout the building." 13

Locks could be purchased, but not Sweeney's reputation. The Elks building, she told Saxon, was "not a place where a lady could work very easily at night--without receiving criticism that would no doubt be justifiable." 14 She did not say, however, why she was so vulnerable to criticism when other ladies working on the WPA at the Elks building managed to escape with their reputations intact.

Four months later Sweeney again wrote Saxon to complain about her office situation. "I am terribly disappointed that you have not found it convenient to visit us the past few weeks," she informed the State Director. "Just how soon can you get here? I need you terribly." She was afraid of being ousted this time from a business rental building. Her latest office difficulties began a month earlier when three insurance men moved next to her office. She began to hear rumors that they planned to occupy her office as soon as her

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

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lease expired. "Naturally, I wanted you here to interview Mr. Gankendorff [who leased Sweeney her office] and determine whether there was a chance of us staying here until the project closed," she told Saxon. "For, strange as it may seem the W. P. A. Office was never able to locate any chairs or cabinets for us."15

When Saxon did not immediately leave New Orleans for Lafayette, Sweeney decided to see Gankendorff about her lease. "He was courteous and explained most thoroughly his point of view as a business man," she wrote Saxon. Gankendorff told her that the rumors were true, for he felt the insurance men would sign a longer lease than she could. Sweeney assured him that this was not true, since she had enough data to keep her staff busy for at least two additional years. Gankendorff "was rather noncommittal," Sweeney told Saxon. "In other words I am not so sure that we could stay if more rent were paid or not." Although she had agreed to see Saxon in New Orleans, she now concluded that "it would be better for you to see me here."16

Sweeney had pleasant experiences as well as unpleasant ones. One of these enjoyable occasions she recorded for Saxon in

15Mary Jane Sweeney to Lyle Saxon, May 11, 1937, ibid.
16Ibid.
a letter on March 8, 1936. Sweeney stayed at the Terrace Hotel. A fellow resident was George A. Mead. One night Mead invited Sweeney into his room ostensibly "to see a view of a pear tree in full bloom," but her eyes lingered instead upon the marvelous scenes inside the room. What she saw was so fascinating that immediately upon leaving Mead she had to write to Saxon about her experience.\(^{17}\)

According to Sweeney, Mead and his hotel room were quite unique. She had heard rumors that Mead was quite wealthy and had purchased the Terrace Hotel as a present for his sister. He had scrap books about Louisiana and one containing his membership cards to various organizations in the East. He also had "cloisonne, garguerrotypes, needlepoint, and hand-decorated brass, a patestroy made of (that wonderful material from France) trimmed with braid, ripped from the robes of some Catholic dignitary. What else? I don't know."\(^{18}\) But she did, for she described to Saxon other things she saw.

The room was "alive with photographs of personality; with objects that implored you to linger on, and admire; with shelves of books that dare you to explore; and with a closet piled with 'Scrap

\(^{17}\)Mary Jane Sweeney to Lyle Saxon, March 8, 1936, ibid.

\(^{18}\)Ibid.
Books." She knew from her short visit that Mead had "been a man of means many years; and perhaps the Mead Family, for many generations." She was convinced that his name should be included in *Who's Who in America.*

Saxon must have wondered while reading the letter why he was so privileged to learn about her thrilling experience. The reason soon became obvious. She wanted to impress her director with the fact that she associated with important people; and she sought to impress Mead with the fact that she knew Saxon. Mead knew of Saxon's books and said he had once met him. She did not say where or when this meeting took place, but she hoped Saxon remembered the occasion. "I am telling you this in confidence to help you to recall it when you do meet him again," she wrote to Saxon. If Saxon wondered how this would occur Sweeney soon informed him. She told Mead that she would like him to meet Saxon and "his answer was he'd like to visit with you right in that room." She thought this could be arranged and requested her superior to set a date when he could travel from New Orleans to meet Mead. She also told him to write Mead a letter "assuring him of your appreciation of any assistance he might give me." Saxon complied with neither of her

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requests. He casually mentioned her letter by saying it was comforting to know that she found agreeable living accommodations. He apparently concluded that it was best to ignore her complaints. He wrote her on one occasion: "I am sorry that you are having such a bad time...I am sorry to hear about your stenographer having a nervous breakdown, and I hope it is not contagious...I do hope...things are going a little more smoothly for you." 21

Sweeney apparently dropped the matter of Saxon's visit, for now she leveled a blast at Edward Dreyer, Assistant State Director of the Federal Writers' Projects in Louisiana. Sweeney became upset with Dreyer's editors for suggesting changes in the materials she sent to the state office. She noted that although she hated to be critical, his editors had "it coming to them." "I do not make corrections without knowing that I have authority from original documents, legislative acts, etc., to back up my criticism or corrections." "Your editors," she said, "seem to prefer taking the word of one individual who was either an inaccurate research worker or a person who enjoyed coloring the truth." 22

Perhaps what really irritated Sweeney was the fact that

21 Lyle Saxon to Mary Jane Sweeney, June 1, 1936, ibid.
22 Mary Jane Sweeney to Edward Dreyer, June 25, 1937, ibid.
Dreyer would not permit her to turn in unscholarly and politically biased work. She fumed that "little regard has been taken for the feelings of those in the district who would later read the published article. In many instances in my revised edition, I added only a short phrase to soften the cruel and untrue words [made by Dreyer's staff only to find that] these additions were eliminated." She reasoned that Dreyer should accept all of her work because of her arduous labor and poor pay. "Why do you think I work so hard?" she rhetorically asked the Assistant State Director. "Simply because I have been conscientious about my assigned district and have wanted my friends to know I was attempting to tell the truth." Unless she could write what she wanted, she would be severely criticized "in one way or another the rest of my life."24

She told Dreyer and Saxon to instruct the "editors to be more careful" with her material. "For they are so consistently careless with mine, they are no doubt just as careless with the others, and the district supervisors will receive the most blame." Had she known that her statements would be changed she would not "have taken the appointment at any price. For, my reputation as a painstaking research worker means more to me than any salary."24

23Ibid.

24Ibid.
Sweeney had difficulty getting the information she needed to present her objective stories to Dreyer for her friends to praise and for posterity to read. She wrote Frank Lewis Prohaska, President of the Bureau of Information, Morgan City, requesting him to provide information about Negro amusement places and hotel accommodations in the Third Congressional District.²⁵

Prohaska became irate over Sweeney's request, as his letter indicates:

Your letter, dated June 9th, has just come to me and I am hastening a reply to you for a variety of reasons. I must explain that this Bureau of Information is purely a volunteer affair...I draw not a penny in salary...and to undertake to do what you ask would require more of my time than I am willing to give without remuneration of any sort; and I suggest this, feeling justified inasmuch as a paternal central government...slightly demented, too, I'm thinking...is appropriating millions for just such projects as you are involved in and why should I not get my share of the bounty? The pork barrel can surely be made to yield twenty-five dollars for me....

I am sure you UNTHINKINGLY asked this of me. I am replacing a Chamber of Commerce here and any other sort of business organization so if you feel that tourists really must have all that

²⁵Mary Jane Sweeney to Frank L. Prohaska, June 5, 1936, ibid.
information, I am the person to supply it. Proper publicity will be given in our paper to your letter as well as to my reply. 26

This thinly disguised attempt at blackmail greatly disturbed Sweeney. She tried to appease the disgruntled Prohaska. "Now that you have explained [how] your contributions to this office have been given gratis," she said, "your services are appreciated just that much more." She did not intend for her "recent request" to be an "imposition" upon him or his time. Sweeney regretted having to solicit information by mail. Since her organization refused to provide adequate travel funds, she had no alternative but to do as she had done. "Our own salaries are small and cannot be spent on transportation," she said. In short, she had "absolutely no funds... for payment of any information" she received. 27

What really bothered Sweeney was Prohaska's threat to publish her letter. She pleaded with him not to do it. The letter "was addressed to you personally, and not the general public. Your letter to me is for my files and not for any one else. I trust that... 26

26 Frank L. Prohaska to Mary Jane Sweeney, June 9, 1936, ibid. The first three ellipses were those of Prohaska and not of the writer.

27 Mary Jane Sweeney to Frank L. Prohaska, June 10, 1936, ibid.

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you will refrain from publishing either my letter or your answer."²⁸

Sweeney tried to assure Prohaska that she was a true
daughter of the South. She was born in the Third Congressional
District, she told him, had lived there most of her life, and loved
"our section of the state." Because of this love she felt that
"strangers should know what a wonderful section this really is."²⁹
She thanked Prohaska for past courtesies, assured him that she
would not impose upon him again, and trusted that he would "not
publish that which was intended as personal."²⁹

Sweeney not only had trouble collecting information, she
had difficulty getting the articles her staff wrote accepted by the
persons about whom the article dealt. This was especially true in
the case involving Mrs. David Pipes, owner of a plantation described
in "Southern Plantation," an article by Sweeney.

Mrs. Pipes wanted the article to present the history of her
family, but to say almost nothing about the furniture and pictures in
her plantation home. She feared mention of them might attract
unwelcome visitors or even thieves. Mrs. Pipes became so upset
with Sweeney's handling of the article that she intended to discuss it
with Saxon, or so Sweeney feared. She told Saxon that "in view of

²⁸Ibid.
²⁹Ibid.
the fact Mrs. Pipes had discussed it in a rather public way in Houma, 
I felt you should be given our side."30

Saxon assured Sweeney that the situation concerning
"Southern Plantation" was not unfamiliar to him. There were, he
said, several owners of old homes who did "not wish their houses to
be mentioned as 'show places' in the Guide." He could understand
their preference since many of the plantation houses were private
residences, and it was "certainly a nuisance to have visitors arriving
at all hours." He then suggested that Sweeney merely mention
"Southern Plantation" with approximately one paragraph concerning
the house and the family. She could say that the house was not open
to visitors, or that the grounds were open to visitors but the house
was not, provided Mrs. Pipes approved. Saxon assured Sweeney
"that with the use of a little tact" the matter could be worked out
satisfactorily to everyone.31

Sweeney then wrote Mrs. Pipes in a manner "as courteous
as could be in regard to the article on 'Southern Plantation.'" She
then noted: "I really thought I possessed tact but I hate to admit I
have failed in my dealings with Mrs. Pipes. Not only have I not been

30Mary Jane Sweeney to Lyle Saxon, April 29, 1936, ibid.
31Lyle Saxon to Mary Jane Sweeney, April 30, 1936, ibid.
able to secure the return of the original copy sent her for her approval or disapproval, but a letter to her and a copy of 'Southern Plantation' as included in your dummy were sent her May 25th." She then lamented: "Both have been ignored." Although hating to admit defeat, Sweeney said she now held Saxon responsible for handling the matter. She had "put forth extra effort to adjust the matter in a dignified and courteous way," but had failed.32

Another colorful and controversial lady with whom Saxon worked ... a Miss Margaret Beaufort. She was employed on the Writers' Projects from November, 1935, to August 31, 1936, as a Junior Editorial Assistant. She then decided that she was "worn out with three long hot summers working in New Orleans and needed a change and vacation." She left the Crescent City to start a new life in San Francisco.33

San Francisco, she felt, would be a wonderful place to begin life again. One of the first things she did there was to drop her married name of Mrs. Margaret Pearce. She then decided to become a scholar by entering the University of California where she would earn a doctoral degree in English literature. The energies for

32Mary Jane Sweeney to Lyle Saxon, June 10, 1936, ibid.
33Margaret Beaufort to Edward Dreyer, September 14, 1936, ibid.
117 - Madelyn Miller examines a 100-year-old map of New Orleans in the Howard Memorial Library in New Orleans*

118 - Dillard Project Workers engaged in the compilation of A History of the Negro in Louisiana*

*Pictures located in the National Archives
her new academic adventure were provided by the "cool, breezy, and bracing" air of San Francisco. It made her "feel rested, full of pep and ready to go to work again." She decided to go "snooping in and about the University of California" to visit "its enormous and easily accessible library." The public library, on the other hand, was "built so as to discourage all the browsing possible--enormous waste spaces, blind alleys, and misleading corridors; not a book in sight."\(^{34}\)

She decided, however, to postpone beginning her doctoral studies for one year. She had, after all, gone to San Francisco with the expectation of working on the Writers' Projects there. To her dismay, however, she learned after arriving there that a three-months residency period was required before one could be certified for relief projects. She also made another discovery, that the Louisiana Writers' Projects had allegedly not paid her for all the time she worked. She informed Saxon and Dreyer that they owed her for five hours of overtime pay and for her first two weeks of pay, from October 1 to October 15. According to her figures she was due "at least $17.00 and some odd cents."\(^{35}\)

\(^{34}\)ibid.

\(^{35}\)Margaret Beaufort to Lyle Saxon, September 19, 1936, ibid.
Miss Beaufort, as she now called herself, told Dreyer and Saxon that she wanted her money and expected them to forward it at once. And, since she could not be certified for relief, as a "favor" she wanted Saxon to "transfer" her to the San Francisco Writers' Project, and to write a personal letter of recommendation.36

Saxon informed Beaufort that there apparently was some mistake about the money. The project did not begin in Louisiana until October 15, and no one was placed on the payroll prior to November 1, 1935. "If any money is owing you for work upon a project which employed you before that time, I know nothing about it," he said.37

Beaufort replied that she had made a mistake about the dates, as they should have been November 1 to November 15, but not about the fact that she was owed money. The amount of $17.50 was a minor sum, she said, "but the principle is important to me." She then scolded Dreyer for "not even [going] to the trouble of having the Accounting Department look over the records of payments made to me to see if anything actually was owing."38

36Ibid.

37Lyle Saxon to Margaret Beaufort, October 7, 1936, ibid.

38Margaret Beaufort to Edward Dreyer, October 14, 1936, ibid.
Saxon was as anxious as Beaufort to settle the money dispute. He asked J. R. Murphy, Manager of the WPA Adjustment Bureau, to examine the records and determine the validity of her claim. Saxon noted that Beaufort had no grievance at the time of her departure. "Her work had been satisfactory but in no way extraordinary," he observed, "nor had she caused any trouble nor made any claims of any kind. We were surprised then when her letter arrived asking for 'back pay.'" He further remarked that he did not like the "tone of these letters" and wished the Adjustment Bureau to inform Beaufort of its findings.  

Beaufort, meanwhile, wrote Henry Alsberg. She complained that although she had twice written Saxon and Dreyer, she had "neither been forwarded a check... nor been given any satisfactory reason for not getting one." Alsberg in turn asked the Louisiana Director to check into the matter and report to him his findings.  

Saxon did as Alsberg requested. He informed the National Director that the basis for Beaufort's complaint was "a complete mystery." All of his dealings with her had been very pleasant. "I don't know what has gotten into her since she has been in

39 Lyle Saxon to J. R. Murphy, November 11, 1936, ibid.

40 Henry Alsberg to Lyle Saxon, November 11, 1936, ibid.
California. It seems extremely odd that she should have waited a whole year before saying that she had not been paid for work during the first two weeks that she was with the Writers' Projects. Her complaint, he noted, was the only one of its type he had ever received. 41

Dreyer informed Beaufort that she could not receive pay for her five hours of overtime work as this time was charged against a day when she missed work. Beaufort must have decided against pushing this claim, for she made no mention of it in her letter to Alsberg. 42

In regard to Saxon "transferring" her to the California project, it is fairly certain this was not done. Saxon said that "inasmuch as she quit her job of her own free will and asked nothing of this kind until she was in California," he could not technically transfer her. He observed that most state directors had more applications than they could fill in their own states, much less transfer people from other states to their projects.

This left only her claim of receiving partial pay for her first two weeks of employment. Workers were paid every two weeks

41 Lyle Saxon to Henry Alsberg, November 13, 1936, ibid.

42 Edward Dreyer to Margaret Beaufort, September 29, 1936, ibid.
according to a fixed scale. It does not seem likely that a special rate would have been set for her and for no one else. But whether she was paid or not, she was only one of the many problems which Saxon and Dreyer had to deal with in their efforts to produce quality publications about their state.

Beaufort's problems were insignificant compared to those of another Junior Editor, Albert L. Dunn. Dunn began working with the Writers' Projects on January 12, 1938, at the monthly security salary of $74.67. Saxon felt that he did good work and Dunn stayed on the project until August 1, when he resigned to accept employment with the Baton Rouge Department of Commerce and Industry. Dunn's interest in the Writers' Projects continued, however. He corresponded with Dreyer telling him of his efforts to reorganize the Department of Commerce and Industry. Officials of the department must have resented Dunn's criticisms, for they fired him almost immediately. He then had to get relief work and was assigned as a Research Field Worker on the WPA Housing Project at the monthly pay of $57.19.

His relief assignment greatly disappointed Dunn. He

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44Ibid.
hoped for reassignment on the Writers' Projects, but there was no opening there at the time of his application. This disappointment, plus his having to accept a position that paid considerably less than his former one, made Dunn bitter and extremely critical. Leo G. Spofford said that his attitude "was very bad and he continually criticized his superiors and showed that he did not like the assignment and did not approve of the manner in which the project was operated." The relief officials sought to help Dunn by placing him under a different supervisor, "but his attitude did not change."45

Dunn wrote E. L. Eustis, Director of the Federal Housing Project, and Crutcher, complaining about project conditions. Project officials claimed that the quality of his work was poor and released Dunn on February 16 along with several others in a quota reduction. Dunn concluded, however, that Crutcher resented criticism and had told the housing officials to get rid of him. Crutcher emphatically denied this charge by pointing out that "his removal was in process before the correspondence was received."46

State Director of Employment, W. F. Oakes, also maintained that Dunn was released due to a quota reduction necessitating

45 Leo G. Spofford to George H. Field, April 14, 1939, ibid.
46 James H. Crutcher to Fred R. Rauch, March 17, 1939, ibid.
the removal of persons least needed for project operations. At the same time, however, a large number of farmers in the northern part of the state left their projects to return to their seasonal work in the fields. When this happened more positions became available, and the quotas in the New Orleans area were increased. Assignments to fill these quotas were to be made after March 15. 47

The New Orleans office of employment for WPA workers received a requisition from the Women's and Professional Project for a Junior Clerk on an indexing project. Dunn was contacted for this position at 2:45 p.m. on March 14. He had but one hour to report for his assignment, since the notary who approved Citizenship Affidavits left work at 3:45 p.m. Dunn arrived at the notary's office at 3:58 and was told he could not be assigned until his citizenship affidavit was approved. He protested, saying the employment office already had his citizenship affidavit. Officials of the employment office refused to check their files to verify his claim, saying they lacked time to file these particular papers. They told Dunn he would have to complete another affidavit and return it within the hour. 48

Dunn, however, returned early the next morning with his

47 W. F. Oakes to Albert Dunn, March 21, 1939, ibid.

48 Glenn E. Garrett to C. B. Braun, March 17, 1939, ibid.
paper properly completed and notarized. Officials at the employment office told him he was too late. An order from Washington freezing quota assignments went into effect that morning. They said he had chosen not to comply with their instructions and could not be reassigned until the employment quota was increased.49

This turn of events, in addition to his previous dismissal, convinced Dunn now more than ever that he had been released because he had criticized Crutcher and other project officials. He concluded that he could not expect fair treatment from them and began writing numerous letters to various state and national WPA officials as well as to his congressman. He complained of his treatment to Florence Kerr, Assistant Administrator. She informed him that matters of employment were the responsibility of state and local officials. She could intervene only in cases involving the misuse of funds.50

This response greatly irked Dunn who again wrote Kerr. He said Crutcher resented his criticisms and had passed the word that Dunn had to go. Crutcher again denied the charge and had officials of the Employment Division and the Women's and Professional Division conduct an investigation into the validity of Dunn's

49Ibid.

50Albert Dunn to Florence Kerr, March 25, 1939, ibid.; Florence Kerr to Albert Dunn, April 4, 1939, ibid.
allegations. They concluded that Crutcher made no attempt "to
influence these divisions in the handling of the case." Dunn replied
that he would "want for food and other necessities of life [until] those
in the Washington WPA headquarters take the necessary steps to put
a stop to his petty Tyranny." Dunn severely criticized Mrs. Kerr for taking the position
that the Washington officials could intervene only if the state
administrator's misconduct in office involved the theft of funds.
Such a stance, he said, left the relief worker without protection or
a means for redress of grievances. It seemed to him that the position
of state officials rather than the welfare of the worker was Kerr's
major concern. This priority, Dunn felt, offered the relief worker
less protection than the private worker who could take his grievance
to the National Labor Relations Board. President Roosevelt would
not permit this for he "had gone on record as being in favor of
protecting the working man in his employment in every way," Dunn
wrote. Therefore, concluded Dunn, "it is reasonable to expect a
governmental agency like the WPA to at least follow the example of
the NLRB in protecting workers."  

51 Leo G. Spofford to George H. Field, April 14, 1939, ibid.
52 Albert Dunn to Florence Kerr, March 25, 1939, ibid.
53 ibid.
Kerr's position, he concluded, not only removed redress from the rights of relief workers, it supported other WPA officials in thwarting criticisms of their despotic actions. "This is the United States—not Germany," Dunn informed Kerr. He requested she tell him "of what steps I should take to seek redress in the matter which shows so clearly a desire for petty revenge on the party of the State Administration in Louisiana and his subordinates." She replied that "careful attention" would be given to his complaints, and she instructed George Field, Regional Director, to investigate Dunn's charges. Field, in turn, had his assistant C. B. Braun conduct the investigation.

Dunn told Braun that he had just begun to expose "WPA mismanagement and irregularities" in Louisiana. Braun assured Dunn that he would be happy to "have genuine information and evidence." Braun stressed genuine "because," as he put it, "so often persons with complaints have nothing but a lot of hearsay. We are interested in something that is real, if it actually exists." Braun invited Dunn to visit him to present his charges.

54 Ibid.
55 Florence Kerr to Albert Dunn, April 4, 1939, ibid.
56 C. B. Braun to Albert Dunn, March 8, 1939, ibid.
Dunn decided to write Braun rather than see him in person. He bemoaned the fact that he had been out of work for three weeks or "ever since I was laid off the housing project with the phony excuse of 'a quota reduction.'" He could readily prove this was a phony excuse, but he would have trouble obtaining private employment since he was "not what is called a 'young man' anymore." He had conscientiously tried to be reassigned on the WPA and had written several letters each week to various officials in his efforts to be reassigned. "Crutcher," he said, "has not even bothered to answer my recent letters." 57

Disgusted with Crutcher, Kerr, and Braun, Dunn decided to present his case to Louisiana Congressman Paul H. Maloney. Dunn knew that Maloney was one of many Congressmen growing increasingly disgruntled with the WPA. Maloney, he said, was "taking a very active interest in the reorganization of the WPA" and was "a member of the House Appropriations Committee which would pass upon money to be allotted to the WPA in the future." 58 The Congressman did interest himself in Dunn's complaints. He queried Crutcher about them and asked the Employment Division in

57 Albert Dunn to C. B. Braun, March 4, 1939, ibid.
58 Ibid.
Dunn sought to provide Braun with other examples of irregularities. He said a project worker told him that the daughter of a city police sergeant got a WPA job although she had no need of work. As soon as she mentioned to the WPA official that she was the daughter of the policeman he said: "Sure, we'll put you on."

Another project employee informed Dunn that Dunn was not released because of a quota reduction. He told Dunn that 'a dozen or more have been added to this same project since I left and some of the newcomers have been given jobs paying MORE money than is paid to the field workers who have been on the project for sometime.'

Braun wanted more than Dunn's accounts of alleged unfair treatment. In investigating the incident involving Dunn's citizenship papers he learned that Dunn would have been assigned work on March 15 had his forms been completed prior to that date. The freeze was general and just "happened to catch" Dunn. Out of an allotment of 2,100 positions only twenty-five had actually been assigned in New Orleans. The assignment officers explained that this rather alarming failure to assist more needy relief workers

59 Leo G. Spofford to George H. Field, April 14, 1939, ibid.

60 Albert Dunn to C. B. Braun, March 9, 1939, ibid.
was due to the meticulous concern they had for accurate citizenship affidavits. Once getting them, however, they did not bother to file them. The employment office officials concluded that they had "acted in good faith in this matter." 61

Braun received other information in his investigation of Dunn's complaints. Spofford said that Dunn was "a very prolific letter writer," but his letters contained no information "bearing on the WPA program." 62 Crutcher reported that Dunn was "a single man" who had been employed by various newspapers [a remark which also could have been made about Saxon]. He admitted that Dunn had "considerable facility in writing" and frequently wrote lengthy letters. Dunn, he noted, had "been thoroughly satisfied with conditions on the Writers' Project" but was disappointed after his private employment ended and he was not reassigned to Saxon's programs. 63

After investigating the complaints, Braun reported his findings to Field. Field invited Dunn "to arrange for an appointment" with him. 64 Dunn refused to do this or to answer Field's letter.

61 Glenn E. Garrett to C. B. Braun, March 17, 1939, ibid.
62 Leo G. Spofford to George Field, April 14, 1939, ibid.
63 James H. Crutcher to Fred R. Rauch, March 17, 1939, ibid.
64 George H. Field to Albert Dunn, April 12, 1939, ibid.
Field concluded in his report to Mrs. Kerr: "I am convinced that Mr. Dunn has no valid complaints, else he would have replied to my letter of April 12." Kerr apparently drew the same conclusion. She informed Dunn that since he failed to reply to Field's letter there was little her office could do "to be of further assistance to you." Dunn must have reached the same conclusion. He then appealed to journalists Drew Pearson and Robert S. Allen, who published a regular syndicated column, "Washington Merry-Go-Round." He thanked them "for focusing attention upon the rotten administration of the WPA in Louisiana." Crutcher, he wrote, had "been the boon companion of Gov. 'Dick' Leche and his gang of burglars (they call themselves State officials, however) ever since he [Crutcher] took charge down here." Crutcher, Dunn charged, had ignored violations of WPA regulations and had "patterned his conduct towards WPA workers much along the lines of Herr Hitler in Germany." When newspaper men showed that a woman on his staff did not need to work, Crutcher said: "I'll hire whomever I d... please." The State Administrator and his aides had "methods of torturing those who dared complain." He and other officials in

65 George H. Field to Florence Kerr, May 15, 1939, ibid.

66 Florence Kerr to Albert Dunn, May 23, 1939, ibid.
Louisiana tried to "'crush' anyone who dared complain or criticize, no matter how justifiable their grounds," Dunn remarked.  

Dunn then offered several pages of examples of alleged wrongs committed by Crutcher and his aides against relief workers. Dunn concluded by saying that he hoped Pearson and Allen would "continue to publicize the rotten conditions permitted in the WPA by James Crutcher and his aides." Their conduct was "a dam [sic] shame."  

Dunn's unhappiness, as Crutcher noted, stemmed from his failure to be reassigned on the Writers' Projects. In all of his many letters not one complaint was made against the Writers' Project or Saxon. Considering the obvious disgust of Dunn, this omission was a real tribute to Saxon and the way he administered the program. It is also interesting to note that in Dunn's view Governor Leche headed a "gang of burglars." Leche was the first and only Louisiana Governor to go to prison. He was convicted in 1939 for income tax evasion, bribery, misuse of mail, and other charges. Another member of his "gang," Louisiana State University President James Monroe Smith, was also convicted and sent to prison in 1939. Dunn

67Albert Dunn to Drew Pearson and Robert Allen, June 19, 1939, ibid.

68Ibid.
was thus more accurate in his appraisal of Leche and his associates than he probably realized when he wrote Pearson and Allen. 69

Mrs. Velma Juneau, like Dunn, also experienced frustration as she tried to continue her association with the Writers' Projects.

Mrs. Lillie Goldstein, Social Service Supervisor of the FERA in Rapides Parish, was the nemesis behind Juneau's difficulties. Goldstein knew that Juneau was a very capable worker because of her past association for more than a year with the Social Service Division. She desired the services of Juneau but could not get them without some pretense for removing her from the position of District Supervisor of the Writers' Projects in Alexandria. Goldstein decided to cancel Juneau's relief certification, upon the basis that her husband should have been the one certified, and then have her transferred to the Social Service Division. 70


70 Velma Juneau to Cathryn Cassibry, September 12, 1936, LaCol-LSLBR.
Mrs. Juneau was too valuable to the Writers' Projects to permit this recertification scheme to go unchallenged. Saxon, Mrs. Birdie C. Busey, District Supervisor of Women's and Professional Projects Division in Alexandria, and Mrs. Leo Spofford, State Director of the project, immediately came to Juneau's defense. Mrs. Busey told Saxon that if "at all possible" he should seek to "retain her [Juneau] as a non-relief person." She further said in her "confidential" letter to Saxon: "Mrs. Juneau is most essential to the Writers' Project, and I personally consider her a splendid worker, and feel that she can not be replaced."\(^1\) Spofford said that Juneau had "done splendid work" and she felt that "the project in Alexandria would be very much crippled if she should be removed from it." Juneau also wanted "very much" to continue her association with the Writers' Projects. Mrs. Spofford proposed to retain her as a non-relief worker since allowances were made for a supervisor in this classification.\(^2\)

Mrs. Juneau expressed great satisfaction over getting to continue her association with the Writers' Projects. She observed in a letter to Miss Cathryn Cassibry, Saxon's secretary: "There

\(^1\)Birdie C. Busey to Lyle Saxon, September 12, 1936, ibid.

\(^2\)Leo G. Spofford to Birdie C. Busey, September 14, 1936, ibid.
seems to be a movement to transfer any workers needed by the administrative staff of the FERA from either the Federal Writers' Project or the Federal Archives Survey here. Thanks again for 'my stay of execution.'

It seemed, however, that if Goldstein could not have Juneau's services, she could at least make life miserable for her on the Writers' Projects.

S. D. Lee, head of the Labor Division of the WPA in Alexandria, informed Juneau on September 28, 1936, that in order to keep her on the payroll she had to be assigned on a non-relief basis since her relief certification was being cancelled September 30. Juneau observed that although her present assignment was made on a relief basis, she was paid from non-relief funds. Reassignment thus seemed unnecessary.

On September 30, Saxon notified Randall Fowler, District Director of the Works Progress Administration in Alexandria, that he was re-assigning Juneau to his project as a non-relief worker. He requested the re-assignment to become effective as of October 1, since this was the date when Mrs. Juneau would be dropped as a

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73 Velma Juneau to Cathryn Cassibry, September 15, 1936, ibid.

74 Velma Juneau to Lyle Saxon, September 28, 1936, ibid.
relief person. 75

One week later Juneau informed Saxon that an official from
the payroll division had notified her that the report time for October 1-
4 had been deleted from her check. Saxon immediately checked with
the payroll department. Officials there told him "that in some way
the Form 402, "re-assigning Juneau as a non-relief supervisor,
"had been misplaced." When Saxon suggested that it could be located,
the payroll authority then managed to find the form. They asked
Mrs. Juneau to make a supplemental time sheet covering these four
days and they would immediately send her a check. Saxon wrote the
harrassed Mrs. Juneau: "I am sure that everything will be all right,
and that you will have no more trouble with this re-assignment."

Mrs. Juneau was thus able to continue on the project of
her choice. Her salary was increased and she was made the
supervisor of the Lake Charles District in addition to her Alexandria
position. 77 By the end of the year, however, she feared for her job.
She knew that Saxon had to reduce his personnel in order to comply
with a new quota assignment. She wondered if she were going to be

75 Lyle Saxon to Randall Fowler, September 30, 1936, ibid.
76 Lyle Saxon to Velma Juneau, October 9, 1936, ibid.
77 Lyle Saxon to Velma Juneau, October 13, 1936, ibid.;
Lyle Saxon to Randall Fowler, November 6, 1936, ibid.
one of the ones he had to let go. 78 Saxon replied by saying: "You are one of the very best people I have, and you may rest assured that you will be retained as supervisor as long as I have any say-so in the matter at all." 79

Job security was not one of the rewards for working on the FWP. District offices closed as soon as they served their function in gathering material, and sometimes even before then. In June, 1937, Mrs. Juneau asked Louisiana Historical Records Survey Director, John C. L. Andreassen, if he might have a place for her on the HRS since the Alexandria and Lake Charles Districts of the FWP were closing on July 14. 80 Andreassen apparently could not use her, for Juneau wrote Saxon in August volunteering to read the Alexandria and Lake Charles Districts manuscripts before publication of the Louisiana Guide. "Please do not hesitate to call on me," she encouraged Saxon, "even though I am no longer on the payroll, and do not expect to be." 81 Since this was the last letter from Mrs. Juneau it is rather doubtful that Saxon accepted her offer.

78 Velma Juneau to Lyle Saxon, n.d., but letter was written in December, 1936, ibid.

79 Lyle Saxon to Velma Juneau, December 14, 1936, ibid.

80 Velma Juneau to John C. L. Andreassen, June 25, 1937, ibid.

81 Velma Juneau to Lyle Saxon, August 8, 1937, ibid.
Another project employee who almost became embroiled in a struggle between two different projects was Arthur DeBreuys. Mrs. T. H. Behre, Supervisor of the Federal Theater Project, asked Saxon to permit DeBreuys to do publicity work for her project. The lending of employees, Saxon concluded, was not good policy. He informed Mrs. Behre that he needed the labor of all of his writers. By lending one Saxon would be deprived of his services, would have to pay his salary, and would be unable to replace him to fill his quota. Since Mrs. Behre refused to assign DeBreuys to her project, Saxon had to deny her request. 82

Robert McKinney, the one black who was not assigned to the Dillard project, like Mrs. Juneau also experienced a problem with his payroll check. His check was lost, but by a non-government agency. According to E. C. Bernius, Credit Manager of the General Finance Company of Louisiana in New Orleans, on January 8, 1937, McKinney endorsed his semi-monthly payroll check of $34.20 and gave it to an agent of the General Finance Company. The agent applied $7.50 toward McKinney's account with the company and gave him $26.70 as the cash difference. The company official then stamped the check for deposit "General Finance Company of

82 Lyle Saxon to Mrs. T. S. Behre, April 21, 1936, ibid.
Louisiana, Inc. The check was later returned to the company when a bank official marked "incorrectly endorsed" on it. McKinney, wrote Bernius to Saxon, "failed to spell out his first name using only the initial 'R'. We immediately enclosed the check with a letter asking McKinney to endorse the check again and return to us."

Bernius said that McKinney refused to respond to this letter or to a second one. Bernius asked Saxon to issue McKinney a duplicate check and assured Saxon that he would "cooperate in like manner should ever an occasion arise."

Saxon sent a memorandum to C. M. Bowman, apparently of the WPA payroll division, and attached to it a copy of Bernius' letter. He noted that Bernius first telephoned his complaint and Saxon asked him to put it in writing. The State Director had difficulty believing that the company had sent the check to McKinney. "This struck me as extremely odd," wrote Saxon, "as I have never heard of a similar thing. I mean that under ordinary circumstances McKinney would have been called back to the office to correct his signature or an adjustor would have been sent to his residency."

There were other factors in the case that distressed Saxon. Bernius indicated that the check was marked, "For Deposit," thus

83E. C. Bernius to Lyle Saxon, March 11, 1937, ibid.

84Lyle Saxon to C. M. Bowman, March 12, 1937, ibid.
precluding the possibility of anyone cashing it. Nevertheless, observed Saxon, "they threaten to hold McKinney responsible for the total amount of $34.20, in addition to the balance of approximately $60.00 which he already owes the Finance Company." Saxon protested, saying that the company could not hold McKinney responsible, "inasmuch as the fault of losing the check was obviously theirs." Bernius insisted that McKinney would be charged an additional $34.20 unless a duplicate check was issued.85

The usually calm Saxon wrote to Bowman: "This makes me pretty mad because I do not believe that the Finance Company would dare to threaten a white person in this manner." Saxon was able to get the number of the check and informed Bernius that the "check cashed by you" could possibly be traced to the Washington office. He suggested Bernius write W. D. Berry, State Disbursing Clerk, to assist him in his effort. Bernius did as Saxon suggested and asked Berry to "have a duplicate check issued for us."87

The final outcome of the case is not known, since Bernius' letter to Barry is the last record of the incident, apparently because

85Ibid.
86Ibid.
87Lyle Saxon to E. C. Bernius, March 16, 1937, ibid.
the matter now was out of Saxon's jurisdiction and thus is not recorded in the Writers' Projects files. The incident would seem to suggest, however, that Saxon was fair with all project workers, both black and white. This is perhaps one reason why project employees enjoyed working with the State Director.

Saxon's patience with Mrs. Irene C. Wagner was rewarded as much as it was tried by Sweeney. Mrs. Wagner, of Natchitoches, was a scholar in her own right. She had A.B. and A.M. degrees from the University of Kansas and had done additional study at the University of Chicago with special training in the technique of research. Her master's thesis was titled, "The Folk-Lore of Louisiana With Special Emphasis Upon Its Distinctive Characteristics." She had taught English at Bowling Green State Normal College, Bowling Green, Ohio, at the University of Kansas, and at Louisiana State Normal College. In 1935 she had ready for publication a bibliography of Louisiana literature in English which included more than 2,500 authors and several thousand items.

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88 For an interesting semi-autobiographical account, which Saxon dictated during his fatal bout with cancer, of his relationship with his black valet, see Lyle Saxon and Edward Dreyer, The Friends of Joe Gilmore and Some Friends of Lyle Saxon (New York, 1948).

89 "Description of Project," an abstract by Irene C. Wagner, (n.d.), LaCol-LSLBR.
Like several of Saxon's friends, Mrs. Wagner was happy to learn of his appointment as Director of the Louisiana Writers' Projects. When first writing Saxon in October, 1935, after his appointment, Mrs. Wagner was not interested in a job on the FWP. She hoped instead that he might be able to publish her bibliography in the event her current plans for publication did not materialize. An official of the Women's and Professional Service expressed an interest in her manuscript provided she turn it over to a public body. Mrs. Wagner was willing to do this and suggested the Louisiana Historical Society. Mrs. Wagner then got an official of this organization to agree to sponsor her project. After all seemed to be going well a problem developed. The official with whom Wagner dealt on the Historical Society seemed to lose interest in the proposal. "The delay and apparent indifference of the Society in acceptance has weakened, if not destroyed, my chances of getting Govt. aid," Mrs. Wagner told Saxon. Before pursuing the matter further she wondered if Saxon might be interested in her work. 90

The trauma of Mrs. Wagner's frustrating experience placed a great strain upon her husband, a professor at Louisiana State Normal College. He had traveled with his wife to New Orleans in

90 Irene C. Wagner to Lyle Saxon, October 15, 1935, ibid.
her effort to get the manuscript published, and had offered to underwrite the expenses involved with it. He suffered a severe heart attack in December which greatly altered Mrs. Wagner's plans and personal circumstances. She wrote Saxon that she felt it "best to give up all plans for the bibliography for the present, and let time take care of the matter." She offered him her manuscript notes for use in the guide, and her services as a voluntary worker. She seemed to feel that the problems with the manuscript were "a contributing cause to the attack" and to be greatly concerned over the possibility of giving up her bibliography in order to preserve the life of her husband. 91

Saxon realized the contributions Mrs. Wagner could make to the survey of historical records. He tried to work something out whereby Mrs. Wagner could divide her time between this project and her husband. Saxon kept in touch with her and tried to comfort her during her period of great distress. "I am sorry to hear of your husband's illness and I hope that he is much better now," he wrote. In an obvious effort to encourage her he said: "Did you know that you were a great authority? We are consulting your thesis in the Howard Library, and my workers report that it is of great value." 92

91Irene C. Wagner to Lyle Saxon, December 19, 1935, ibid.

92Lyle Saxon to Irene C. Wagner, December 23, 1935, ibid.
On February 10, 1936, Mrs. Wagner told Saxon that she was "considering the three offers with great care." He apparently tried to offer her several employment possibilities. She accepted the third, which must have been for her to do research work in Natchitoches rather than in New Orleans. She initially accepted the position because of her love for research. The possibility existed, she explained to Saxon, that if her husband failed to improve she might need the work:

If you just knew how hard I have tried to hold everything together—my little class at WPA headquarters, Mr. Wagner's classes at Normal, plan ahead for the Guide work, keep my typists going, stand by Mr. Wagner all night, do anything and everything to bring him surcease from misery. Will you... keep on believing in me a while longer... I try to keep up with the burden because it may be necessary from an economic viewpoint for me to do something. I feel that I must not lose command of myself intellectually, spiritually, or physically--But--I feel sure that tragedy in some phase will overtake me before I can finish this one project. I think best to be prepared any minute for it. I am very sorry, I appreciate all your efforts in my behalf.  

Saxon did continue to believe in Mrs. Wagner but her premonition of woe came true. Within hours after writing Saxon the previously cited letter Mr. Wagner suffered another severe heart attack. Mrs. Wagner asked Saxon to appoint someone else

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93Irene C. Wagner to Lyle Saxon, March 5, 1936, ibid.
to her position. She was, she told Saxon, "more than a book worm and juggler of books. I am a human being with very human emotions. It is my home and the cherished life within it which demands my all, now. I do not question; I accept."94

Saxon was also "a human being with very human emotions." Although Mrs. Wagner resigned her position, Saxon patiently kept in contact with her. Mrs. Wagner's worst fears became a reality, and her husband succumbed to his illness. On July 6, 1936, Saxon offered her the position of supervisor of the Historical Records Survey in Baton Rouge.95

Once again Mrs. Wagner faced a tough decision. Despairing to leave her home and friends in Natchitoches, Mrs. Wagner hoped for a permanent teaching position at Normal College.96 When it did not materialize she accepted Saxon's offer and prepared to close down her home. Saxon wrote: "I am very much pleased that you are going to join our staff, and this is a note to welcome you to New Orleans."97 He tried to have her assignment made retroactive as of July 25.98

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94Irene C. Wagner to Lyle Saxon, April 9, 1936, ibid.
95Irene C. Wagner to A. A. Fredericks, July 8, 1936, ibid.
96Ibid.
97Lyle Saxon to Irene C. Wagner, July 18, 1936, ibid.
98Lyle Saxon to J. H. Talbot, July 29, 1936, ibid.
Since her referral was made on July 27, this became the official date for her assignment.\textsuperscript{99}

Saxon's patience and kindness was rewarded once again. Mrs. Wagner became one of the most capable and devoted district supervisors, no doubt in small part because of her appreciation of Lyle Saxon. When Andreasen replaced Saxon as head of the HRS, Mrs. Wagner very capably performed her work. She appeared, however, to miss having Saxon as her chief and eventually returned to Natchitoches to head the HRS work in her home city.

In the midst of their work on FWP publications, the Louisiana writers also faced the daily problems of life. The success of the FWP, however, is not judged solely by how well the project employees dealt with their daily woes but also by the quality of the publications they produced. What they produced, and how, is also a part of the history of the FWP in Louisiana.

\textsuperscript{99}G. A. Cason to Lyle Saxon, August 1, 1936, ibid.
CHAPTER V

THE FLOW OF COPY

The Federal Writers' Project method for producing guide-books was as complex as the FWP's own bureaucratic structure. A system had to be devised for writing the guides to each state and major city across America. The basic regulations for guide production appeared in the American Guide Manual and in supplementary instructions. The Guide Manual, which became something of a Bible to project employees, established the goals of the Project and the means to achieve them.

Project officials did have basic goals. They wanted "to make the American Guide the complete, standard, authoritative work of the United States...."¹ They hoped to achieve this by handling all guide copy "according to a single system." In this manner they could secure "a fairly even production throughout the

country" and "avoid congestion or slack periods."

Writers of the Guide Manual tried to envision every contingency that would face project workers while preparing the guides. They broke down the work force so it would resemble an assembly line. In actual project operations, the flow of copy did have all the traits of a mass produced product. Each worker had a particular assignment and corresponding instructions to assist him in his labor.

One of the first steps in guide preparation was the compilation of vast amounts of information for possible inclusion in the guide or in other publications. Field workers were responsible for gathering this data. The local supervisor assigned each member of his staff a specific research topic. Since many of the field workers had no previous training in research techniques, detailed instructions were provided for them by the national and state guide staffs. Field workers inquiring about the flora and fauna of an area, for example, could ask: "Are wild flowers numerous? What are the common varieties? Are there places to which one may drive or hike where some special variety blooms at a certain time? Are there dangerous animals?" The questions, instructed the Manual, were not to be used

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2 "Filing System for Large City and District Guide Material" (no author or date), 1, FWP-La.
"as interrogations to be answered by rote."³

In addition to posing questions, the Guide Manual also instructed the field worker to compile lists, such as the following:

"List plants and trees common to your district. List unusual plants and trees. List, locate, and describe natural trails, developed by sanctuary authorities, museums or other bodies."⁴ The information for these lists could be found through various means. The field worker might gather data through personal observation of physical features, through interviews with volunteer consultants or other knowledgeable persons, and from documentary research and investigation. They could consult public and private records and documents, books, and other sources containing useful information. They were encouraged to use the most recent and accurate sources available. In the event the local field worker lacked such sources, project workers in New Orleans were expected to obtain the data. If they could not locate it, the burden then fell on the Central Office in Washington. Occasionally the data gathered by officials in the

³"The American Guide Manual," 24, 34, 36. Supplementary Questionnaires also were produced to assist the researcher such as "Supplementary Instructions #9-D to The American Guide Manual, Folklore and Folkways," October 24, 1936, ibid.

Central Office conflicted with that garnered by the state and local researchers. When this occurred some determination had to be made as to which data was correct. Some of the more fundamental conflicts in the history of the project occurred as a result of disagreement over the accuracy of data.  

The data collected from making lists and asking questions first appeared in the form of field notes, which could be abbreviated, and written in long or short hand, as long as the notes made sense to the compiler. From these notes the field worker wrote "field continuities" (fc), which were simply field notes written in essay form. Each field worker was expected to write a weekly field continuity of 1,500 to 2,000 words. Some workers apparently had difficulty doing this, for they were cautioned about "padding" their work in order to meet their work quota. Assistant state director, Edward Dreyer, for example, told his project supervisors:

"Frequently, material forwarded to this office has been much too flowery...Will you please see that your workers give specific information whenever possible, that [they] avoid generalizations 


that have no actual bearing on the subject, and will you please do
everything in your power to keep two adjectives from growing where
only one has grown before." Field workers were also instructed
to avoid local biases, local pride, and writing so as to publicize
local commercial interests. They had to be careful in using such
statements as the "best," the "most important," and the "greatest." Field editors and volunteer consultants examined the field
continuities. Their corrections constituted the "field editorial copy"
(fec), which they forwarded to the state editorial staff in New Orleans.
There the copy was further edited and condensed so as to make it
comply with the word quota for each section of the guide as determined

7Edward Dreyer to Project Supervisors, April 7, 1936, LaCol-LSLBR. Interview with confidential source, January 22, 1974. The above source said that James B. LaFourche (see Chapter III)
"talked and talked but wrote little." When Saxon or Dreyer asked him
about his assignment, LaFourche would say that he was working on it
and it was just about ready. He would eventually turn in a few pages
supposedly representing a week's amount of work, but which he could
have done in fifteen minutes. The above source said that some project
workers were "pen and typewriter leaners." He made no apology for
this since his pay "was not commensurate with his responsibilities." Dillard Project writer, Octave Lilly, said that workers could easily
write 2,000 words a week. They had time to gather materials for
their personal use for future books or articles. He and Director of
the Dillard project, Marcus B. Christian, wrote and read poetry to
each other. Interview with Octave Lilly, January 29, 1974.

by the guide's central office. The product of this editing was the "state editorial copy" (sec), which went to the central guide office in Washington for a final editing as the "central editorial copy" (cec). By this time the original field copy was reduced to approximately one-eighth to one-tenth of its original size. Condensation took place periodically during the flow of copy. Since the copy of several projects flowed simultaneously into and through the office of the state editors, the question of scale and proportion was a constant problem.

The state office was swamped with editorial copy, but the national office was unundated with it from every state. Keeping track of the copy in Washington was a formidable task. Occasionally essays, maps, and photographs were lost by the Washington office and had to be reproduced by the state offices. Understandably,

9"The American Guide Manual," 12-18. As an example the Manual provided a "Suggested Word Quota for District of Columbia Guide." Quotas were: "General Description, 2,700 words; History, 33,750 words; Government, 15,750 words; Transportation, 4,500 words; Accommodation, 4,500 words; Points of Interest, 102,150 words; Environ, 9,900 words; Bibliography, 2,250 words; and Index, 4,500 words." 14.

10Ibid.

11McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, 669.

then, Alsberg sought to maintain a steady flow of copy from the state editors. If he failed to get it he would write a letter such as the following one to Saxon: "I am disturbed over the failure of the Louisiana Project to maintain a steady flow of copy to this office; we do not want at present to receive the complete dummy on either the New Orleans Guide or the State Guide. We do want complete tours, complete city descriptions and complete essays from both books sent in for criticism." 13

In Washington the copy was assigned to editors and consultants who were supposed to be authorities on the particular topic discussed in the copy. The competence of these editors was a matter of dispute. 14 Some project officials believed the editors to be incompetent, 15 whereas others thought they were very

13 Henry Alsberg to Lyle Saxon, November 18, 1939, LaCol-LSLBR. The Guide Manual stated: "While no uniform rate of data production can be insisted upon because of local conditions, the Guide Central Office is desirous of securing a fairly even production throughout the country in order to avoid congestion or stale periods." 17.


15 Ulrich, "Salvaging Culture for the WPA," 656. Ulrich wrote: "Of the federal editorial staff some had taught English, a few had worked for newspapers, others had written an occasional novel or short story. But very few had ever before been editors... All had a vital interest in proletarian warfare, a deep suspicion of chambers of commerce, distrusted all statements not found in their often outmoded source books, and were undoubtedly overworked." 656.
Saxon and Dreyer seem to have gotten along reasonably well with them, and generally made without complaint the changes suggested by the national staff. After the national and state staffs agreed upon corrections, the materials finally went to the publisher. Once the necessary changes were made in the dummy, the materials, after years of preparation, were ready for publication.

In addition to the field workers, field research assistants, state field assistants, state research editors, state editorial assistants, the state director and his assistants, officials of the guide central office, and personnel of the publishing company,

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16 Bernard DeVoto, "The Writers' Project," Harper's Magazine, CLXXXIV (January, 1941), 223. DeVoto wrote: "The Guides could not have been produced without the infinite labors of the field workers of course, but it is equally true that the work of the Washington staff has been indispensable. That staff is composed of experts trained to this particular job, and they are primarily responsible for the excellence of the Guides." 223.

17 Lyle Saxon to Henry Alsberg, November 25, 1936, FWP-La. Unlike some State Directors who seemed to protest every change, Saxon made them without complaint as his letters to Alsberg indicates: "When I returned from Washington with the manuscripts, to the New Orleans Guide I found orders from your office making several radical changes necessary. These changes are now completed."

18 "Flow of Copy for the American Guide," LaCol-LSLBR.

19 For a general discussion of how the guidebook was written, see State Times, May 15, 1939, Sec. 1, p. A 13.
FLOW OF COPY FOR THE AMERICAN GUIDE

DISTRICT AND LARGE CITY OFFICES:

FIELD CONTINUITY (in triplicate)

FIELD FILES

(Original & 1 carbon) Editor

Consultant

WORK FILES

Field Editorial Copy (in quadruplicate)

(Original & 2 carbons)

TO STATE OFFICE

REFERENCE FILES

TO STATE OFFICE:

FIELD OFFICES:

Field Editorial Copy (in triplicate)

(Original & 1 carbon)

PROJECT FILES

State Editor

State Work Files

State Editorial Copy (in triplicate)

(Original & 1 carbon)

To Washington

(2 carbon)

REFERENCE FILES
two other groups also examined the copy. These were the volunteer consultants and the sponsor and co-sponsors of the projects.

Volunteer consultants were authorities on the respective topics covered in the guide. As such, they were called upon by Saxon and Dreyer to criticize particular essays, although a few examined the entire guide. The state director and the assistant state director sent a form letter to the volunteer consultants asking them to make suggestions about the Louisiana Guide. One such representative letter went to Moise H. Goldstein, a New Orleans architect and member of the state advisory committee. Saxon and Dreyer informed Goldstein that he would receive a copy of the guide essay on architecture. They told Goldstein that they would "appreciate very much any additions or corrections [he would] care to make." They especially wanted him to suggest the names of living architects whose names should be included in the guide.

The response to such requests varied with each respondent.

20 In the preface of the Louisiana Guide approximately fifty individuals were cited as having read portions of the Guide. Workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Louisiana, Louisiana: A Guide to the State (New York, 1941), vii-ix.

21 Lyle Saxon and Edward Dreyer to Moise H. Goldstein, February 27, 1939, LaCol-LSLBR.
Some volunteer consultants offered constructive suggestions, some merely complimented the work and offered no corrections, and others used the request to promote themselves or the institution with which they were associated.

Dr. Leon Ryder Maxwell, Director of the School of Music, Newcomb College, New Orleans, gave careful consideration to the music essay Dreyer submitted to him. Maxwell was greatly disturbed over the mentioning of a Mrs. Bumstead in the essay. "It is difficult to understand where your investigators got the information about teachers listed on pages 11-12," he wrote. "For instance, Mrs. Bumstead is mentioned. She is a well-to-do amateur, not at all a teacher." This information was evidently appreciated, for her name did not appear in the state Guide. Maxwell, on the other hand, felt that "among New Orleans composers and virtuosos, the name of Sam Franko should certainly be mentioned." Dreyer placed a question mark beside this suggestion, but Franko's name also failed to appear in the guide. Maxwell also expressed surprise that he found "nowhere the mention of Lena Little, a New Orleans singer who became very famous in England and eastern America in oratorio and song recitals." Little's name was not listed in the guide.22

22Leon Ryder Maxwell to Edward Dreyer, March 30, 1939, ibid.
Dr. H. W. Stropher, Director of the School of Music at Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge, and a member of the state advisory committee, sought in his criticisms of the music essay to publicize his music department. Stropher made several criticisms of the essay. He first noted that there was "too much credit given to colored people and their type of music and too little to musical culture among white people." He felt that the music "among the colored was socially more significant, in view of the great numbers, perhaps, but musically, it is to be questioned." Dreyer apparently disagreed, for he placed an "x" by this remark.23

Dr. Stropher also believed the essay out of proportion--it gave seven pages to informal music and only six pages to formal music. Dreyer also objected to this comment. The professor thought that some reference should have been made to the Catholic Church in St. Martinville having the oldest organ in Louisiana. He also wanted noted the fact that New Orleans was the first American city to have an opera house. He agreed with the listing Dreyer had made of the compositions of L. M. Gottschalk, but wanted him to include others such as La Jota Aragmesa, Opus 14, Le Banjo, Opus 15, Souvenir d'Andalusia, Opus 22, La Gitavella, Opus 35, and

Ojos Criollos, Opus 37. This last number, Stropher noted, was
"played successfully in London and Ostend, Belgium; Lucerne,
Montreaux, Geneva, Lausanne and Interlaken in Switzerland and Paris
by the Louisiana State University Orchestra." The only suggested
number Dreyer included in the guide, however, was Le Banjo.24

Stropher told Saxon and Dreyer that in the guide Louisiana
State University's Music Library should be characterized as follows:

It has the best collection of 'Americana' of
any school in America, the largest collection of
concertos with complete score and parts of any
educational institution anywhere, the finest lot of
opera scores for research of any library except
the library of Congress, [sic] and it is said to be
second best in point of quality of all schools in
America. Manuscripts and first editions have
gravitated to it. You would have to see it to be
convinced.25

Saxon and Dreyer apparently did not see it, for in the guide
they described the Library as including "an excellent collection of
Americana, a large collection of concertos with complete score and
parts, and a fine collection of opera scores."26

24 Ibid.; Workers of the Writers' Program of the Work
Projects Administration of the State of Louisiana, Louisiana: A Guide
to the State (New York, 1941), 198.

25 H. W. Stropher to Lyle Saxon and Edward Dreyer,
March 30, 1939, LaCol-LSLBR.

26 Workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects
Administration of the State of Louisiana, Louisiana: A Guide to the
State (New York, 1941), 198.
Robert J. Usher, Librarian, Howard Memorial Library of New Orleans, made constructive observations about the state guide. He felt that reference should have been made in the "Bibliography" to a work by J. Fair Hardin, *Northwestern Louisiana, A History of the Watershed of the Red River, 1714-1937*. Dreyer wrote "OK" by this suggestion and the title appeared in the guide.  

Some volunteer consultants used Saxon and Dreyer's requests for suggestions as an opportunity to promote themselves. Dr. Ernest Eugene Emile Schuyten, Dean of the College of Music, Loyola University in New Orleans, wrote Saxon that he had "read the music survey with very much interest" and had found "it very good indeed." He then noted: "I am enclosing a little outline about myself which will give you a little more information than is mentioned in the survey." He provided a twenty-three line biographical sketch of himself. The page of information the dean offered for use in the state guide, however, was reduced to the following: "Ernest Schuyten, violinist and composer, is dean of the college of Music of Loyola.


28 Ernest E. E. Schuyten to Lyle Saxon, April 19, 1939, LaCol-LSLBR.
Some respondents merely complimented the essays they read and offered no constructive suggestions. Charles A. O'Neil, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Louisiana, wrote the following letter to Dreyer:

I thank you very much for the honor you conferred upon me by submitting the essay on Government, which you intend to include in the Louisiana Guide, and which my good friend Lysle [sic] Saxon spoke to me about.

I have read the essay with great interest and genuine pleasure, and as far as my judgment goes, it is faultless. The explanation of the judicial system prevailing in Louisiana was particularly interesting to me, of course, and I am impressed with its accuracy. In fact, the whole essay is an excellent history of Louisiana's system of government. It is astonishing how complete and yet how concise the author has made this history.

With kindest regards and best wishes to you and my good friend Lysle [sic] Saxon, I beg the honor to remain....

The Advisory Committees did not perform the services expected of them. Their contributions were noted in the "Final


30Charles A. O'Neil to Edward Dreyer, November 20, 1939, LaCol-LSLBR.
Report of the Louisiana WPA" as follows: "These committees... were not as active as anticipated, because of the lack of incentive and lack of orientation of the very basic question of what was expected of them and why they were called into existence." Not every federally sponsored project had an advisory committee. The Survey of the Federal Archives Projects in Louisiana never organized one but managed to perform its duties.31

In addition to the services rendered by volunteer consultants were those made by sponsors and co-sponsors of the projects. The system of sponsorship, like many phases of the Federal Writers' Program, evolved. Alsberg originally intended for the Government Printing Office in Washington to publish the guides at government expense. Several developments, however, caused him to alter his plans. Essentially, these were publication in 1937 of two guides, Idaho: A Guide in Word and Picture, and Washington: City and Capital.32

Vardis Fisher, Director of the Idaho Writers' Project,


32 McKinzie, "Writers on Relief," 85.
had his guide ready for publication before any other state director. He realized that the first published guide would receive considerable national publicity and thus determined from the start to have his guide receive this recognition. To Fisher's dismay, however, Alsberg insisted that it was embarrassing to have Idaho, a small and relatively unimportant state, issue the first guide. Alsberg wanted the Washington, D.C. guide to be the first one published, followed by guides to the larger states.\footnote{R onald W. T a ber, "Vardis Fisher and the 'Idaho Guide:' Preserving Culture for the New Deal," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, 59 (April, 1968), 68-76.} Fisher vehemently protested Alsberg's decision and made plans to publish his guide with or without the blessings of the national director. Heated argument between Idaho and Washington ensued, and the national staff began a series of delaying tactics to thwart publication of the Idaho guide. Fisher, however, was just as adamant to achieve his goal as the national staff was to deny it.\footnote{Ib id.}

According to federal law, all materials produced by an agency of the federal government had to be published at public expense by the Government Printing Office (GPO) in Washington. Fisher was aware that he could never have his guide published first
if the Government Printing Office issued it. He circumvented the federal regulation pertaining to publication by an ingenious maneuver and in doing so made his heresy become the orthodoxy of the FWP. He persuaded the Idaho Secretary of State to serve as sponsor of the Idaho Guide and to sign a contract with a private publisher for its publication. As sponsor the Secretary of State also signed an agreement to transfer to the United States Treasury any royalties the publisher paid for the Guide. Without violating the law Fisher was thus able to prevent the Government Printing Office from issuing his guide while at the same time to see his guide become the first one produced by the Writers' Project. 35

A few months after publication of the Idaho Guide in 1937, the Government Printing Office issued Washington: City and Capital. The mere size of the guide immediately caused it to come under derision, for no tourist could comfortably carry the over 1100 page, five and one-half pound guide. In a note to Harry Hopkins about the guide, President Roosevelt remarked: "As a guidebook or as an

35Ibid. Despite Alsberg's earlier protestations to Fisher about the quality of the Idaho Guide, Alsberg wrote Fisher after the guide was published: "I want to thank you and your staff for the excellent job you have made of the Idaho State Guide. It is a swell book... You are to be congratulated not only on the quality of the book, which of course, we knew would be excellent, but also on the speed with which you produced it." Taber, "The Federal Writers' Project in the Pacific Northwest," 143-144.
article to sell to visitors it is too large to go into anything smaller than a steamer trunk."\textsuperscript{36} Jerre Mangione observed, however, that the size of the guide did have one redeeming feature: "In a nation conditioned to respect bigness, its size, if nothing else, may well have made the deepest impression on the members of Congress who had been complaining about the paucity of the Project's output."\textsuperscript{37}

Alsberg might have lived with derision, but not the reasons for preventing the Government Printing Office from issuing the guides. The GPO determined all physical aspects of its books, including layout, dimensions, quality of paper, and style of type. The GPO was slow to issue its books and could not produce them as fast as the FWP prepared them. The GPO offered no copyright protection, provided no discounts to bookstores, did not publicize its publications, and lacked facilities to market and distribute its books. Understandably then, Fisher's plan for private publication seemed even more attractive to Alsberg, especially when he realized that the system of sponsorship removed from the Project any responsibility for the costs of publication.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36}McKinzie, "Writers on Relief," 90.
\textsuperscript{37}Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, 209.
\textsuperscript{38}McKinzie, "Writers on Relief," 90; Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, 221; McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, 272.
Once Alsberg realized the disadvantages of having the GPO issue the guides at government expense, he then sought to have local publishing companies issue the guides with money appropriated by the state legislatures. On November 23, 1936, he wrote Saxon:

"It occurs to me that if a legislative appropriation will be requested, with the State University as cooperating sponsor, the matter should be taken up at the University during the next week or ten days so that the question of an appropriation can be taken up immediately with the Legislature when that body meets... Please give this matter your prompt attention."  

Although several state legislatures did appropriate money for local printing companies to produce the guides, this plan for financing the guides was dropped in favor of the plan Jerre Mangione proposed to Alsberg. Shortly before Mangione's association with the FWP in February, 1937, Alsberg planned to issue the guides at public expense through the GOP. By March, however, "Alsberg abandoned the idea in favor of a sponsorship system of publication that would permit the Project books to be issued by commercial publishers." Alsberg now worried that while the publishers might

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40 Henry Alsberg to Lyle Saxon, November 23, 1936, LaCol-LSLBR.
issue at their own expense guidebooks to vacation states, they might not, without subsidy, publish the "guidebooks of less popular states."

Mangione then offered a solution to Alsberg's problem:

Listening to Alsberg, there occurred to me a simple solution for enticing publishers to issue the less desirable guidebooks without any subsidy. Why not offer such books in groups that would include at least one highly desirable guidebook, I suggested, with the stipulation that the publisher must agree to publish the entire group.... This strategy proved to be so successful that within three months Alsberg became convinced that every state guidebook could be published at the expense of reputable commercial publishers. Now he began to worry about the states where, at his instigation, monies had been appropriated by state legislatures for the production of the guidebooks by local printing firms, which had no promotion and marketing facilities.41

Alsberg encouraged Saxon to have the state legislature appropriate funds for publication of the state guide. Like Mangione, but before him, Saxon also saw the disadvantages inherent in Alsberg's plan. Saxon discussed these problems with his Advisory Committee and wrote Alsberg about their discussion (The letter is very revealing in light of Mangione's claim and Alsberg's later letters to Saxon,):

Mr. Clark Salmon of the New Orleans Item
has made a suggestion which would be an excellent one if the plan can be worked out. His suggestion is that we submit the New Orleans City Guide to

some New York publisher such as MacMillan, Appleton-Century, Harper's, or Scribners, and that they publish the book exactly as they would publish one of their own books, and that all royalties accruing from sales be turned over to the Department of Public Welfare or to some other public charity. Nearly any publisher would be glad to publish the New Orleans Guide because we could guarantee a sale of at least 30,000 copies, if the book was published at a reasonable retail price.

This seemed an excellent idea to the others [sic] members of the committee--such a good idea, in fact, that they have lost interest in printing it locally, unless Washington disapproves of the plan. I am not at all sure that it would be in line with the policies laid down by Mr. Hopkins. However, if bids were submitted from several publishers, some satisfactory arrangement might be made. I do believe that several city guides would have a wide sale in other States--such guides, for example, as San Francisco, Charleston, and New Orleans. It could be a fine thing if the City Guide were taken completely out of our hands and could be distributed and sold indefinitely--long after the Writers' Projects ceased to function.

Would you please write me what you think of this?42

Saxon kept before Alsberg the feasibility of having a national rather than a local publisher issue the guides. On January 23, 1937, he wrote Alsberg that he would like to have a New York publishing firm issue the New Orleans Guide. He felt that such an arrangement would be made, "as there will be a large sale of the New Orleans

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42Lyle Saxon to Henry Alsberg, November 25, 1936, FWP-La.
Guide book, because the guide is new and complete and will be cheaper than other books on the market in New Orleans (including my own).\footnote{43}

Whether these letters helped Alsberg opt for commercial publication by publishers with a national reputation is unclear. At least this much, however, can be determined. Before publication of the Idaho Guide, prior to Mangione's association with the Writers' Project, and before the appearance of the Washington Guide, the Advisory Committee in Louisiana realized the advantages to be gained from national publication of the Guides. As Saxon enumerated them, these benefits were greater distribution and sale of the guides at nominal costs through competitive bids, use of royalties for worthwhile purposes, and continuance of the guides after demise of the Writers' Project.

While keeping before Alsberg the advantages of having a national publisher issue the New Orleans Guide, Saxon also informed the national director of his efforts to find a sponsor for it. During the first week of February, 1937, Saxon and Crutcher went to see Governor Richard Leche. They hoped he might help them persuade Mayor Robert S. Maestri of New Orleans to act as sponsor of the

\footnote{43}{Lyle Saxon to Henry Alsberg, January 23, 1937, ibid.}
New Orleans Guide. They also used the occasion to discuss with
the Governor sponsorship of the state guide. 44

Their visit was successful, as Saxon indicated to Alsberg.
The Governor kept Saxon and Crutcher in his office for two hours.
"He wouldn't let us go away," Saxon told Alsberg, "and he is highly
pleased with the idea of the Louisiana Guide and says that he will
have the State of Louisiana sponsor it and will do anything we want
to help toward its publication." The Governor "grew so enthusiastic"
that he made suggestions for additional work by the Writers' Project.
He also appointed a committee of three individuals to read and check
the Guide. "This I believe to be a good idea," commented Saxon,
"and it will shift some of the responsibility from me in case of errors
or omissions." 45

Alsberg responded to Saxon's letter by saying: "I have
always been sure, with you directing the work, you would have no
difficulty about getting sponsorship." Alsberg remarked that he
personally knew "any number of publishers in New York who would
be willing to take over the New Orleans Guide without demanding any
guarantee from the sponsor." He said that he was recently at the

44 Lyle Saxon to Henry Alsberg, February 6, 1937, ibid.
45 Ibid.
office of Simon and Schuster, "and they would have signed a contract
with the sponsor right away for the job."46

Alsberg apparently thought Saxon wanted the Mayor of
New Orleans to publish rather than to sponsor the city guide.
This would seem to indicate that Saxon's earlier letters, concerning
his preference for a national publisher, made little or no impression
on the national director. For Alsberg now urged Saxon to do what
Saxon had weeks before encouraged Alsberg to do. "No doubt
Louisiana has a state printer," Alsberg wrote Saxon, "to whom the
printing of State publications has to be given." This, he said, was
true in New York, so he cautioned Saxon not to let the Mayor of
New Orleans force him to have a Louisiana publisher issue the guide.
"If you do this," Alsberg warned, "you would get no national
distribution, no national reviews, and no national attention for the
book, and you would not get a very good typographical job."47 Saxon
apparently concluded that he could have the Mayor of New Orleans
sponsor the guide and a national publisher issue the book. Since
Saxon never suggested otherwise, Alsberg's concern was well intended
but baseless.

46 Henry Alsberg to Lyle Saxon, February 9, 1937, ibid.

47 Ibid.
On June 10, 1937, Mayor Maestri informed Alsberg that Crutcher and Saxon had just brought him the completed New Orleans Guide manuscript. He said as Mayor he was glad to sponsor the book on behalf of the city. He also offered to "cooperate in any way" that Alsberg could suggest in regard to copyright of the publication. Saxon, Maestri said, told him that the guide could "be published by a New York or Boston publishing house, and in this way no expense [would] be incurred." The Mayor believed that the guide was "a valuable and worthwhile undertaking of which New Orleans may well be proud."48

Saxon also wrote Alsberg on the same day that Maestri did. The State Director said: "The deed is done. This afternoon Mayor Maestri formally accepted the sponsorship for the New Orleans City Guide." The Guide, Saxon continued, would arrive in Alsberg's office the following day. "I hope you like it," remarked Saxon, "for we have worked hard."49

Five days later Edward M. Barrows, apparently of the Central Office, wrote Cronyn about the New Orleans Guide. Barrows observed that the manuscript contained about 250,000 words and thus


49 Lyle Saxon to Henry Alsberg, June 10, 1937, ibid.
was too long for a local guide. He wanted Saxon to reduce it to 200,000 words. Barrows noted that Alsberg had given the manuscript "his personal attention" and had found it "excellent." Barrows said that the Houghton Mifflin Company expressed "their willingness to publish it, since they have published other Louisiana works by Lyle Saxon."50

The Houghton Mifflin Company of Boston did issue the New Orleans City Guide. An official of the company, R. N. Linscott, wrote Alsberg that an advance of five hundred dollars against the royalty would go to the sponsor. Linscott told Alsberg to make it clear that the money went to the office of the Mayor, and not to the individual, Robert S. Maestri. "Otherwise," observed Linscott, "we would have to send the royalty checks to Maestri after he left office."51

Royalties from the sale of the guides could only be expended by the sponsor in a prescribed fashion. The money could be used to defray publication costs or to write and publish new works. It might be used to pay "other than labor costs" that otherwise would be charged against the Writers' Project. Receipts might also be spent

50 Edward M. Barrows to George W. Cronyn, June 15, 1937, ibid.

on installing and maintaining historical markers, or be placed in the Miscellaneous Receipts of the United States Treasury.  

The important link in having national publishing houses issue the guides was adoption of the system of sponsorship. A sponsor could be a public official, a tax-supported body, a trade union, a civic organization, or a non-profit organization. Since the FWP did not enter directly into contracts with publishers or printers, the volunteer sponsor in theory was responsible for securing publication for the guide it sponsored. In the event a book or pamphlet was of such a specialized nature as to be unsuited for commercial publishers, or in case a pamphlet was desired, the sponsor could finance the printing of the manuscript. In actual practice the role of the sponsor was quite limited. Only the State Director and National Director could approve the final copy for publication. They arranged the contract with the publisher and the sponsor merely signed it. The system of sponsorship that evolved was an important step in the general flow of copy.

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52 WPA Operating Procedure No. W-13, "Regulations for Publication of State and Local Guide Material," October, 1936, La Col-LSLBR.

53 "Work of the Federal Writers' Project," The Publishers' Weekly, CXXXV (March 18, 1939),

54 Ibid.
Despite the extensive flow of copy in the state, few sponsors were needed in Louisiana because the Writers' Project completed so few projects. What these publications were and how well they were written can best be determined by a review of the guides.
CHAPTER VI

A REVIEW OF THE PROJECT'S MAJOR PUBLICATIONS

During its history from October, 1935, to January, 1943, the Louisiana Writers' Project had but two major books published. These were the New Orleans City Guide in 1938 and Louisiana: A Guide to the State in 1945. A third major work, Gumbo Ya-Ya, was published in 1945, after the project closed. All three books were generally well received by the reading public and by the book critics.

The first major work, the New Orleans City Guide, was published by the Houghton Mifflin Company and sold at $2.50 per copy. 1 The city guide was the shortest of the three major books, 420 pages. It contained maps, pictures, drawings, a bibliography, and an index. Caroline Durieux, a paid consultant for the Writers' Project for six months during 1937, designed the cover for the city guide and also made several of the drawings in the guide. 2

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1 "Application for Permission to Publish," January 14, 1938, FWP-La.

2 Interview with Caroline Durieux, January 27, 1974; Lyle Saxon to J. D. Newsom, May 23, 1940, Lyle Saxon Collection (Howard Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, La.) Hereinafter cited as LeScol-HTML. According to Barbara E.
The city guide was divided into three sections. The first division, "New Orleans: The General Background," was the shortest, just thirty-three pages. In this section topics discussed were the natural setting, history, government, and racial distribution of New Orleans. The second division, "Economic and Social Development," was approximately equal in length with the third section. The second section dealt with topics such as education, religion, sports, recreation, newspapers, literature, music, architecture, cuisine, cults, and folkways. The last division, "Sectional Descriptions and Tours," described the various tours one could make through New Orleans and its environs.

Lyle Saxon tried to make the stories in the city guide as accurate as possible. He employed a very successful method of collecting data. When not satisfied with a report turned in by a worker, Saxon assigned another writer the topic: neither writer knew that the other had the assignment. Saxon compared the second

Amidon of the Houghton Mifflin Company: "While the original NEW ORLEANS CITY GUIDE was published in 1938, the Revised edition by Robert Tallant was published December 8, 1952. The list price on the original edition...went up in 1948 to $5.00 and $5.00 was the list price of the Revised edition....There were 5 printings of the original edition of the Guide totaling 19,000 copies and two printings of the Revised edition totaling 4038 copies." Barbara E. Amidon to author, February 22, 1974.
report with the first and, if still dissatisfied, wrote the assignment himself. He had to be cautious about the information he received. One project worker turned in beautifully written and entertaining stories. Saxon realized, however, that the stories were completely fabricated and thus could not be used.³

Collecting information for the city guide was not always an easy assignment. Because of the segregation policies in New Orleans, some Dillard Project writers were turned away from the city's public libraries. Even when admitted, their problems had just begun. They were required to sit separately from the other library patrons. Some librarians refused to provide materials the workers requested. A few librarians instructed the Dillard workers not to return and then informed Saxon never to send them again. One Dillard worker claimed that he had to know the holdings of the libraries because librarians would provide only the materials specifically requested.⁴

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³Interview with Caroline Durieux, January 22, 1974. Saxon was not the only director who had such problems in Louisiana. John Andreassen, Director of the Historical Records Survey in the state, learned, just before sending some data to the publisher, that a worker had made up all of the entries.

⁴Interview with a former Dillard Project worker who asked to remain anonymous, January 22, 1974, cited hereinafter as Anonymous Dillard Project worker.
The Dillard Project workers also had difficulty gathering information from some Negro cult leaders. The occultists held the Dillard workers in suspicion because of their education. They knew that the Dillard writers could not be tricked like their uneducated customers. Saxon also got around this obstacle to information by utilizing the services of Robert McKinney, the only Negro not on the Dillard Project. Most black Orleanians knew and trusted McKinney, who understood the psychology of the uneducated Negroes better than did some Dillard workers.

McKinney frequently accompanied Mrs. Durieux on some fascinating assignments. He often introduced her to the Negroes as an underworld character rather than as an accomplished artist working for the Writers' Project. On one occasion, for example, he told a Negro fortune teller that Mrs. Durieux was a pickpocket who planned to work Canal Street the next day. Mrs. Durieux, McKinney said, wanted to know which section of the street to work. The fortune teller was deceived by this clever bit of trickery and began her work. She placed several lighted candles around a cup containing an egg and then put two straws on top of the egg to form an "x." She quickly raised her arms, causing a draft which in turn spun the straws. They finally came to rest and the fortune teller informed Mrs. Durieux that the northern section of Canal Street
would be the best section for the acts of theft. 5

Saxon also had to be cautious about the claims some owners of historic homes and buildings made about their dwellings. Saxon's acceptance or rejection of these claims affected the tourist traffic, and thus the income of many people. Saxon also tried to avoid taking sides in disputes about the history of New Orleans. For instance, Orleanians have long differed over whether their city was founded in 1717 or 1718. The city guide noted both dates, but it quoted Robert Usher, Librarian of Howard Memorial Library in New Orleans, as to why 1718 was more likely the accurate date. 6 In this manner Saxon stayed out of the controversy but at the same time gave credence to the year 1718.

Some Orleanians also believed that the onetime Spanish Governor of Louisiana, Don Estevan Miro, lived in a home at 529 Royal Street. The guide said: "Whether the ruler actually lived in the home is not known." 7 Opinion likewise divided over the location of the first theater in New Orleans, Le Spectale. The guide

5 Interview with Caroline Durieux, January 27, 1974.

6 Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration for the City of New Orleans, New Orleans City Guide (Boston, 1938), 229-30. Author cited hereinafter as Louisiana Writers' Project.

7 Ibid., 240.
favored its location at 732 St. Peter Street and listed it as such. 8

Occasionally the guide categorically rejected some historical claims. It noted, for instance, that one building in New Orleans bore a plaque stating that the structure was built in 1774 as the first skyscraper in the city. This inscription, stated the guide, was "erroneous" because the building was erected in 1811 and thus could not have been the first skyscraper. 9

Orleanians did agree on one thing, however, that the Latin influence in their city made it unlike any other American city. This "Latin culture," noted the guide, was "a culture not founded on books but on the art of life itself which [made] New Orleans different from other cities of the country." 10 New Orleans was like other Southern cities, however, in the practice of racial segregation. The guide mentioned Negro recreational and tourist facilities when they were available, but this was not very often. The fact that they were listed at all in the guide, however, was appreciated by Negroes planning to visit the Crescent City. 11

8 Ibid., 244.
9 Ibid., 243.
10 Ibid., 67.
PAGE 184
DISPLAY IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

184 - Exhibit of the American Guide Series*

*Picture located in the National Archives.
Saxon and his staff not only wrote for a segregated city, they expressed a view on Reconstruction with which many of the residents of the city probably agreed. This interpretation is interesting especially since the Central Office in Washington approved the guide:

The years between 1865 and 1877 were the blackest in the history of New Orleans. It was a period of violence, lawlessness, political agitation, and corruption. Politics, as the order of the day, colored and shaped every activity. Returning Confederate soldiers found Unionists in charge of all civic affairs. Negroes, bewildered by their new liberties and constituting a threatening problem to the whites, crowded the city under the protection of the Freedmen's Bureau. Northern fortune-hunters—derisively called 'Carpetbaggers'—were coming into the city daily and were fast taking possession of commercial as well as political vantage points. The Southerners, however, earnestly went to work to repair their shattered fortunes and regain their former place in the community.... New Orleans became a city occupied by Federal troops under the ruthless control of General Phil Sheridan.... White people were compelled to adjust themselves to the strange experience of living under Negro officials and Negro police, and were also required to associate with them on an equal footing in restaurants, railroad cars and schools. It cannot be said that the white population adjusted itself very gracefully to these conditions....

The New Orleans City Guide received extremely favorable reviews by book critics. Since the comments made about this work

\[12\]Louisiana Writers' Project, New Orleans City Guide, 31-33.
were similar to those made about the other two Project publications, an examination of the reviews of the city guide is instructive concerning the comments made about the state guide and the folklore book. Although the reviewers differed about the most appealing features of the city guide, they generally agreed that the book was well written.\(^{13}\)

Samuel Tupper expressed the opinion of many reviewers when

\(^{13}\) An advertisement of the city guide by the Houghton Mifflin Company read in parts as follows:

Here at last is the guidebook to New Orleans! It comes as close as is humanly possible to putting the whole spirit of the city between the covers of a book.

It tells you everything you want to know about "The Crescent City:" what to do, what to see, where to go, and what happened there. It describes (and gives the history of) every part of the city, and covers the nearby plantations and Delta in a series of automobile tours.

And is much more than an ordinary guide, for two of the three sections are devoted to detailed information about the amusements and night life of the city, about her famous recipes, her history, architecture, industry, literature. It is an encyclopedia of valuable information presented in the most attractive form....

With Lyle Saxon as editor, the New Orleans City Guide promises to be the best and most interesting of all the guidebooks being prepared by the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration... No one is better fitted to edit the book, as his interpretations of the spirit of New Orleans are inspired by a sure knowledge of the city's past and present.

he wrote in the Atlanta Journal that the city guide was "amply documented, beautifully illustrated, and admirably written." He felt that the quality of the guide was enhanced by the "arrangement, selection, and fascinating facts," which, he said, was "the way it should be with a composite production of writers." Tupper did not like Saxon's "glowing prose" and he thought the history essay in the guide was only "satisfying." He regretted that the guide virtually ignored the twentieth century. "It may well be," Tupper concluded, "that such periods as the Huey Long reigns are too recent to permit proper evaluation."

In the Washington Post Jean Maury observed that as a native of New Orleans Saxon knew "how it should be written about." Saxon, said Maury, "made the city and its environs live and breathe," and he portrayed "the spirit as well as the substance of America's gayest, most romantic city." Saxon and his staff, wrote Maury, gave "clinching proof" that the American Guide books could "be at once interesting literature and practical guides for tourists and research workers."


15Jean Maury,"Making New Orleans 'Live and Breathe,'" Washington Post (March 6, 1938).
Maury also liked the guide because she felt it had universal appeal. The "former resident," she noted, would enjoy reading the guide because it would "clarify [his] memories, add to his information, reconstruct some of [his] impressions and deepen [his] nostalgia." The "casual visitors" would also like the guide, said Maury, even if they only had time to walk through the Vieux Carre or to dine at Antoine's Restaurant. If the visitors read the guide on their return trips home, they would "more than ever [be] eager to go back for more." The guide, added Maury, would also appeal to the reader who had never been to New Orleans, for it would "present to his [five] senses something of what [he would] see, hear, taste, smell and feel when [he did] go for a real visit to New Orleans."16

Dorothy Jones of the Dallas News also wrote a favorable review of the city guide. She said that it would make a "perfect gift for the New Orleans-bound tourist" because it contained so much varied and interesting information. "Whatever the reader is seeking," Jones said, "whether it be the best restaurant for frog legs or the most interesting church, the guide book directs his search, including even a city map large enough to be actually useful." Jones said the Writers' Project "should be congratulated on the successful

16bid.

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completion of this project. 

Even more complimentary of the city guide than Jones was Alice Allen of the Tulsa World. According to Allen the book was "the perfect guide book, an encyclopedia of valuable information, presented in the most attractive form." The photographs alone, said Allen, "would justify the price" of the guide. The book was helpful to the tourist for it told him "what to do, what to see, where to go and what to say." It was "extremely well planned" and was "outstanding in its practical usefulness." The "extensive bibliography," continued Allen, "and the cross references and detailed index [made] it very simple for the reader to find what he [was] looking for." This guide, Allen concluded, set the standard for other guides, and she hoped "that most of the federal writers' project books [would] not fall too short of the standard set by this one."  

Other reviewers also lauded the merits of the city guide. In The New Yorker Clifton Fadiman said that the "New Orleans City Guide was one of the best of the American Guide Series...and about one of the most picturesque American Cities." Blair Bolles in 

The Saturday Review of Literature wrote that the city guide was "perhaps the masterpiece of the whole [guide] series." In The New York Times Book Review Edward L. Tinker remarked that the book was an "exceedingly well planned and informative guide to the most unusual and picturesque city in the United States." Margaret Parsons in the Sunday Telegram of Worcester, Massachusetts, said that upon first seeing the city guide she was puzzled as to why New Orleans had a guide book larger than some of the state guides. After reading the city guide, however, she concluded that there was "more of interest in New Orleans than in most states."

The content of this guide, she said, could not be "duplicated in any other guidebook." Writing in Social Forces, Howard W. Odom agreed with Parsons that the guide was unique. "It would be difficult," he said, "to find a more beautiful book and more more steeped in the atmosphere of the annual sub-regional center of the Nation." The guide was "well organized, well written, well illustrated, and a

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22 Margaret Parsons, "City That Care Forgot," Sunday Telegram (March 13, 1938).
credit to all those who worked it up."^23

The city guide was as impressive to an Orleanian reviewer as it was to critics across America. Cleveland Sessums of The Times-Picayune said that residents of "The City," New Orleans, may have wondered when visiting the city's libraries and museums "about the earnest scribes [they] saw vigorously studying ancient books and documents and carefully making notes of their trips. On trips to the riverfront, [they] may have noticed quietly serious individuals taking measurements of levees and water levels." These "scribes, checkers and investigators," Sessums said, "were members of the Writers' Project gathering information for the city guide."^24

Sessums believed that the Writers' Project was "one of the most valuable and important" of the WPA's projects. Saxon and his assistants, Sessums remarked, "discharged their share of the job with a success which [gave] the New Orleans guidebook authoritative and permanent value." Although the guide represented "an immense amount of labor," it was "singularly free from the cloying [sic]  


^24Cleveland Sessums, "Spirit of New Orleans Caught in New 'City Guide,'" Times-Picayune (February 27, 1938).
pedantry" which occasionally marred "even the most worthwhile efforts in its field." The guide, continued Sessums, spoke "eloquently of the director's selective taste, editorial skill and shrewd arrangement of material." Saxon avoided "the extravagant spirit of the blurbist," and he provided "an admirable [sane] and well-balanced picture of a city which [had] long suffered from the undisciplined interpretations of kindly romanticists." The guide, concluded Sessums, was "a splendid job which [brought] credit to the compliers of the book, to the city and to the WPA. It [was] a permanent contribution to the national understanding and solidarity; an achievement of the most importance and lasting service."25

Perhaps the New Orleans City Guide was too successful, at least in so far as publication of the state guide was concerned. Project officials had difficulty obtaining a publisher for the state guide because publishers feared that the city guide removed the market for a state guide.26 Hastings House, however, accepted

25Ibid. The FWP-La records contain typed copies of reviews by other book critics in the following publications: New York World Telegram, March 7, 1938; Los Angeles Times, April 3, 1938; New Republic, April 6, 1938; American Literature, May, 1938; Social Forces, May, 1938; Sunday-Item Tribune, May 1, 1938; Prairie Schooner, Summer, 1938; South Atlantic Quarterly, July 1938; The Saturday Review, April 23, 1938.

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PICTURES IN THE NEW ORLEANS CITY GUIDE

194 - Old St. Louis Cemetery
195 - Delgado Art Museum
196 - King Zulu
197 - Chimney Sweeps

PAGES 198 THROUGH 203
DRAWINGS BY CAROLINE DURIEUX

198 - Tourists
199 - Cemeteries
200 - Tante Eulalie Et Mademoiselle Mimi
201 - Shutter Girl
202 - Mother Carrie
203 - Zeline and Joe

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the manuscript and issued Louisiana: A Guide to the State, in 1941.

Hastings House initially contracted to print five thousand copies of the guide at a price of $2.50 a copy. The Louisiana Library Commission, sponsor of the Louisiana Writers' Project, agreed to permit the publisher to increase the price to $3.00 a copy due to the "length of the book," and to the "rising costs of publication and paper." 27

The State Guide was the largest book prepared by the Louisiana Writers' Project and was the only one which really dealt with the entire state. The book contained 766 pages, thirteen maps, 102 photographs, thirty-seven drawings, and was divided into four sections. Part one described "Louisiana: Past and Present," and constituted about one-third of the book. The second division, with

27 Paul M. Hebert and Essae M. Culver to Walter Frese, November 29, 1940, FWP-La. Paragraph five of the "Memorandum of Agreement" between the Louisiana Library Commission and Walter Frese read: "The Publisher undertakes to publish the said work at his own expense, according to style and specifications heretofore agreed upon... at a catalogue price of not more than two dollars and fifty cents cloth style. The Publisher further undertakes to print an initial minimum edition of five thousand (5,000) copies," "Memorandum of Agreement," May 17, 1949, ibid. According to Barbara E. Amidon of Houghton Mifflin Company: "GUMBO YA-YA sold for $5.00 when it was originally published... There were four printings of GUMBO YA-YA totaling 19,000 copies." Barbara E. Amidon to author, February 22, 1974.
147 pages, was the second shortest section and provided a history of sixteen towns. The longest division, with 301 pages, was the third, and consisted of tours through the state. The last division, with only sixty-one pages, was the shortest, and was made up of a glossary of words, a chronology of the history of the state, a bibliography of works about the state, a 1940 population census of Louisiana towns, and an index.²⁸

The pictures in the state guide were generally of good

²⁸Many of the chapter titles of the State Guide were similar to those in the City Guide, as the following indicates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Orleans City Guide</th>
<th>Louisiana: A Guide to the State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural Setting</td>
<td>Natural Setting</td>
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<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>Racial Distribution</td>
<td>Racial Distribution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>Transportation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folkways</td>
<td>Folkways</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Life and Social Welfare</td>
<td>Social Life and Social Welfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>Religion</td>
<td>Religion</td>
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<td>Sports and Recreation</td>
<td>Sports and Recreation</td>
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<td>Arts and Crafts</td>
<td>Art</td>
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<td>Literature</td>
<td>Literature</td>
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<td>Theater</td>
<td>The Theater</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Music</td>
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<td>Architecture</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creole Cuisine</td>
<td>Cuisine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
quality but were not always placed to illustrate the essay in which they were located. For example, the pictures titled, "Some Plantation Homes," were inserted in the section of literature rather than in the essay about architecture, and the pictures titled, "Agriculture," were placed in the discussion of religion. One picture of a "sugar mill near Jeanerette," showed more of the mill's smokestacks than of the mill.

Although the book was supposed to be a guide to the state, more emphasis was given to New Orleans than to any other city. The guide noted that "only about half of the people of Louisiana [were] Catholics," but devoted almost twice as many pages to Catholics as to Protestants, and almost no space to Jews. The guide also discussed South Louisiana more than North Louisiana.

29Workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Louisiana, Louisiana: A Guide to the State (New York, 1941), 188-89. Author cited hereinafter as Louisiana Writers' Project.

30Ibid., 126-27.

31Ibid., 127.

32Ibid., 129.
Some sections of the guide gave evidence of an assembly line production, especially in the repetition of information. The introduction informed the reader that Louisiana resembled the shape of a boot. "If you will look at a map you will see that Louisiana resembles a boot with its frayed toe dipping into the Gulf of Mexico." Four pages after this statement the fact again was

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33One North Louisianian was distressed that his name was not mentioned in the State Guide. Two years after the book's appearance, R. S. Theriot, apparently of the Shreveport area, discovered that his name was not listed in the guide. He thought it should have been included because he allegedly provided project workers with some information. He vigorously protested this omission to Bertha Mae Kelly, Assistant District Supervisor, Shreveport. State Director of the Service Division, Clarice H. Rougeou informed Saxon of Theriot's complaint and noted that Theriot had "been making almost daily visits to the Shreveport office to determine what we are going to do to correct this situation...."

Saxon refused to become upset by Theriot's protestations. He told Mrs. Rougeou that he never heard of Theriot, but felt Theriot was upset because he "didn't get his name in the Guide." As far as the "valuable material" he was supposed to have contributed to the project, Saxon noted that the material appeared in a centennial edition of a Shreveport paper "so it became anybody's material after that." Saxon observed that it seemed "odd" that Theriot, who claimed to be vitally interested in local history, "waited two years to read the Louisiana Guide." Although "thousands of persons contributed information for the Guide," Saxon said, "Theriot's complaint was the first one of its kind he had ever received.

Clarice H. Rougeou to Lyle Saxon, April 29, 1943, in TUA; Lyle Saxon to Clarice H. Rougeou, April 30, 1943, LSCol-HTML.

34Louisiana Writers' Project, Louisiana: A Guide to the State, 3.
mentioned: "Louisiana, shaped like a boot, with the toe pointing eastward...."35 In less than ninety pages the guide mentioned four times that Louisiana had three deep water ports; on page xxiii, "Waterways: 3 deep-water ports, New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Lake Charles;" on page sixty-eight, "Ships from every seaport in the world enter the State's three deep-water ports--New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Lake Charles;" on page seventy-eight: "Steamships from every quarter of the globe enter the State's three deep-water ports--New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Lake Charles;" and on page eighty-four: "Louisiana's 4,794 miles of navigable waterways and its three deep-water ports--New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Lake Charles...."36

In addition to repetition, the guide contained sections that were probably too technical for the general reader. These sections undoubtedly were written by specialists rather than project workers and were intended for specialists rather than for the general reader. Although such sections were undeniably authoritative, they were also labored and dull. While the guide had to appeal to wide interests among readers, it is doubtful that every section was equally as


36Ibid., xxxiii, 68, 78, 84.
interesting to the reading public. For example, not every reader
was interested in the fact that the "pileated woodpecker" was a
"common inhabitant of the swamps of Louisiana," or that in the
summer one could find "the yellow-billed cuckoo, and a number of
smaller birds, among them the Acadian flycatcher, white-eyed
vireo, and hooded prothonotary warblers."37

Some of the information in the state guide could have
appeared in scholarly scientific journals, such as the following
description of the state's subsoil foundations:

As the study of microfauna and microfossils
has progressed, tentative zones have been set up
within the Fleming, such as the Potamides matsoni
and Rangia johnsoni zones....

Little is known about the Pliocene, which lies
between the Fleming and the Pleistocene. Inter-
pretation is rendered difficult because the only
described Pliocene microfauna available for
correlation is a small one from the comparatively
thin Caloosahatchee marl of southern Florida.38

There were certain similarities of the state guide to the
city guide, especially in the discussions of twentieth-century

37 Ibid., 27. According to Bernard DeVoto, "most of the
scientific ones [essays] were written by people who were not
connected with the project at all, college professors and other experts
who gave their knowledge and labor in a simple desire to make the
books as good as possible." DeVoto, "The Writers' Project." 223.

38 Ibid., 17.
Louisiana, slavery, and Reconstruction. In a fifteen-page history of the state in the state guide, only two pages pertained to this century. One paragraph was devoted to the life of Huey Long, who, according to the guide, was "the State's most colorful political figure."\textsuperscript{39} Governor Richard Leche, whose resignation and prison sentence were as noteworthy as was his administration, was mentioned as follows: "Richard W. Leche was selected to succeed him [James E. Noe] in May 1936. In 1939 Leche resigned, and Earl Long, Lieutenant Governor and brother of Huey, came into power to complete the term."\textsuperscript{40}

The discussion of slavery in the state guide was similar to the same topic in the city guide. Slaves, according to the state guide, fared well under their masters: "Though slaves had none of the rights of free labor, their lot, under humane masters, was not any worse than that of Northern mill hands of the same period."\textsuperscript{41} The slave master "was affectionately known to his slaves as 'maitre,' or 'massa'..."\textsuperscript{42} The plantation owner's wife treated the slaves

\begin{itemize}
\item[^{39}]\textit{Ibid.}, 51.
\item[^{40}]\textit{Ibid.}, 52.
\item[^{41}]\textit{Ibid.}, 73.
\item[^{42}]\textit{Ibid.}, 108.
\end{itemize}
well and "gave them clothing, necessary comforts for their cabins, and attention and advice in illness and trouble."43

According to the state guide, both slaves and their masters enjoyed plantation life, which was "very gay at times." Slaves "were allowed to have balls or dances of their own, and in general were well treated. It was to the economic advantages of the planter to keep his workers in good condition."44

Like the city guide, the state guide told of the alleged horrors of Reconstruction in Louisiana, as the following statement indicated:

The State bonded debt increased from $10,000,000 to $50,000,000 within eight years, taxes rose 450 per cent, a single session of the legislature cost $900,000, and the proceeds of a public school fund were divided among embezzlers. Public affairs were controlled by 'carpetbaggers,' Northern fortune hunters who blocked into the South during Reconstruction to take advantage of the confusion, and Negroes organized in Union Leagues directed by whites. Few native white Louisianans had any voice in governmental affairs.45

The state guide was the most encyclopedic of the three major major publications of the Louisiana Writers' Project. It was not the type of book, however, requiring much creativity by the project

43Ibid.
44Ibid., 109-110.
workers. Saxon was aware of this, and thus established a project more challenging to his writers. This project, the most creative one of the three major publications was the folklore book, *Gumbo Ya-Ya.*

The folklore book was ideally suited for the Louisiana Writers' Project. Saxon was an authority on the history of Louisiana, especially on the folklore of the state. He devised the plan for the book, organized assignments on it, wrote most of the stories in the book, did most of the editing of the book, and saw the manuscript through to its publication.

In addition to being a more creative assignment than the guides, the folklore manuscript became the ideal medium in which Saxon could express his historical concepts about Louisiana. The folklore book, then, was something of a commentary on the guides.

Saxon tried to have the folklore manuscript published by the time he closed the Louisiana Writers' Project. Several of his last letters as Director pertained to the folklore book. In October, 1942, he informed a Miss Landes that the "folklore book [was] going to be rather good," and that he was "doing the final editing" on it. 47

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46 Interview with Caroline Durieux, January 27, 1974.

47 Lyle Saxon to Miss Landes, October 8, 1942, LSCol-HTML.
214 - A Blurb by Caroline Durieux
216 - Sugar Mill Near Jeanerette
217 - Migratory Strawberry Pickers
218 - The Shadows, on Bayou Teche
219 - Acadian Woman Hulling Rice
220 - In Front of the Courthouse at Abbeville
     Acadian Family
221 - The State Bird is the Pelican
     The State Flower is the Magnolia
222 - Exterior of a Trapper's Cabin
     Interior of the Same Cabin
AMERICAN GUIDE SERIES

"This series of American guidebooks is the first attempt, on a comprehensive scale, to make the country itself worthy known to Americans. We need no longer depend upon the Chamber of Commerce leaflet and the gasoline-station guide for clues as to where we are and where we might go. These guidebooks are the finest contribution to American patriotism that has been made in our generation. They give to contemporary Americans the opportunity to know and understand intimately their country, as they never had the opportunity, without a lifetime of leisure, to do before."

—Louis Mumford in the New Republic

The volumes in the American Guide Series contain a wealth of information on the regions they cover. Each gives an account of the history, folklore, and contemporary life of the city or state, outlines tours on the highways to places near and remote, provides data of special use to tourists who seek facilities for recreation, hunting, fishing, and sightseeing. Maps and many new illustrations supplement the text.

ALABAMA (revision in preparation), ARIZONA (revised), ARKANSAS, CALIFORNIA (revised), COLORADO (revised), COPPER CAMP (revision in preparation), DELAWARE (revised in preparation), ILLINOIS (revision in preparation), IOWA, KANSAS, KENTUCKY, LOS ANGELES, LOUISIANA (revised edition 1971), MINNESOTA, MISSISSIPPI, MISSOURI, MONTANA (revision in preparation), NEBRASKA, NEW JERSEY, NEW MEXICO (revised), SAN FRANCISCO (revision in preparation), SOUTH DAKOTA (revised), TENNESSEE, TEXAS (revised), UTAH, WASHINGTON, D. C. (revised), WISCONSIN.

HASTINGS HOUSE Publishers, New York 10016
MIGRATORY STRAWBERRY PICKERS—ST. TAMMANY PARISH

Lee: Farm Security Administration
THE SHADOWS, ON BAYOU TECHE (1830) — NEW IBERIA

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ACadian Woman Hulling Rice—Near Rayne
IN FRONT OF THE COURTHOUSE AT ABBEVILLE,
(NOTE THE FUNERAL NOTICE ON THE POST)

ACadian FAMILY—NEAR CROWLEY

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THE STATE BIRD IS THE PELICAN

THE STATE FLOWER IS THE MAGNOLIA

Louisiana Department of Commerce and Industry
EXTERIOR OF A TRAPPER'S CABIN, SHOWING MUSKRAT PELTS

INTERIOR OF THE SAME CABIN

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A few weeks later he wrote Lee Barker, New York editor of Houghton Mifflin, that he "would certainly like to get the Folklore book out" before closing the Louisiana Writers' Project. "Personally," said Saxon, "I think it is our masterpiece...and I would rather have Houghton-Mifflin publish it than any other publishing house." Saxon said that although several publishers were interested in the book, he did not have "time to fool around now, with the WPA folding up under [him]." He remarked that he had authority to do with the manuscript as he wished, and that the manuscript was finished, except for the introduction which he planned to write.  

The importance of the folklore book to Saxon was further revealed in his letter of March, 1943, to Paul Brooks of Houghton Mifflin. Saxon said: "I've put a good deal of myself into this book and it is my pet. I mean I consider it more important, in its way, than the Guide Books, for it is the under-the-crust world of Louisiana that nobody has written of before." Saxon also remarked about the work he had done on the manuscript and the responsibility he had for it: "As I am the last one left who knows anything about all this, I'll have to take the responsibility for the publication." 

48Lyle Saxon to Lee Barker, December 8, 1942, ibid.  
49Lyle Saxon to Paul Brooks, March 5, 1943, ibid.
Although Saxon said that he had most of the manuscript ready for publication when the Project ended on January 1, 1943, it was not published until the fall of 1945. During this two-year interval Saxon constantly sought to get the folklore book published.  

After closing the Louisiana Writers' Project, Saxon went to Washington to work in the Central Office. For six months he traveled across America writing final reports on many WPA projects. The work, he said, literally almost killed him, and when he returned to Louisiana in mid-1943, he became seriously ill. His rapidly deteriorating health, frequent operations, and extended periods of hospitalization drained him of his energies and his income; yet Saxon's interest in _Gumbo Ya-Ya_ never waned.  

In March, 1943, Paul Brooks wrote Saxon about the folklore manuscript. "First of all," said Brooks, "let me say that you have done a magnificent job. This is one of the most exciting and heart-warming manuscripts that we have seen in many a long day... For a combination of scholarship and _joie de vivre_, it has few equals." The book, he observed, would be very expensive to publish, probably due to the shortage of paper during wartime and to the quality of

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50 _Lyle Saxon to Lee Barker, December 8, 1942, ibid._

51 _Lyle Saxon to Paul Brooks, March 5, 1943, and July 27, 1944, ibid._
paper required for the book's pictures and drawings.  

Brooks also said that he wanted to place Saxon's name on the title page. This, he felt, was important "both from the point of view of justice to [Saxon] and promotion of the book." Brooks, however, did not like the title, "Gumbo Ya-Ya," for it was "the sort of title," he said, "that would make some would-be purchasers feel rather silly if they asked for the book in the book store." The title would not "do the book justice." Nor did he like the subtitle, "A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales." Brooks preferred to have the subtitle say that the book was a collection of stories about the residents of New Orleans because he felt this would result in a better "drawing card...to the country at large." Brooks also wanted to avoid the word "folklore" in the title because it had "too many academic connotations."  

In February, 1944, Brooks received a letter pertaining to the folklore book from Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant. Saxon was too ill to write the letter but not so sick that he could not discuss the book. The three writers told Brooks that the introduction and final chapters of "Gumbo Ya-Ya" had been completed. The authors asked him to arrange the chapters so that the one on the Creoles came

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52 Paul Brooks to Lyle Saxon, March 24, 1943, ibid.

53 Ibid.
first and the chapter about the Cajuns followed it. They preferred, however, to substitute "Bayou Folk" for the word "Cajuns." The other chapters, the writers said, could be arranged in any manner Brooks wished. They preferred that Brooks "use Roland Duvernet's jacket and frontispiece rather than the jacket by Caroline Durieux." 54

The authors also told Brooks that the "title Gumbo Ya-Ya [should] be retained." This title was acceptable, they concluded, for they had submitted it to "some one hundred people and of those 80% have approved it." The latter were not, they pointed out, "Creoles or Cajuns but ordinary readers." The title was "good enough for perhaps national adaption." The subtitle, however, "was secondary," so the publisher could use any subtitle he preferred. 55

The last instruction the authors gave Brooks concerned authorship of the folklore book. Speaking for Saxon, Dreyer and Tallant said: "The editors of this book are Lyle Saxon, Edward Dreyer and Robert Tallant. They should be given equal credit. Saxon insists on this, if any names are used at all on the jacket, the title page, or elsewhere in the volume." 56

54 Lyle Saxon, Edward Dreyer, and Robert Tallant to Paul Brooks, February, 1944, ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.
By July, 1944, Saxon had sufficiently recovered from his illness to resume correspondence about the folklore manuscript. He wrote Paul Brooks about his disappointment over the publisher's failure to issue the book. "I cannot tell you," said Saxon, "how much I regret that the Louisiana Folklore Book cannot be published immediately. We took so much trouble with it, and its publication means so much to the Louisiana Library Commission--and to me."

Referring to his failing health, Saxon said that should anything happen to him the publisher should work with Miss Essae Culver, Executive Secretary, Louisiana Library Commission, for she, said Saxon, had "the authority to conduct any further business with the Houghton Mifflin Company."

During the summer of 1945, Saxon again encouraged Houghton Mifflin to publish the folklore manuscript. By this time

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Lyle Saxon to Paul Brooks, July 27, 1944, ibid. Saxon further observed to Brooks that although he had directed the Writers' Project in Louisiana for a period of seven years, he was nevertheless "astonished to see how much material was still available for publication." Saxon said that he "hope[d] that the Library Commission would see fit to let him edit the work and bring it out in book form." The material, he continued, was very important to him. "The whole thing is nearly my life work," Saxon said, "and I hope d to do a popular history of Louisiana, for which there is a crying need in the Public Schools." He feared that the materials might be "wasted," or that they would "fall into inexperienced or careless hands."
Paul Brooks had left the company and Saxon now corresponded with Mary B. Underwood.\(^{58}\) Once more the subject of authorship was discussed. Saxon told Underwood that he wanted his name listed first on the title page, Edward Dreyer's name listed second, and Robert Tallant's name last. "There is a reason for this," Saxon said, for he and Dreyer "edited the earlier publications of the Writers' Project, while Mr. Tallant was a special writer who came to us to do the final editing on Gumbo Ya-Ya."\(^{59}\)

Mary Underwood informed Saxon in August, 1945, that Gumbo Ya-Ya was ready for publication. She assured him that the names of the authors would appear in the order he requested. The manuscript was finally printed in the fall of 1945, approximately three years after going to the publisher.\(^{60}\) In November, 1945,

\(^{58}\)Mary B. Underwood to Lyle Saxon, August 2, 1945, ibid. Saxon told Underwood: "It was Mr. Brooks' desire and mine to make the book as attractive as possible inasmuch as it was to retail for a larger sum than any of our books published heretofore. It was with this understanding that the Louisiana Library Commission agreed to a cut in the royalties. The Library Commission is not particularly interested in the sum that they receive on the first edition, but they are extremely anxious to have a book which will do them credit." Lyle Saxon to Mary Underwood, July 30, 1945, ibid.

\(^{59}\)Lyle Saxon to Mary Underwood, July 30, 1945, ibid.

\(^{60}\)Mary Underwood to Lyle Saxon, August 2, 1945, ibid.
Saxon received his first copy of the book. He told Dale Warren of Houghton Mifflin that he was "pleased with it," and that he hoped it "made some money for Houghton Mifflin—for, as you know, it will not make a penny for the rest of us, and the Lord knows that our hearts as well as our labor went into it."\(^{61}\)

Authorship of Gumbo Ya-Ya was difficult but not impossible to determine. Saxon's correspondence indicated that his involvement with the manuscript was extensive, both during and after the Project. Saxon noted after the project ended that he was finishing the last few chapters and the introduction. Since Dreyer joined the Navy shortly after America's entry into World War II, he could not have done much work on the manuscript during its final stages. Although Saxon in his correspondence made reference to Dreyer being on leave in New Orleans, Saxon did not say that Dreyer worked on the manuscript during this time.

Robert Tallant was never officially connected with the Writers' Project and was listed in the folklore book as a "special

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\(^{61}\) Lyle Saxon to Dale Warren, November 6, 1945, *ibid.*

In this letter Saxon asked Warren to send review copies of Gumbo Ya-Ya to some of the following individuals and magazines: Walter Winchell; Sinclair Lewis; Bernard De Voto; Stark Young of The New Republic; Hamilton Basso of Time Magazine; Clifford Orr of The New Yorker; and Henry Seidel of Saturday Review of Literature.
Since the manuscript was nearly finished when the project ended, Tallant could not have had much to do with writing it. Saxon was primarily responsible for writing *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, but the question remains as to why he insisted that Dreyer and Tallant also be given credit for authorship of the book.

Edward Dreyer was a close personal friend and colleague of Saxon. After Dreyer left the Project for the Navy, Saxon commented that the project was folding, that he was getting old, and that he missed Dreyer. Saxon's friends knew him to be kind, considerate, and unpretentious. He possibly wanted to express gratitude for Dreyer's contributions to the project and to recognize Dreyer's work on the manuscript.

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Lyle Saxon to Pete [no last name cited], September 14, 1942, *ibid*. The war, failing health, departure of friends, and end of the Writers' Project caused Saxon to become very melancholy. He had mounting hospital debts, he could not get into the service after failing his physical, and no one would give him work. Several of his letters were filled with remorse, as the following one to "Pete" indicates: "I'm right back where I started six and a half years ago... and all I've got to show for those years is a the [sic] sad fact that I'm much older--and my eyes are bad now, and I've published some guide books... And what the hell?... Never ruin your middle age in order to make things easier when you are old. I've completely ruined five years, and I'm not now sure yet that the game is worth the candle. My life has been pretty much on the drab side. Most of the people I care for are dead or scattered, and the young ones are all in the [service] or just missing...I'm rapidly turning into an old man; [Saxon earlier said he did not know how much longer he would live]
Although Tallant was never officially connected with the Writers' Project, Saxon saw great potential in him as a writer. Saxon knew that his serious illness probably would not permit him to live for many years after the Project. He did all that he could during these remaining years to assist young writers, especially Tallant. Saxon created people, as Tallant noted in his introduction to the 1950 edition of Saxon's Fabulous New Orleans, and Tallant was one of those whom Saxon helped to create. Mr. Melvin H. Shortess, who knew Saxon and Tallant, also said that Saxon saw much promise in Tallant as a writer, that Saxon loaned Tallant money, and that he tried to get Tallant's works published. Quite possibly, the most strongly worded letter Saxon ever wrote was on behalf of Tallant. This letter was instructive as to Saxon's interest in Tallant and as to Saxon's reason for adding Tallant as co-author of the folklore book. The letter was addressed to H. S. Latham, Vice-President

very white as to hair, and sort of on the haggard side since I've become thinner. I drink too much, of course through boredom... I seldom go to Melrose any more, and I regret that I almost never go to Baton Rouge." [First four ellipses were Saxon's.]

63 Lyle Saxon, Fabulous New Orleans (New Orleans, 1950), xvi.

64 Interview with Melvin H. Shortess, December 18, 1973. Mr. Shortess and Octave Lilly noted that Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant were known as "The Triumverate."
of the MacMillan Company. Saxon did not use the customary salutation of "Dear Mr.," but just "Dear Latham:"

Robert Tallant has shown me your letter to him. I can hardly believe that you wrote it, remembering our conversation over the telephone when I was in New York ten days ago. Let me give you a brief recapitulation: Tallant has written a book, "Voodoo in New Orleans," which you are publishing in February; he has already commenced work on an extremely interesting book of true crimes in Louisiana (I had once thought of doing this very same thing myself, and gathered some material, but I found other things to write which interested me more). Tallant has been working on a grueling job, and I urged him to come with me to New York, to see you and talk to you and make an arrangement for a monthly advance of $200 (which is just enough to support him and his mother). It seems so entirely logical to me, for he is a young writer with great ability, fine perception and a driving force which makes him work.

On the strength of my telephone conversation with you, plus his interview, he has returned to New Orleans and at my insistence has quit his job. He had just settled down to making a complete synopsis for you, and he intended to start immediately [sic] on the actual writing of the first chapters of the crime book. I thought everything [sic] was settled, and that you had done something very wise in backing your own author in a book which I am sure has great possibilities and which will sell widely. And now Tallant has received your ambiguous letter, which says exactly nothing. Do you or do you not intend to give him the money that he needs in order to do this work, or does he have to go and get another job? If the latter is true, it means that he will have to put aside his crime book for I know full well that I cannot write and hold a job at the same time. Neither can he. Neither can you. I think that this a serious situation and that something should be done about it at once, one way or the other.
May I say in closing, that Tallant has worked with me for four years, and that he did most of the rewriting on the Houghton Mifflin book "Gumbo Ya-Ya," which has sold 10,000 copies—the whole first edition—within ten days of its publication. Now, as you know, this is a Federal Writers Project book. Neither Tallant nor I get a dime from it. But my name is in the news again, and Tallant is getting an excellent buildup before the publication of your "Voodoo in New Orleans." Like many good writers, Tallant is extremely sensitive. He was very much upset when he showed me the letter—and I wish you would read it over again (just for fun)—which was sent to him over your signature...

I am somebody sitting on the sidelines watching, and I think I recognize ability when I see it. He had more ability than any other one writer with whom I came in contact during the years that I managed six states for WPA...65

According to the above letter, Saxon listed Tallant's name as a co-author because Tallant "did most of the rewriting," and because Tallant would benefit from the publicity connected with Gumbo Ya-Ya. Saxon did not say, however, how much rewriting

65Lyle Saxon to H. S. Latham, December 18, 1945, ibid. Saxon was ill when he wrote the letter. According to one former project worker, Saxon changed during his last few years of life. Saxon remarked of his illness in this letter and tried to end the letter on a more pleasant note: "I am very sorry that I could not come down to MacMillan's to see you when I was in New York. I was so ill that I only left the St. Moritz once during my stay. I've been in a hospital for eleven days since I returned home, and this is the first time that I've set my fingers to a typewriter. Otherwise, I would have written to you before...Repeating that I am sorry not to have seen you, and with best wishes always—which includes Merry Christmas!"
on the manuscript was required, but it was probably very little.

Saxon had previously made too many references to the work he had personally done on the manuscript, and to the fact that the manuscript was finished, for one to conclude that Tallant's work on the manuscript was more than minimal. While both Dreyer and Tallant were involved with the manuscript, Saxon was the writer responsible for heading the Project's work on the folklore project, and responsible for publication of the book in 1945. 66

_Gumbo Ya-Ya_ was 573 pages in length and included pictures, drawings, an appendix, and an index. The title meant "everybody

66Saxon and Tallant were interested in similar topics as is indicated in the following comparison of their book titles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lyle Saxon:</th>
<th>Robert Tallant:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fabulous New Orleans</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Romantic New Orleans;</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Voodoo in New Orleans; Ready to</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hang: Seven Famous New Orleans</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Murders; Mardi Gras; The Voodoo</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Queen: A Novel</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Old Louisiana</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Louisiana Purchase;</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Evangeline and the Acadians</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lafite the Pirate</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Pirate Lafite and the Battle of</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>New Orleans</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gumbo Ya-Ya (compiler)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Gumbo Ya-Ya (special writer)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Orleans City Guide</strong></td>
<td><strong>New Orleans City Guide</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(directed first edition)</td>
<td>(revised first edition)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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talks at once," and was used, said Saxon, "derisively concerning a
women's party where there [was] much gossip." He wanted the book
to reveal the "under-the-crust world of Louisiana" for such people,
he felt, had no spokesman nor were they considered in previous works
about Louisiana. 67

Neither the subtitle nor Saxon's claims for the book were
completely accurate. The subtitle, "A Collection of Louisiana Folk
Tales," was misleading, for most of the stories pertained to
Orleanians rather than to Louisianians. Also partially unfounded was
Saxon's statement that the folklore book dealt with the poor of
Louisiana about whom nothing before had been written. Saxon said
that he "touched on it here and there in [his] own books, but never to
the extent that [the folklore book did]." 68

Saxon never claimed that the stories in Gumbo Ya-Ya were
completely original with him. He observed in one letter that "it took
seven years to compile" the folklore materials. 69 Some of the
compiled materials were used essentially as written as a portion of
the folklore manuscript, written by Joe Posey, apparently a project
worker, indicates:

67 Lyle Saxon to Paul Brooks, March 5, 1943, LSCol-HTML.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
Planters were amassing fortunes and were building homes—not merely houses built overnight but ones that took years to complete.

The belief that a Creole is of negro extraction still prevails among the ignorant and uneducated classes in the Northern States, and among the illiterate in many of the Southern States as well.

The term Creole is applied indiscriminately to every one native to the State as Creole Negro, and to such articles as Creole eggs, etc....

The masters as a whole took excellent care of their slaves and often risked their lives in attending to them in time of epidemics.

The negroes in Louisiana, they were not unhappy. They had games of their own and dances which they enjoyed immensely.

That there were some cruel planters cannot be denied. They were the exception and were not esteemed by the other planters.

The old home places were not built in a few months nor even, in some cases, a few years.

No true Creole ever had colored blood. This erroneous belief, still common among Americans in other sections of the country, is probably due to the Creole's own habit of calling their slaves 'Creole slaves' and often simply 'Creoles.'

Slaves were valuable property and the owner of any intelligence provided adequately for their physical welfare. The larger estates operated hospitals for those that were ill.

The slaves had lots of fun in their quarters... They played guitar and used a barrel with a skin over it for a drum.

Yet, despite the tales of inhumanity of masters to the slaves, there were few actual cases of excessive and extreme brutality.
Our Northern brethren heard only the bad side of slavery and of course, formed their ideas of the institution from these republicans. The slave was the master's property, his money had bought him and certainly he would do nothing to injure his value any more than any man would injure his cow, horse, or any other piece of property.

Those old slaves! No one will ever know the bond that existed between them and the Master and his family.

Treatment accorded slaves varied in proportion to the personal disposition of their owners, but slaves were financial investments... and planters were business men and cared neither to destroy their property nor to hamper the operation of the estates. 232

Without a doubt, the affection directed toward his owner by many a slave was a deep and imperishable thing. 70 245

Saxon also suggested that the stores in Gumbo Ya-Ya had never appeared before in print. Perhaps this was true regarding complete stories, but not partial ones. For example, the story about Mother Catherine in Gumbo Ya-Ya was almost identical to the

70 Sections of a typed manuscript by Joe Posey, May 2, 1941, ibid.; Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant, Gumbo Ya-Ya, 213, 139, 231-32, 240, 232, 245. Posey's statements were very pro-South, and apparently had to be "toned down" by Saxon. One of his most extravagant claims pertained to planters: "No finer type of gentleman has this world ever produced than the Southern planter--and certainly Louisiana was in the galaxy of States. Brought up to feel when he stood upon his paternal acres that he was the monarch of what he surveyed...he was independent without haughtiness, and determined without obstinacy...He was generous without arrogance, and honest without consorousness, genial without levity, and candid without rudeness."
one in the New Orleans City Guide, as the following comparison indicates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gumbo Ya-Ya</th>
<th>New Orleans City Guide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother Catherine always entered the church through a hole in the roof of a side room, intimating that she was sent down from Heaven to preach the gospel.</td>
<td>Mother Catherine always entered the church through a hole in the roof of a side room, intimating that she was sent down from Heaven to preach the gospel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

She had no particular uniform. The Lord told her what to wear. Often it was an ample white robe and nunlike headdress.

About her waist she always wore the blue cord of power and purity, and from it dangled a large key. Members were permitted to kneel at her feet and make wishes as they kissed this key.

She wore no shoes on her grotesquely large feet, saying that 'de Lawd went without shoes.'

So Mother Catherine left her bed and traveled to her birthplace in Kentucky, where she died August 9, 1930, two days after her arrival. She believed that she would be resurrected. 'Ah's gonna sleep while, * not die. De great God Jehovia, He's callin' me to come an' rest awhile. But on de third day Ah's commin' back; Ah's died in 1930 believing she would rise from the dead as did Jesus Christ. She contended, 'Ah's gonna sleep awhile, not die. De great Gawd Jehovia, he's callin' me to come rest awhile. But on de thud day Ah's gonna rise again. Ah's gonna continue ma good wuk.'
gonna rise again. Ah's gonna continue ma good wuk.¹

Thousands attended the funeral. The congregation first intended that its High Priestess should be buried in the Temple, then planned a tomb near the building. But the city health officials objected and Mother Catherine was buried in the Saint Vincent de Paul Cemetery, vault number 144, 4th tier....

Thousands attended the funeral at which many feeble and timorous guests fainted. The congregation of the Church of the Innocent Blood intended that the High Priestess should be buried in the middle of the Manger next to the statue of Jehovah, but the city health officials objected and Mother Catherine was buried in the St. Vincent de Paul Cemetery, vault number 144, 4th tier.⁷¹

*Underlined words indicate differences in the two texts.

There were also similarities between Gumbo Ya-Ya and the state guide. A description of the Creoles was similar in both books, as can be seen in the following comparison:

Among themselves, Creoles were warm, affectionate, extremely loyal. La famille was the very core of their life, and, like the humbler Cajuns, this extended to the utmost limits of relationship.

Like the Greeks, the Creoles had a word for everything. For themselves they even did better than that. Every Creole was sorti de la cuisse of Jupiter.

Creoles have a humor all their own. For example they say that every Creole considers himself sorti de la cuisse de Jupiter—a piece from the thigh of Jupiter;

de Jupiter -- a piece from the thigh of Jupiter; and privately each one considered himself a slice of deity of no mean proportions.

Several claims Saxon made about the folklore book were not well founded. He said that the book dealt with "the under-the-crust world of Louisiana that nobody had written of before." He also said that it was "a book of the living folklore of Louisiana. As such it is primarily the work of those characters, real or imaginary, living or dead, who created the folklore." 73


72 Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant, Gumbo Ya-Ya, 141, 138; Louisiana Writers' Project, Louisiana: A Guide to the State, 94. In Gumbo Ya-Ya all of the names of the children of Theophile Polite Narrows started with the letter "O" whereas in the state guide Lastie Broussard had children whose names began with the letter "O." Although Broussard had more children than Narrows, the underlined names were identical.

Gumbo Ya-Ya

We call them Ovide, Oristes, Olive, Onesia, Otheo, Odalia, Octave, Olite, Oristide, Odelee, and Odeson.

Louisiana: A Guide to the State

To...were born sixteen children named Odile, Odelia, Odalia, Olive, Oliver, Olivia, Ophelia, Odelin, Octave, Octavia, Ovide, Onesia, Olita, Otta, Omea,... Opta.

73 Lyle Saxon to Paul Brooks, March 5, 1943, LSCol-HTML.
PAGES 242 THROUGH 248
DRAWINGS AND PICTURES IN THE FOLKLORE BOOK

242 - Ghost Map of Louisiana
243 - Title Page
244 - A Group of Baby Dolls
Queen and Maids of Honor at the Zulu Ball
245 - St. Rosalia is Carried in Honor from Church to Church
Mrs. Zito makes a Beautiful Speech in Honor of St. Rosalia
246 - A Cajun fisherman's Family in their Bayou Home
Cajun Girls of the Bayou Country
247 - Mother Catherine's Grave and Statue
248 - Mother Maude Shannon

PAGES 249 THROUGH 252
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250 - A Cult Leader Exhorts his Flock to Obedience
251 - A Child is a Jack-in-the-Box
252 - Hands of the Dead Reach out for the Living

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A group of "Baby Dolls"

Queen (second from right) and Maids of Honor at the Zulu Ball
St. Rosalia is carried in honor from church to church

Mrs. Zito makes 'a beautiful speech' in honor of St. Rosalia
A Cajun fisherman's family in their bayou home
Courtesy of Lee, Farm Security Administration

Cajun girls of the Bayou Country
Courtesy of Shahn, Farm Security Administration

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Mother Catherine's grave and statue
Mother Maude Shannon, leader of a popular cult of today
South Rampart Street Sports
"A Child Is a Jack-in-the-Box"
Hands of the Dead Reach Out for the Living
of the two above mentioned categories. The Creoles and plantation
owners were anything but "the under-the-crust world of Louisiana." None of the three categories were subjects that "nobody had written
of before." These three chapters did not fit into the general
chronology or subject matter of the folklore book. These topics
were ones in which Saxon had considerable interest and were basic
to his understanding of the past, and to his life time. By including
them in the folklore book, however, Saxon inadvertently but honestly
transformed history into folklore.

Saxon preferred to place the Creoles first in the folklore
book because of his belief that they were superior to other
Louisianians. He told Paul Brooks that "the Creoles [were] the top
of the heap," compared to those "at the other extreme," such as the
Negro prostitutes parading on Mardi Gras. Saxon feared that his
readers might think that Creoles were of "mixed blood." He quickly
pointed out that this was not the case: "No true Creole ever had
colored blood," he wrote, for "Creoles were always pure white.
Any trace of cafe au lait in a family was reason for complete
ostracism." According to Saxon the "Creoles were warm,
affectionate, [and] extremely loyal." They had an orderly family in

74Ibid.
which each member knew his place. Heading the family was the father whose "word was final in all matters." The "Creole mother, although she might have been a beauty in her day, was nearly always of generous proportions." 75

The Creoles were very benevolent toward their slaves, especially to the "Mammy" of the household: "Through all her life she shared the children's affection with the parents. When Mammy grew old, she was retired, the family supporting her to the end of her days. At her death the now adult people she had raised, often several generations, grieved deeply." 76

Closely associated with the Creoles were the quadroons. Saxon wrote that the quadroon woman "would walk like a queen, her chin high, her jet brows disdainful, her handsome silk gown lifted just the proper inch or two from the cobblestones." A quadroon girl, wrote Saxon, had reason to be proud: "She would be as proud as any Creole lady in the city. And why not? Her father might be one of

75 Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant, Gumbo Ya-Ya, 139-142.

76 Ibid., 143. Saxon also wrote in the folklore book that the Creoles were responsible for making New Orleans unlike any other American city: "To this patrician race New Orleans owes a debt of measurable proportions; the Mardi Gras, the world-famous cuisine, the gaiety, the whole intricate fabric of charm that distinguishes the city from any other in America." 178.
its most fashionable residents, her lover, to whom she [was] absolutely true, another." Not only did she have a Creole father, and a Creole lover, she had Creole culture: "She is well educated, can receive guests with elegance and grace, and preside over the largest dinner with dignity."77

Slaves, like the quadroons, were also closely associated with the whites during the ante-bellum period. This period was the golden age for Saxon, and on the first page of the chapter, "The Plantations," he wrote: "It is of the Utopia of Before the War that old Southerners speak. It was here and it is gone. The best of all possible worlds existed in the South and it was destroyed. And, truly, if merely a part of this remembered grandeur once existed in reality, Louisiana plantation life must have been almost paradisiacal."78

In this utopia of which Saxon wrote, no consideration was given to the slaves' opinion of the period, although they were as much a part of the era as were the "old southerners." The topic of slavery, however, was discussed. Saxon first established that although whites owned slaves during the ante-bellum period, blacks did, too:

77Ibid., 158.
78Ibid., 212-13.
"Though slavery in the South is usually interpreted as meaning white persons owning Negroes, the United States Census of 1838 showed that 3777 free Negroes owned slaves throughout the nation." Not only did blacks own slaves, they owned them because they were interested in monetary gain, not because of humanitarian reasons:

"Occasionally, it is said, a free woman of color bought a slave out of pity for the creature's plight and out of racial sympathy, but in general the Negro master of other Negroes is reputed to have been the sternest of all slave owners."

After establishing that blacks as well as whites owned slaves, and that blacks were the "sternest" masters, Saxon then reasoned that because common sense required considerate treatment of the slaves, they were, therefore, well treated. "Slaves were valuable property," wrote Saxon, "and the owner of any intelligence provided adequately for their physical welfare. The larger estates operated hospitals for those who were ill." Not all slaves lived on large plantations, but even slaves on the smaller ones were, according to Saxon, well treated: "Often, on smaller plantations, the masters personally cared for sick Negroes. Nurseries were often provided for small children and were cared for by the older Negresses,

79ibid., 229.
so that the mothers of the youngsters might work in the fields."

Pregnant slaves also received excellent attention: "Women in childbirth received careful attention in most cases, for each child increased the planter's wealth." \(^{80}\)

Slavery in the folklore book was portrayed in a most ideal manner. Because of slavery's benefits, a bond of love and friendship existed between the master and the slave which lasted throughout life: "Newborn children of planters were assigned slaves at their birth...." \(^{81}\)

If the white baby were female she was assigned a "Mammy" and these attachments endured, the Negress remaining the girl's "Mammy" for the balance of her days. The white male baby also had a slave "assigned" to him as a "valet" and the slave became 'one of the beloved 'Uncles' of which so much has been written." A deep attachment developed between the "Uncle" and his master, for many of the "Uncles" followed their masters into the firing lines of the War Between the States. Some slaves were not assigned at the birth of the master's child, but at the wedding of the master's son or daughter: "Slaves presented as wedding gifts to brides were usually proud of the honor, boasted of raising 'the chillun' resulting from the marriage." \(^{81}\)

\(^{80}\)Ibid., 231-32.

\(^{81}\)Ibid., 232.
Of course true uncles could not be sold, beaten, bought, assigned, or separated from their families against their will. Nor could they be given away as wedding gifts. This indifference to reality, however, did not deter Saxon from presenting slavery in as favorable a light as possible before he discussed the brutality of the system. Saxon wrote, "Treatment accorded slaves varied in proportion to the personal disposition of their owners, but slaves were financial investments and aside from any particular virtue, planters were business men and cared neither to destroy their property nor to hamper the operation of the estates." 82

Although masters did administer physical punishment, Saxon absolved them from any real blame. "Flogging," he noted, was not actually administered by the master but by "an overseer or driver." Saxon wanted the reader to place such punishment in historical perspective. He wrote that "all punishment of this period was more severe than it is supposed to be now." Blacks, he continued, were not the only ones treated harshly, for during the ante-bellum days "white people were harsher to their own race, prisons, asylums, even mental institutions, being rife with brutality." 83

82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
Some slaves sought to leave their masters and others tried to rebel against them. Saxon noted, however, that "slave uprisings were surprisingly rare." Uprisings were not initiated by discontented slaves, but by northern abolitionists: "Behind many a slave uprising was the Abolitionist from the North, especially after the American acquisition. As early as 1839 there was evidence that such persons were fomenting discontent among the Negroes and actually promoting disorders."84

The slaves eventually obtained freedom, but, according to Saxon, some former slaves longed for the days of bondage: "Living ex-slaves remember the day when freedom came with conflicting emotions. Most slaves were confused and like lost children, many exhibited strange reactions to emancipation." Some former slaves tried to act as if they remained under the benevolent care of their former masters: "On most plantations there were Negroes, particularly house servants, who were faithful to their former owners and remained, often working exactly as if nothing had occurred, without wages and without wanting them." Some ex-slaves so loved their former masters that they could not part from them: "Mammies could not be pried loose from their 'chillun,' and many of the old

84Ibid., 254-55.
'Uncles' displayed the same affection for the white folk who had kept them all these years."85

Saxon tried to present a balanced account of slavery, but he did so unconvincingly. He said that "in general, the plight of the slaves was pathetic." Saxon's apparent objectivity was destroyed by his next sentence, where the reader learns that the reference was not to slaves, but to ex-slaves: "Most fled in the first wave of elation at this new 'freedom,' and found themselves completely unable to earn a livelihood." The Southern whites, however, had compassion for the plight of the former slave children, and took them under their protective wing, at least the whiter Negro children, doing so for reasons apparently too obvious for the authors to mention: "Little Negroes were put into asylums, except for a few very light ones who were adopted by white families."86

Whereas Saxon presented the deceased Creoles and plantation owners in the best possible light, he described the living Negroes in most uncomplimentary terms. The stories about the Negroes were no doubt real, but the style of writing seemed to be based on stereotype and caricature. One former Dillard Project worker today

85Ibid., 256.
86Ibid., 257.
insists that a stereotype of the Negro race was presented in *Gumbo Ya-Ya*. He said that the educated Negroes in New Orleans had mixed reactions after reading the book. While pleased that their race was finally recognized in literature, they were also fearful that the behavior of the Negroes in the folklore book would be taken as the behavior of all Negroes. The former Dillard worker said that he was very disappointed with the folklore book, for it catered to sensationalism and thus did not fairly portray all of the Negro race in New Orleans.87

Another former Dillard Project worker, Octave Lilly, however, disagreed with the above view of his colleague. Lilly stated that Saxon was not writing a history of the Negro race but a history of folklore. Lilly did not consider the book offensive, and enjoyed reading it. He insisted that the characters in the book were real, and it was, he said, "a slice of life Saxon chose to deal with."88 Mrs. Caroline Durieux agreed with Lilly's interpretation of the book. She did not feel the book was an attempt at caricature, for this was, she pointed out, the real New Orleans. She said the people described in the book actually existed, for she talked with

87Interview with anonymous Dillard Project worker, January 22, 1974.

88Interview with Octave Lilly, January 29, 1974.
and drew portraits of many of them.  

Gumbo Ya-Ya had dual strains of history and folklore in it. Lilly saw the book as folklore and, therefore, not offensive to Negroes. The anonymous Dillard writer disagreed, finding the book to resemble caricature. Saxon's tendency to present the positive features of those he admired and the negative traits of those he did not admire also compounded the problem of the true nature and purpose of the book. But whether it was history or folklore, or history and folklore, it was a book which dealt with the seamier side of life in New Orleans.

The pattern for the discussion of Negro life in Gumbo Ya-Ya was established in the first chapter, "Kings, Baby Dolls, Zulus, and Queens." "Every night is like Saturday night," the story begins, "wild and fast and hot with sin. But the night before Mardi Gras blazed to a new height." Young black women tried to arouse the men who "sagged over the bars, their eyelids heavy from liquor and 'reefers.' One woman screamed above the din: 'I'll do it for twenty cents, Hot Papa....' She did a little trucking step, raised her dress, 'showed her linen.'"

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89 Interview with Caroline Durieux, January 27, 1974.

90 Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant, Gumbo Ya-Ya, 1-2.

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The theme of sexual activity dominated the discussion of Negro life in New Orleans. According to the folklore book, sex often got the Negro into trouble: "The Negro's sex life is always getting him into trouble. Fights, shootings, and stabbings are frequent...." 91 A black woman, Creola Clark, testified to the problems she had with amorous men. She complained that the fellows constantly asked her to "pull up yo' dress." She complained: "That's all I could hear. 'Pull up yo' dress. Pull up yo' dress.'" She "commenced wonderin' what would happen if I'd pull up my dress," and found out when she consented to Buster Clark's request. "That was the finals," Creola lamented. "What Buster didn't put on me, Lawd! I told that nigger he'd hafta marry me 'cause I liked it. He did." 92

According to the folklore book the Negro's love for sexual activity was also expressed in his music. "To the...black man's primitive and innate propensity for expressing himself by singing, all the Southern States are indebted for their folk music." Saxon observed that "practically all Negro songs [were] expressions of the elementary desires for survival, for spiritual and sexual outlets."

91Ibid., 455.
92Ibid., 501.
The blues, said Saxon, had "no lofty conception of love," but expressed instead "the superlative of the obscene and extoll[ed] unrestrained sexual relations." Negroes chanted in the blues "of unfaithful lovers and torrid love lives." They constantly realized that "your man or woman is yours only as long as you both are amused. A better lover may walk in the back door at any moment." Saxon cited the song, "I Don't Care if You Never Come Back" to illustrate his point:

I don't care if you never come back,
Get a move on, you nigger duke,
There's a lot of coons in this here town,
So I won't grieve after you,
There's lots of coons, I can boss 'em round;
But none with their hair so black,
So trot along, my honey, you haven't got no money,
So I don't care if you never come back.

Negro women in the folklore book not only enjoyed unrestrained sexual relations, they also liked to fight. Blanche Jackson of Paillet Lane was a fighter, and she recalled for the remainder an encounter she once had with a Negro woman, Octavia. Blanche and Octavia threatened to cut each other. "What you gonna do?" Octavia asked Blanche, who replied that she was "gonna knock hell outta" her.

\[93\textit{Ibid.}, 427, 449, 454.\]
\[94\textit{Ibid.}, 454.\]
Blanche accepted the challenge and said: "I whipped out my razor and she start runnin'. Right behind her was me. I done cut her down. She screamed like hell and jumped into that dago grocery and slammed the door plumb in my face. But I was satisfied. I had done cut her seven times."95

In the folklore book most of the Negroes were not only alike in their sexual activities, they were also similar in physical appearances. Either the project workers gathering the folklore data only saw fat or unusually thin Negroes, or Saxon employed a style to make the Negroes appear more colorful. Many of the Negroes he described in the folklore book were very heavy or light, wore bright colored clothes, perspired profusely, and had big eyes, pink tongues, and white teeth. Some of them also had names relating to color, such as "Creola," "Blanche," "White," and "Green."

There were many examples of apparent caricature in Gumbo Ya-Ya. For example, Martha White "rolled her dusky face[and]

95Ibid., 387-88.
heaved her huge bosom in a mighty sigh."\textsuperscript{96} Mamie Smith rolled "her eyes huge and white in her fat black face."\textsuperscript{97} In the chapter, "Pailtet Lane," was "a very stout, amazingly black Negress," with a "gay pink- and pea-green parasol held over her head."\textsuperscript{98} In the same chapter a Mother Duffy was "a large woman with snowy hair edging from under her red and white tignon and white whiskers on her round black face."\textsuperscript{99}

Negro members of the "very crude and very small" Fairview Baptist Church in New Orleans were also fat or thin. The Reverend Strudwich was "small and lean and black." Blanche Jackson "was almost recognizable in a polka dot silk dress, bright blue shoes, a flaming red straw hat set jauntily on her head and a bag to match the

\textsuperscript{96}\textit{Ibid.}, 123. Caricature is herein used to mean "the deliberately distorted picturing or imitating of a person, literary style, etc. by exaggerating features or mannerisms for satirical effect in such a manner that ludicrously exaggerates its distinguishing features. \textit{Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language} (New York, 1960), 221. Undoubtedly some Creoles, plantation owners, and quadroons also were overweight and underweight, had white teeth, gold teeth, pink tongues, and wore bright colored clothes. These features, however, were not considered in the treatment of the Creoles, plantation owners, and quadroons.

\textsuperscript{97}\textit{Ibid.}, 75.

\textsuperscript{98}\textit{Ibid.}, 385.

\textsuperscript{99}\textit{Ibid.}, 392.
hat. She smiled widely and every gold tooth gleamed." Blanche usually wore "a very bright kerchief about her head, large hoop earrings, dirty print dresses and red shoes." Blanche apparently smoked her bosom, for she "pulled a sweat-dampened package of cigarettes out of her bosom and lighted one."

The members of Mother Shannon's church were similar in physical appearances to the members of the Fairview Baptist Church. Mother Shannon was "very fat," almost three hundred pounds, and had "the sort of heavy-lidded eyes that might add sultry appeal to a glamour girl," but which made "Mother Shannon look sleepy." Despite her immense size, however, Mother Shannon was a very sincere preacher as could be determined "in those sleepy brown eyes, in her loosely fitted, thick-lipped mouth, in the tenseness of her clasped hands."

In attendance at Mother Shannon's services was Roxanna Moore, "a short, plump, elderly Negress." One member was a "lean, very black Negro dressed as a Roman Catholic priest." Sister Mary Augustine was "quite tall and very black," and Mary Lou Green was a "dark brown girl," who had "a red mouth containing very white teeth and the pinkest tongue every seen" and Mother

\[\text{\cite{ibid., 395, 386-87.}}\]
Clark, "an amazingly long thin Negress in blue velvet." Bishop T. Morris Kelly was "a large, fleshy, light Negress stylishly dressed in a beige street costume with turban to match and baring a number of beautiful gold teeth when she smiled."  

According to Gumbo Ya-Ya, Negroes were not only fat or thin, they were also lazy. The Negro men in Pailent Lane were particularly lethargic: "Black bucks, most of them in overalls and blue jumpers, sprawl on the rude porches, many of them asleep." Those who were not asleep could be found at the corner bar, where "bare footed black males loaf." The "black males" did not "loaf" on the riverfront, however, because river captains knew how to make the "black bucks" work. These captins, according to the folklore book, were "a hard-boiled lot and of the conviction that the only way to make a Negro work was to be tough." Captain Fred Ketchum was especially tough with his Negro crewmen:  

I'm here to tell you we had a better bunch of niggers working then than we have now. Sure we used to club them. We always used a thick hickory stick. Of course, some fellows used a barrel stave, but I always thought they were too think and too weak to hit a nigger with. Clubbing was usually done when

101 Ibid., 397, 407-10.

102 Ibid., 386.
a nigger got smart or worked too slow. You know, they're quick to take advantage. I never did fool with them and they were scared to death of me. There were a few who tried to get smart, but I put them in their places. I killed five niggers. But don't get me wrong. I didn't kill them because I enjoyed it. It was absolutely necessary. They came after me with knives. There is only one way to treat a nigger and that is to be positive with him. In other words, if you are right, you are right, and if you are wrong, you are still right. 103

The Negroes may have been lazy physical laborers, but, according to the folklore book, they were energetic gamblers. Willie Jones, "a philosopher as well as a gambler," loved to play lottery. Willie made his bets based on his dreams and he had a system for dreaming: "I eats my bananas, goes to sleep, then I sees the Lawd... The Lawd done told me to play one, two and five. I is filled with joy... 'Hallelujah!' I cries. My crazy wife wakes up and yells: 'Look at that nigger!... That damn fool!' Then I reaches over and busts her one in the mout'. That shuts her up for a while." Willie, however, was on better terms with "the Lawd" than with his wife. "Every now and then the Lawd personally shows me numbers," boasted Willie. "And when the Lawd shows me numbers I is bound to win. How does I know? I reckon the Lawd 'tends to take care of

103Ibid., 381.
Willie Jones.  

Saxon's inductive reasoning, resulting in apparent caricature of Negroes in the folklore book, was also evident in his descriptions of Italians, Irishmen, Germans, and Cajuns. Reading of the behavior of one individual in each of these groups, the reader was informed that all individuals of these groups behaved in a similar manner.  

104 I b i d ., 137. The Louisiana Lottery Company was once a viable political force in Louisiana. The folklore book said of lottery and of this company: "For years Lottery has been an integral part of New Orleans and Louisiana life. The Louisiana Lottery Company was authorized to operate by Legislature [sic] in 1868 when it promised to pay $40,000 a year toward the upkeep of the Charity Hospital in New Orleans...The original charter of the Louisiana Lottery Company was for twenty-five years. This was canceled in 1879, but a new one, including even greater privileges, was granted the following year...In 1898 the company was able to offer the State $1,250,000 for a renewal. But by now Lottery was highly unpopular as having a pernicious effect on the poor and as possessing tremendous political power, which was being misused...In 1895 the federal statute prohibiting interstate transport of the tickets was passed. The company promptly moved to Honduras. There it remained until 1907, when it was forced out of business by federal prosecution of its American agents at home. But this wasn't the end of Lottery in New Orleans. It seems to have been only the beginning." It is interesting to note that no mention of the company's profits was made, just the company's payments to its customers and to the state. For more discussion about the company, its profits and political influence, see William Ivy Hair, Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics, 1877-1900 (Baton Rouge, 1971), especially 201-226; and Mark T. Carleton, Politics and Punishment: A History of the Louisiana State Penal System (Baton Rouge, 1971), 28-73.
For example, in the chapter, "The Irish Channel," the reader is informed by Irishman Gus Laurer that Irishmen loved to fight. "Did you ever know as when an Irishman would not rather fight than eat?" he said. 105 Whereas the Irish fought, the Italians stole, but just "a little bit, [and] most of the time it was to give to the poor." Cajuns, however, were better at trapping than at theft, for they were "the world's finest trappers." They also loved to eat frog legs: "All Cajuns love frog legs, so hunting the frog is a favorite pastime." A Cajun was "proud of his race, his family, his strength, his prowess as a hunter, fisherman, fighter or lover, and he boasts of any or all of these with a childish lack of restraint."

Cajun husbands, according to the folklore book, were "good husbands, so long as their wives behave[d]." The husbands had to discipline their wives, however, in order to make them behave:

A visitor in a Cajun home where a young couple lived with the husband's parents was astonished to hear blows and screams from a room into which the young couple had just entered. The door flew open and the young wife ran out of the house with a great bump on her forehead. The boy's mother turned to her husband and complained: 'Charles Alex is bad, yes. He should not hit Lulu like that. You would not do that to me, you.'

105Ibid., 55.
The older man took his pipe out of his mouth and said quietly: 'I never had no reason for to hit you. But if Charles Alex did not beat hell out of that woman's [sic] he's got once in a while there would be nothing he could do with her.'

Cajun men were good husbands, and, according to the folklore book, German men were excellent fighters and lovers. In the discussion of the Germans of New Orleans the reader is immediately informed: "No tougher element ever lived in the city than the old Sockserhause Gang." The Sockserhausers "were not proud," nor were they "very clean." They did have fun, however, especially the male Sockserhausers with Lena Muller. Lena "was a buxom fraulein, without real beauty, but with a vibrant, fun-loving personality and a pair of dancing feet...." Lena was not for every man, at least not for Johnny Grouse. Johnny was so large that "even some of the prostitutes would refuse to do business with Johnny, no matter how large his bankroll." The size of Johnny's bankroll was not his problem, but "suffice it to say that Johnny was a big man." 

The virility of the German men occasionally caused them problems, especially Hans Muller. Hans and his wife operated a sausage factory. The arduous labor quickly aged Mrs. Muller,

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106Ibid., 55, 182, 200, 206, 204.
107Ibid., 413, 418, 423.
for "she grew old and wrinkled before her time." Hans tired of Mrs. Muller, shoved her into the factory's large meat grinder, and then turned his amorous attention to one of his young female employees. Hans' trouble with Mrs. Muller, however, had just begun. His customers began to complain about bits of bone and cloth in their sausages. Hans' girl friend began to hear gossip about the mysterious demise of Mrs. Muller and refused to see him. One day a customer found part of a gold wedding ring in her sausage and called the police. The officers went to the sausage factory and found Hans "screaming and crying, a raving maniac. He kept saying his wife was coming out of the sausage grinder and would get him. He spent the rest of his life in an insane asylum."108

Perhaps some of the Project workers sympathized with Hans Muller. While working on the project, one worker had a nervous breakdown and had to be placed (as he said after his recovery) on the "cooling board."109 Another writer committed suicide after leaving the project by jumping out of a New Orleans hotel window.110 Former project employees are divided as to

108Ibid., 285.

109[Name withheld by request] to Lyle Saxon, October 28, 1942, ibid.

110Lyle Saxon to Cammie Chambers, October 28, 1942, ibid. Saxon informed his Aunt Cammie about the suicide of Innis
whether Edward Dreyer fell or jumped to his death from a New York building. Despite the personal problems of the writers, however, the project managed to produce three major publications.

Like most books, the *New Orleans City Guide, Louisiana: A Guide to the State*, and *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, were works containing strengths and weaknesses. On the whole, however, they were excellent books written during a period of national economic depression by unemployed white collar workers in a state not particularly noted for literary excellence. Had the project only these three titles to its credit, the program would have been worthwhile in Louisiana. There were, however, numerous other titles the project was working on when forced to close. These projects and their final disposition are also part of the story of the Louisiana Writers' Projects.

Patterson, a former project employee. "Innis Patterson threw herself out of a window on the twelfth floor of the Montelone Hotel yesterday afternoon and came crashing down into the Royal Street traffic, just at the peak hour. Of course she was a mangled mass of blood and broken flesh when she was picked up. We had all predicted that she was going to kill herself and perhaps it was the best thing for her, but she chose a horrible way to do it. Ever since her husband, George Wolf, took poison and died at her feet Christmas day, she has been half-crazy and was taking both drink and drugs...the Mother is quite cracked. I think I told you how she used to come to the office and open the doors and scream 'Unnatural girl!' at Innis--and that was five years ago when Innis was working for me here." Lyle Saxon to Aunt Cammie, October 28, 1941, LSCol-HTML.
CHAPTER VII

THE FINAL ACTIVITIES OF THE LOUISIANA WRITERS' PROJECTS

The Louisiana Writers' Project published very little of the materials it collected and completed few of the projects it planned. The three major publications of the project represented a small portion of the work done in Louisiana. The Project planned several additional major and minor publications that were in varying stages of completion when the Project ended.

The exact number of minor publications issued is difficult to ascertain, for Saxon left some of these manuscripts with co-sponsors upon the condition that they complete and publish them. The records dealing with these intended works are thus not available in the files of the Writers' Project. Two minor publications, however, were issued by the Writers' Project before it closed: the New Orleans City Park: Its First Fifty Years, 1891-1941; and A Tour of the French Quarter for Service Men.

New Orleans City Park: Its First Fifty Years, 1891-1941 was written by the Louisiana Writers' Program and sponsored by the Board of Commissioners of the City Park of New Orleans, a
co-sponsor of the Writers' Project. The Gulf Printing Company of New Orleans issued 1,000 copies of the pamphlet in 1941. The seventy-two page pamphlet contains one map and sixteen photographs placed throughout the work to illustrate various topics under discussion. The work is divided into ten chapters pertaining to topics such as the history and development of the park, a general description of the park, dueling, sports, amusements, the Isaac Delgado Museum of Art, fowl, and WPA labor. ¹

¹Louisiana Writers' Program, New Orleans City Park: Its First Fifty Years, 1891-1941 (New Orleans, 1941): "Publication Report on New Orleans City Park: Its First Fifty Years, 1891-1941," October 6, 1941, FWP-La. Alfred Welborn to Lyle Saxon, December 17, 1942, LSCol-HTML. Lyle Saxon to Clarice Rougeou, "Final Report of Louisiana Writers' Project," January 26, 1943, ibid. The title of the work is not exactly accurate, for the discussion of the history of the park begins with the founding of New Orleans, almost two hundred years before 1891. The Creoles are discussed in the chapter, "Dueling." Although dueling was made illegal in 1850, and ended by 1900, this time period was also included in a work supposedly dealing with a fifty year period from 1891 to 1941. Since the pamphlet did not take the reader from one point to the next in the park, it was not a guide. Nor is it a history, since only one chapter deals with the history of the park. The name of the Mayor of New Orleans was written in large print on the front cover of the pamphlet. The mayor, however, made no contribution to the origin, writing, publication, or sponsorship of the work. If the pamphlet had a theme, it was that the city park resulted from the foresight, intelligence, and benevolence of the members of the Board of Commissioners of the City Park. The pictures of the board members are printed on page thirty-six, and their names are listed twice in the pamphlet, on page thirty-six and page seventy-two. Perhaps the pamphlet best illustrates the chamber of commerce type of publications that would have resulted had the writers' project been totally dependent upon local sponsorship. Had the other planned publications been like this pamphlet,
The second minor publication issued by the Writers' Project was *A Tour of the French Quarter for Service Men*. The Wetzel Printing Company of New Orleans printed the uncopyrighted thirty-two page pamphlet in 1941. The pamphlet was the result of a joint effort by several WPA agencies. The Writers' Project wrote the pamphlet, the Louisiana Art Project designed the cover of the pamphlet as well as a map of the French Quarter, and the WPA Recreational Council sponsored and distributed the pamphlet without charge to service men on leave in New Orleans. Distribution of the pamphlet began on Christmas Day, 1941, and the 2,000 copies of the first edition were quickly exhausted. The pamphlet briefly describes buildings, museums, and other points of interest in the French Quarter. The Recreation Project conducted the guide's two walking tours for service men.  

Perhaps it was best they were never published. The pamphlet was vague in purpose, political in composition, and lacking in merit. While this pamphlet must be credited as one of the publications of the L.W.P., the pamphlet was no credit to the Project. If never published, neither the academic world nor the reading public would have been deprived of a significant work. Rather, the board members and a few of the socially significant families in the crescent city would have had to rely on other means to publicize themselves.

The pamphlets about the New Orleans City Park and the French Quarter of New Orleans were but two of the titles Saxon planned for publication. The fate of the other intended publications is discernible by examining the deposition of project materials after the project ended.

The question of disposal of project materials faced Saxon as the project closed. Essae M. Culver, Librarian of the Louisiana State Library at Baton Rouge and Executive Secretary of the Louisiana Library Commission, realized the importance of the project materials. She asked Saxon if he would consider depositing them with the Library Commission, Official Sponsor of the Louisiana Writers' Project. Saxon asked George H. Field, Deputy Commissioner of WPA, and Florence Kerr, Assistant Commissioner, for authorization to deposit the records in Baton Rouge with the Commission. They granted him

1942, in LaCol-LSLIBR. Neither the official sponsor of the project, the Louisiana Library Commission in the Louisiana State Library at Baton Rouge, the Howard Memorial Library at Tulane University, nor the publisher of the pamphlet, the Wetzel Printing Company of New Orleans has a copy of the pamphlet. The AMS Press, Incorporated, of New York, New York, however, sells a microfiche copy of the pamphlet. For a description of this and other microfiche editions of Writers' Project titles available, as well as an article by Jerry Mangione, "The Great Legacy of the Federal Writers' Project," see an undated advertisement brochure by the AMS Press, "Federal Writers' Project."
such authority, and Saxon informed Miss Culver that he could comply with her request.

Miss Culver expressed delight over acquisition of the records. She also asked Saxon if the Library might have the pictures and statues in his office. Saxon apparently agreed to this request, for his portrait and one of his statues are presently displayed in the Louisiana Room of the Louisiana State Library. Miss Culver also asked Saxon if he might send someone familiar with the project records to assist her in filing them. Saxon sent his assistant, whom he referred to only as "Mr. Kornfield," to Baton Rouge where Kornfield spent approximately two months assisting Miss Culver in filing the records.

Saxon tried to assure that at least one copy of all project manuscripts was deposited in Baton Rouge. He left some original copies in New Orleans and Shreveport in order to assure the future safety and accessibility of the documents. He hoped to work with

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the records in Baton Rouge after the project ended but was unable to
do so before his death. Perhaps this explains in part why reports
about the deposition of project materials, the lists of project
publications, and the status of manuscript completion are very
minimal in project reports. Only three reports relate to these
topics. One, dated May, 1939, listed and briefly described planned
project productions. The report of January 9, 1942, titled
"Washington Memorandum of a Technique for Ensuring the Orderly
and Efficient Arrangement of Material Collected by the Writers' Project,"
pertained to the degree of completion of the various
manuscripts. Saxon discussed the deposition of the manuscripts in
a brief report after the project ended, dated January 26, 1943,
and entitled "Final Report." These three reports provide the basic
narrative of the unfinished and unpublished manuscripts pertaining
to national, state, and local topics.5

5"Material to be covered by the Louisiana Writers' Project," May 1, 1939, FWP-La., cited hereinafter as the "1939 Report;"
"Washington Memorandum on a Technique for Ensuring the Orderly
and Efficient Arrangement of Material Collected by Writers' Project,"
deposition of all unpublished materials of the Writers' Project, see
Merle Colby, "Final Report on Deposition of Unpublished Materials
of WPA Writers' Program," April 8, 1943, FWP-La.
The Louisiana Writers' Project prepared materials for publication by the Central Office. These topics were America Eats, Hands that Built America, and The Louisiana Factbook.

Alsberg planned for America Eats to be a regional work on the customs and traditions of serving and preparing food. This work was never published, perhaps due to the 1939 federal law affecting the cultural projects, and to America's change in national priorities after her entry into the Second Work War. Saxon wrote of the regional work in his final report when he said: "The manuscript of the virtually completed national volume which was compiled in part in the New Orleans office--America Eats--will not be published at present for obvious reasons...." After closing the project and going to work in the Central Office, he asked that the materials on this topic be shipped to him in Washington. He wanted, he said, to make the materials available to nutrition officials responsible for establishing the eating habits of Americans entering the armed forces. Perhaps the manuscripts were shipped to him, but today they are in the Louisiana State Library at Baton Rouge. They pertain to topics such as bread, fish cookery in South Louisiana, fowl, coffee and tea, liquors, and seafood.  

Another national project on which the Louisiana writers worked was *Hands That Built America*, also listed in some reports as *Hands That Built the Nation*. Saxon did not mention this project in his final report, but the Washington Report stated that the Louisiana writers would "like to make [their] contribution to this Series if Washington plan[ned] to go ahead with it." The Central Office, however, was unable to complete this project by the time the Writers' Project closed.  

The Central Office also planned an encyclopedic production about the various states. As part of this program Louisiana was to produce *The Louisiana Encyclopedia*, or, perhaps as the name evolved, *The Louisiana Factbook*. The former title was listed in the 1939 report, whereas the latter title was discussed in the 1942 report. If they were not the same projects they at least dealt with similar, and in some instances, identical, subjects.

According to a 1942 "General Prospectus" of the *Louisiana Factbook*, the work was "a reference book supplying the general public with essential information on the history and social, economic, cultural, and political life of the State." The tentative table of contents listed chapter titles such as "The Land, The People, History

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The manuscript contained information about newspapers, for example, such as ownership, political affiliation, circulation, and number. When the project ended the Factbook manuscript was about ten per cent complete, the chronology approximately eighty per cent finished, with almost 500 chronological entries. The abstract on the section, "Charters and State Constitutions," consisted of 50,000 words, about eighty per cent of the planned length. 8

The Louisiana Writers' Project also prepared a "National Defense Series." The Guide to the French Quarters for Service Men was part of this series. Guides to military bases near Alexandria were in their "pre-final stage" when the project ended, and in outline form were guides titled Barksdale Field, Camp Polk and Service Men's Guide to New Orleans and Vicinity. Saxon noted in his final report that "certain parts of...A Military History of Louisiana [would] be made available through the Louisiana Library Commission to military authorities...or to the Office of War Information..." 9

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8"A General Prospectus of the Louisiana Factbook," January 14, 1942, LaCol-LSLBR.


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In addition to the uncompleted national programs were several intended state and local projects. Saxon planned approximately twenty significant publications for the project, but few of these were ever finished, and some that were completed were never published.

One of the completed but unpublished manuscripts was *They Saw Louisiana, 1519-1765*. Only the first of three volumes was finished and it consisted of forty chapters. Helen R. Cope, project editor of the work, stated that the first volume contained "carefully-checked quotations from journals, memoirs and letters of Louisiana's discoverers, explorers, settlers, missionaries, traders, visitors, et cetera, joined by a running text, included a minimum of background and basic material assembled about brief biographies."¹⁰

Cope noted that she worked on the manuscript from the fall of 1939 until the close of the project. Both she and Saxon hoped to publish the manuscript, although she warned Saxon: "I find the ________________________________

officials was pecuniary as well as patriotic. After the project ended, Saxon eagerly sought to join the navy and other related military organizations. He failed, however, to pass his physical examinations.

¹⁰Helen R. Cope, "General Report of Work of the 'Travel Tales' Unit, of the Louisiana Writers' Project," January 14, 1942, LaCol-LSLBR.
second, third and even fourth chapters almost deadly dull—for the principal reason, I think, that we had to see other than modern translations." Saxon sent the manuscript to the University of Oklahoma Press at Norman, Oklahoma. He wrote Savoie Lottinville, of the University Press, that he hoped his company would publish the manuscript. "Do not be frightened when you see what a vast manuscript it is," Saxon said. "You will find certain diaries repetitious, and the manuscript may have to be cut...The main question is: Do you want it?"11

Lottinville informed Saxon that he would notify him "concerning its publishing possibilities" as soon as readers examined the manuscript. Perhaps, however, Lottinville also found the manuscript "deadly dull" and "repetitious," for he refused to publish it. 12

Another planned project about the early history of Louisiana was The Spanish in Louisiana. According to a synopsis of the work written by Jeanne de Lavigne Scott on January 9, 1942, all research had been completed on the topic and the manuscript was about

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11 Lyle Saxon to Clorice Rougeou, September 17, 1942, LS COL-HTML; Lyle Saxon to Savoie Lottinville, September 17, 1942, ibid.; Helen R. Cope to Lyle Saxon, September 26, 1942, ibid.

12 Savoie Lottinville to Lyle Saxon, September 24, 1942, ibid.
PAGES 287 THROUGH 289
PORTRAITS OF LIFE IN NEW ORLEANS

287 - A Praline Mammy in Front of Jackson Square*

288 - A Portrait of Marie Laveau, Once the Most Famous of Voodoo Queens*

289 - A Voodoo Grave in St. Louis Cemetery No. 2
where Voodoo Believers make Cross Marks with Red Bricks and drop Coins through Holes in the Cement to make Their Wishes come True*

*Pictures located in the National Archives.
one-fifth finished. Scott indicated that the book would have twenty-one chapters, each about 13,000 words in length. She estimated that, when finished, the manuscript would consist of 47,775 words. The project ended, however, before the manuscript could be completed and published.  

Saxon also planned local histories as well as studies of the state. In addition to the New Orleans City Guide, Saxon planned guides to Baton Rouge and to Shreveport. The work on Baton Rouge, entitled Baton Rouge: An Informal History from Contemporary Documents, never went beyond the planning stage. Saxon made no reference to this project in his correspondence or in his final report. The Washington Report simply stated "much of the research completed, but work temporarily suspended." The 1939 report indicated that the work was to be "an informal history of the capital of the state from its earliest settlement to the present, based on contemporary accounts, letters, diaries, memoirs, newspaper files, etc."  

13 Jeanne de Lavigne Scott, "Synopsis of the Spanish in Louisiana," January 9, 1942, LaCol-LSLBR.  

Although Saxon had no way of knowing that Baton Rouge would become an important petro-chemical center during and after the war, publication of a guide to the capital city would have seemed warranted, anyway. New Orleans so dominated the Writers' Project, however, that other cities, equally deserving of consideration, were ignored.

Saxon expressed his true sentiment regarding cities other than New Orleans when he wrote about the Shreveport Guide in his final report: "The Louisiana Writers' Project compiled several local guides during the early part of its existence when it was necessary to have field offices in various parts of the state."

Apparently Saxon worked on guides to cities other than New Orleans only "when it was necessary to have field offices in various parts of the state." When this "necessity" ended, so did the guide work. Saxon noted that the Shreveport guide was complete and contained "much useful information to people of that vicinity."\(^{15}\)

If Shreveport residents could not have their completed guide published, they at least hoped to retain the materials collected about their city. Saxon said that Robina Denholme of Shreveport wanted to "have the Shreveport material stored in Shreveport rather

than in Baton Rouge. "\(^{16}\)

Saxon consulted Miss Culver about Denholme's request and they agreed to send the original records to Shreveport. Saxon told Bess Vaughan, Librarian of the Shreve Memorial Library of Shreveport: "In the haste of closing the Project without the aid of skilled workers--many of them had left us for war jobs--we found it virtually impossible to separate all the materials." He asked her "to separate the originals from the carbons and send these carbons to the Louisiana Library Commission, so that two sets of the materials [may] be available to the public."\(^{17}\)

Several planned but incompletely local projects pertained to New Orleans. One such work was *A History of the New Orleans City Hall and a Guide to Its Art Collection*. According to the 1939 report this project was to be "a history of the building, the mayors, and the principal historic events which have taken place in the building since the erection, plus a guide to the paintings, statuary, and other objects d'art in the City Hall collection." The same report also stated that work was planned on a *New Orleans Tourists' Pamphlet*,

\(^{16}\)Lyle Saxon to Bess Vaughan, February 1, 1943, LSCol-HTML.

\(^{17}\)Ibid.
"a short pamphlet on what New Orleans has to offer tourists."\(^{18}\)

Another project involving New Orleans was *Chains of Property Titles in the Vieux Carre*. This project sought, according to the 1939 report, "to definitely establish the authenticity of previous information on this old and famous section of New Orleans, and research into various sections of the French Quarter which have never before been adequately investigated."\(^{19}\)

This work was not completed when the project ended, so members of the Vieux Carre Commission of New Orleans made arrangements with Saxon for them to finish the work. Chairman of the Vieux Carre Commission, Walter Cook Keenan, asked Mayor Robert Maestri to assist the Commission in completing the property title research by providing the Commission with $150.00 a month. Keenan said the money would be used to pay the salary of Mrs. Stephanie McCollaster, the Writers' Project employee responsible for the property survey, and to buy materials necessary for Mrs. McCollaster's research. Mayor Maestri complied with Keenan's request for money by authorizing the expenditure of $98.00 a month for the salary of Mrs. McCollaster, and $100.00 a month for

\(^{19}\)Ibid.

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employing Mrs. Lucille Ward as stenographer for the office of the Vieux Carre Commission. 20

Saxon noted in his final report that the Vieux Carre Commission hired Mrs. McCollaster to complete the Vieux Carre property title project. He also remarked that he left the original manuscript of this project with the Commission and had duplicate manuscripts forwarded to the Library Commission in Baton Rouge. The Vieux Carre Commission, Saxon commented, promised to send duplicate copies of their research to the Library Commission until completion of the project. 21

The arrangement Saxon made for disposal of materials with the Vieux Carre Commission was similar to the one he made with the State Parks Commission. One unit of the Writers' Project was called the State Parks Unit. According to William W. Wells, Acting Director of the State Parks Commission, this unit performed "research and copying and typing of historical data for fifteen crescent binders." The binders contained two volumes of materials about the Acadians, three volumes regarding Andrew Jackson, and


several folders pertaining to Louisiana newspapers such as the Louisiana Gazette, the New Orleans Argus, and the New Orleans Bee.\textsuperscript{22}

The State Park Unit of the Writers' Project also compiled seventeen folders of materials on topics such as "Audubon's birthplace, Louisiana-Act of Admission, and Louisiana-Indians."\textsuperscript{22} This unit, Wells noted, also had responsibility for the "research and copying of historical material pertinent to subjects under 'crescent binders,' comprising two file drawers of approximately 9,000 legal size longhand pages." The unit prepared a typed manuscript for the Fontainbleau State Park and the Longfellow-Evangeline State Park, each manuscript being approximately 100 pages. Regarding the materials gathered and written by the State Park Unit, Saxon said in his final report: "Copies of certain materials made by our workers have been left with the State Parks Commission (another of our co-sponsors) in the Court House in New Orleans. Duplicates of this material have been sent to the Library Commission in Baton Rouge. In this way the material is available to research workers in two places instead of one."\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22}William W. Wells to Lyle Saxon, December 14, 1942, LSCol-HTML.

In addition to the projects thus far discussed, the Louisiana Writers were also involved with indexing and translating projects. Louisiana Writers' Project employee Henri de Sinclair made a report in April, 1942, pertaining to the Project's indexing and translating work. Sinclair's report, entitled "Bibliography, with Explanations, of Translations, Transcriptions, and Historical data, Compiled by Various Units of the Work Projects Administration, and available at the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana," listed approximately twenty different titles.24

Two of the major unpublished indexing projects were an Index of Debow's Commercial and Financial Review, and an Index to the Louisiana Historical Quarterly. According to Sinclair, the Debow index consisted of "the collection of the original numbers, incorporating data regarding the Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources of the South." The index covered volumes one through thirty-four for the years 1846 through 1870. One volume covered the period 1879 to 1880.25

24Henri de Sinclair, "Bibliography, with Explanations, of Translations, Transcripts, and Historical Data. Compiled by Various Units of the Work Projects Administration, and Available at the Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana," April, 1942, LaCol-LSLBR.

25Ibid., 106.
The Index to the Louisiana Historical Quarterly comprised one volume of 138 pages. This work went through the year 1938. It was, noted Sinclair, "an alphabetical index of the various articles, and their authors, contained within the pages of the various issues of the Louisiana Historical Quarterly."26

The Writers' Project also translated a number of titles, basically from French and Spanish into English. One such title was *Histoire Ecclesiastique, Lettres Edifiantes Inedites*. Florence Peterson, Louisiana Writers' Project employee, translated this title from French into English. The work, noted Sinclair, was "a narrative of the author's [Fauyer] voyage to Louisiana, dated at New Orleans, November 1721."27

Another project employee, Maud O. Turcan, translated from French into English a 134-page work by Charles Montagne, *History of the Company of the Indies*. Albert Guerrero, also a project employee, translated into English a twenty-six page Spanish work written in 1769 by Don Alejandro O'Reilly, entitled *Military and Political Government of Louisiana*. Guerrero also translated Spanish Service Records. These records, said Sinclair, were records "signed by Miro and Pedre Piernas, the latter military Governor of

New Orleans during the Galves expeditions against Baton Rouge, Mobile, and Pensacola."28


Jeanne Wogan Arguedas was another project employee who translated several titles from French into English. These works were, Here and There in Louisiana, a three-part article appearing

28Ibid., 109-111.

29Ibid., 112-116, 120-121.
in the March 7, 1867 edition of *Revue Cosmopolite; The Old Red Church and its Cemetery*, a 1722 work by Father Peufier, a parish priest of the Church of Sainte-Marie in Saint Charles Parish; *L'Observateur Louisianais; A List of the French Societies in New Orleans*, an article in the April 17, 1936 issue of *Courrier*; and *Superstitions of New Orleans*, a listing of superstitions prevalent in New Orleans among descendants of former slaves employed by Creole families.\(^{30}\)

Sinclair noted several other works translated in whole or in part by the Louisiana Writers\(^{1}\) Project. Laureat Pelletier translated chapters five, seventeen, twenty-two, and thirty-one of *Aristocracy in America*, an 1883 work dealing with, said Sinclair, "the French language in Louisiana...the filibustering activities of William Walker, and the visits of [Pierre] Soule to Paris and Madrid...." *Cajun* was a thesis translated into English from French by an unidentified project worker, as was the thesis, *Voodooism*, and a work titled *In Louisiana*.\(^ {31}\)

The Louisiana State Library at Baton Rouge has copies of three of the translations Sinclair discussed, namely, *In Louisiana*,

\(^{30}\)Ibid., 118, 125-127.

\(^ {31}\)Ibid., 117, 119, 122, 124.
Legend and Realities, History of the Company of the Indies, and A Daily Journal for 1858. The Library also has titles to several works not mentioned by Sinclair. These are not publications, but typescripts of translations and of essays written by project employees. The library has bound these translations and essays and now includes them as part of its holdings. Other titles in the library are as follows: Lake Providence, Louisiana; Old Houses of East Carroll; Arlington; Louisiana Place Names; Trends in Family Life and Organization in Louisiana; The Saint Ybars Plantation or Masters and Slaves in Louisiana, A Social Account; Dreux Seigneur De Gentilly; Huey Long's Period; and Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred.32

The above mentioned transcripts, translations, and type-written essays in the Howard Memorial and Louisiana State Library at Baton Rouge represent some of the work done by the white Writers' Project. A major project not completed when the Writers' Project ended, however, was the all black Dillard Project at Dillard University in New Orleans. This project gathered material and wrote copy for publication of The Negro in Louisiana.

Saxon noted in his final report that the Negro history

32Typescript copies are LaCol-LSLBR.
manuscript was "virtually complete" when the project ended. An unidentified Dillard Project employee observed in a prospectus of the manuscript that the project completed "1,128 pages of finished copy, comprising about 46 chapters. The two or three very short chapters necessary for its completion will probably cover about eight pages each, making a total of nearly 1,200 finished pages to the completed manuscript. After this the comparatively easy task of editing and condensing will prepare the book for the publisher."³³

The remaining records of the intended history of the Negro in Louisiana are now extremely limited. The prospectus and the outline of the intended book indicate that the history would have been radically different from the portrayal of Negro life in the two guides and in the folklore book. The extent of this contrast can be seen in the following prospectus of The Negro in Louisiana:

This book on Louisiana Negroes will contain interesting and colorful stories of slave life, housing, cuisine, clothing, health, remedies, and hospitalization. In it one will learn of many of the Negro dealers who flourished in New Orleans and other Louisiana centers. The folklore of French- and English-speaking slaves will be described. Voodoo lore and the story of the celebrated Marie Laveau and equally famous Doctor John are included. How the position of State executioner was traditionally given to a Negro slave will also be told. But

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one Negro—more humane than his predecessors—refused to shed blood in this manner, and when appointed to the job is said to have struck off his own hand rather than serve. The study also carries a description of a slave auction in the famous old St. Louis Hotel Exchange—-one of the many auction rooms of the city where Negroes were sold.

Bit by bit, facts hitherto unknown concerning the black people of the State begin to unfold themselves in the story. Out of the labyrinthian maze of Reconstruction arose the educated and cultured classes of free colored men, who were very often educated in France, the northern United States, and on the European continent, like their white, and free colored fathers before them. They tried by all of the power and wealth at their command to lead their freed brothers into a political Promise Land, but those who had lashed and driven them for nearly two hundred years—both Republican and Democrat—were too strong and cunning. Little by little, the more worthwhile Negroes and white carpet baggers were eliminated, and then a mad scramble began for Negro votes between unprincipled leaders on both sides of the political fence. In the end, the revolutionary won out, and then a new-unprecedented era of black exploitation was ushered in.

In addition to the material outlined here, there is also the story of the Louisiana Negro after the Civil War. The Negro as a soldier, painter, poet, writer, publisher, actor, sculptor, and architect, are but a few of the phases of Negro life that are projected into the present day. Negro labor, churches, politics, business, professions, and other aspects of Negro integration into American civilization are amply treated in this book.

The prevailing thought in writing this account of the Negro in Louisiana was to present an
informative, entertaining, readable account of the activities since the founding of the first early settlements. In addition to this, facts have also been advanced that would disprove many of the common historical errors concerning the Negro's long stay in our common country. 34

The "outline" of The Negro in Louisiana is also revealing as to the focus of the intended book. Like the prospectus, the "outline" was very much at variance with the interpretation of the Negro's role in Louisiana history in the guides and folklore book. Especially interesting is the portrayal of the slave-catcher and the Creole in the intended Negro history:

People generally conversant with American history erroneously believe that the Negro has made no considerable contributions to the advancement of American art, invention, economic progress, education, or literature. Even in the realm of culinary arts the Negro's true worth is denied to him, although his efforts in that direction began early in the life of the colony and remain unto the present day....

There is still too little known of the numerous efforts made by American Negroes, in concert with white liberals, to break the bonds of slavery. Many persons, forgetting, or having read nothing of their many attempts at insurrections, usually point to the fact that the American Negro was the only person ever to have freedom thrust upon him without struggling for it, unmindful or ignorant of the fact that the slave man-power of the South as soldiers and laborers, etc., became the deciding factor in the outcome of the Civil War.

34"Prospectus of 'The Negro in Louisiana,'" ibid.
There were so many insurrections and attempts at insurrections that it is hardly possible to name them all. One New Orleans writer once wrote that every plantation was an armed camp. While this picture was slightly exaggerated, it is no Abolitionist propaganda to assert that a pall of nameless fear hung over the entire Southland, and that deep within his heart every thinking Southerner knew that some terrible day of retribution would come when the debt that the American commonwealth owed the slaves would be washed away in ever-rising, ever-widening waves of human blood. That day came and when that day did arrive, men suddenly realized that the particular type of exploitation of their fellow-men which they and their fathers had known was not worth the price exacted of them.

As slave escapes became more numerous, the slavecatchers became bolder and more audacious. (Even more gullible,) A mulatto escaped in New Orleans and made his way across the river to Algiers. A Negro trader, named Hall, crossed the river in close pursuit asserting that he was the property of a North Carolina master. Unfortunately, he asked information concerning the runaway from another Negro, who, upon being furnished with a description of the man, (mischievously) pointed out a dark-complexioned Creole in a nearby barroom, and pretending admiration of the sleeves and cuffs of his shirt, banteringly asked to see his wrists. Unsuspectingly, the Creole held out his hands. The Negro trader quickly snapped a pair of handcuffs upon him, and began dragging him towards the river for a return trip to New Orleans. The Creole, being a well-known citizen of Algiers, set up a loud cry that he was being kidnapped. 'Come along,' the Negro trader commanded him, menacingly, 'I know you well; you belong to Colonel __________, in North Carolina.' But the Creole, still crying out loudly, refused to be hurried into slavery.
'Je ne suis pas un naigre! Je ne suis pas un naigre!' he continued to scream at his captor, and appealed to his friends, in the crowd, which quickly gathered to verify his statement. This was done, and the Negro trader was lodged in jail. 'People seem to think that there are no laws in the country,' observed the Daily Delta, 'and that every man came make himself Judge, Jury, Sheriff and Executive, whenever he desires.' To this stage had the 'peculiar institution progressed in mid-July of 1850. 35

The Dillard account of the role of the Negro in Louisiana was to be unlike any other account published by the Writers' Project, and Saxon's deposition of the Dillard records was different from the arrangements he made for all of the other projects. In view of what happened to these records and the "virtually complete" manuscript, the exact arrangement Saxon made for storing the records is important.

On December 31, 1942, Saxon wrote A. W. Dent, President of Dillard University, about the Dillard Project records. Saxon said:

I have discussed with Marcus B. Christian the advisibility of leaving the Negro Material where it is at present, and the possibility of work being continued on the book, The Negro in Louisiana, until it is completed. Being assured of his intentions in that direction, and with the understanding that the university would give him all aid possible, it was largely due to his solicitations that I have concluded that your institution is the logical place in which to allow it to remain.

35"Outline of 'The Negro in Louisiana,'" ibid.
Although I shall be in Washington for a few months, I would like to know from time to time just how the work is progressing, and when it is finished, I would also like to be able to help in getting the attention of a publisher, as well as being able to write the forward in which I would like to give you and Christian the proper credit in the writing and publishing of the work.\(^\text{36}\)

President Dent responded to Saxon's letter by assuring him that all would be done to complete the manuscript and to have it published:

I wish to assure you that we are pleased to have this material deposited here and that we will make it available to Mr. Christian as well as to other interested persons from time to time as is our custom with all our library materials.

We shall do what we can to encourage Mr. Christian and give all of our assistance we can at Dillard University to bring the manuscript to completion and ready for submission to a publisher. When we get to this stage we will certainly ask again your assistance.\(^\text{37}\)

Upon learning of the special arrangement that Saxon had made with Christian and Dent, Clarice H. Rougeou, State Director of the Service Division, asked Saxon: "We wonder whether matters of this sort can be left in the hands of a private institution such as Dillard." Rougeou said she had no objection to leaving the materials

\(^{36}\)Lyle Saxon to A. W. Dent, December 31, 1942, ibid.

with the Louisiana Library Commission, a public agency and former sponsor of the project. "We are not at all sure, however," said Rougeou, "that a similar arrangement with Dillard would be satisfactory."38

The arrangement Saxon made with Dillard seemed logical to him. The records were already at Dillard, and the Dillard Project Director, Marcus B. Christian, assured Saxon that the manuscript would be completed and published. Dillard University planned to cooperate with the Rosenwald Foundation in Chicago in attempting to find a publisher for the manuscript, and the President of Dillard, A. W. Dent, promised to do all that he could to publish the manuscript and to make the records available to the public.

Saxon commented on these matters in his final report when he wrote: "It is my understanding that they Dillard University will employ my last Negro worker, Marcus Christian, to complete the work. The University will also cooperate with the Rosenwald Foundation in Chicago in attempting to find a publisher...The other unpublished Negro material will remain at Dillard University and will be made accessible to the public."39

38Clarice Rougeou to Lyle Saxon, February 16, 1943, ibid.
The Dillard Project manuscripts were not published, nor were the records permanently retained. A storm supposedly damaged all of the Dillard Project materials in 1939, and librarians destroyed them. Saxon, it now seems, was wrong, and Rougeou was right.

Perhaps the Dillard Project records should have been left with a public, rather than a private, institution. Saxon's private papers fared better than the Dillard Project records. His papers are in the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library of Tulane University. The official description of these papers reads:

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40Interview with Geraldine Amos, January 29, 1974.
Speculation about the fate of the Dillard Project materials would not be necessary if the parties responsible for their deposition, Christian and Dent, would discuss what happened to them. They refuse to do so, however, and this refusal is unfortunate. Saxon developed the Dillard Project despite the resentment and opposition of some whites. Saxon gave the Project an identity of its own. He entrusted responsibility to four different directors of the Dillard Project. He occasionally visited the project but did not interfere with its operations. Saxon, as a concession to Christian, made special deposition of the Dillard materials and sought to provide for continuance of the Dillard Project work even after the Writers' Project officially ended. Christian was the final director of the Dillard Project and the only one authorized to complete the Negro history manuscript. His refusal to answer the correspondence of the author, or to grant him an interview, and Dent's refusals to discuss the Dillard Project with the author is extremely regrettable. The Dillard Project was a public program developed for blacks at a time when such projects were uncommon in the South. The Project was paid for by the public, and the records belonged to the public. Unfortunately, however, a few individuals refused to disclose information about public documents that the public seemingly is entitled to have.
"The collection consists of correspondence; manuscripts of books, short stories, newspaper stories and book reviews; WPA reports and manuscripts; photographs and poems and manuscripts of friends of Lyle Saxon."  

The Writers' Project major and minor publications, completed and partially completed manuscripts, and translations and indexes provide some indication of the work of the project. Saxon's personal publications, however, also reveal much about the three major publications of the Louisiana Writers' Program.

41A few of the records not thus far discussed are located in Baton Rouge. These records are quite limited and are housed in the Louisiana State Archives, the Louisiana State University Archives, and the Louisiana Room of the Louisiana State Library. These records pertain more to the Historical Records Survey than to the Writers' Project.
CHAPTER VIII

THE INFLUENCE OF LYLE SAXON ON
THE LOUISIANA WRITERS' PROJECT

The Louisiana Writers' Project was supposed to concern itself with projects throughout the state. For several reasons, however, New Orleans became the major concern of the project. New Orleans was the center of all WPA activity in the state, the most populous city in the state, and the city Saxon most greatly admired.

New Orleans was the most populous city in Louisiana, as well as one of the largest cities in the South. Perhaps its size resulted in locating the WPA headquarters for Louisiana in the Crescent City. In addition, New Orleans had many newspapers, institutions of higher learning, courts of various levels, publishing houses, libraries, and other attractions making the city the cultural and educational center of the state.

New Orleans was also the center for the WPA cultural projects. New Orleans was no exception to the general tendency of artists to reside in large cities. The Crescent City thus had the artists, the WPA organization to hire them, and the public to
patronize them when the cultural projects were launched. Among all the WPA cultural projects, the Writers' Project and the Historical Records Survey came closer to developing statewide programs than did the Theater, Music, and Art Projects. The Art Project was so limited in location that at one point it was called the New Orleans Art Project, not the Louisiana Art Project.

Employment of writers across the state, however, did not mean that the work of the Writers' Project would be proportionately catholic in interest. Although materials were gathered from around the state, not much was done with the materials once gathered. The offices not located in New Orleans were closed as soon as Saxon could, and at times had to, close them. The emphasis that New Orleans received by the Writers' Project, thus, was not because materials were lacking from other sections, but because interest in writing about other sections was lacking by the writers' office in New Orleans. Saxon was totally devoted to making New Orleans the main and almost exclusive topic of consideration by the project. This emphasis was merely an extension of his own interest as revealed in his private publications.

Before, during, and after his tenure on the LWP, Saxon's letters, writings, and personal experiences revealed a dual theme of romanticism and realism. The titles of his publications

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indicated that his major interest was pre-twentieth century Louisiana.

Just as he was better able to express his historical concepts in
Gumbo Ya-Ya than in the Guides, he had even more liberty to state
his views in his own publications. Any of his works could be used
to illustrate his interest, but Fabulous New Orleans most closely
corresponds to the topics discussed in Project publications.

The three-tiered paradigm from which Saxon operated was
relatively simple. He believed that the Golden Age of Louisiana,
and in particular New Orleans, was the ante-bellum period 1830-
1860. This was the best era because the Creoles controlled the
daily affairs of life, the Mississippi River steamboat trade made
New Orleans an important city, and the institution of slavery enabled
Creole plantation owners to prosper.

One of the chapter titles in Fabulous New Orleans is
"The End of the Golden Age." Saxon wrote of this period: "The
thirty-year period from 1830 to 1860 marked the Golden Age in
Louisiana. Those were 'the good old times.'" The importance of
New Orleans in this period was enhanced by the Mississippi River
traffic. "With the coming of the steamboat," Saxon wrote, "the
wealth of the continent was carried down the Mississippi and spread
out on the levee of New Orleans. "1

The significance of the Mississippi River steamboat traffic to the Golden Age seemed to Saxon to be a perfectly natural and almost divine phenomenon. "The river commerce seemed a wholly natural development," he said, "for did not the current of the river carry the produce of the nation to the city at the river's mouth?"

Whereas the river was a "natural development," canals and railroads were, according to Saxon, merely systems of "artificial transportation." The people of the Golden Age, he felt, could not imagine that one day canals and railroads would compete with their "natural carrier."2

Just as the Mississippi River steamboat traffic increased the importance of New Orleans as a port city, the Creoles improved the life of New Orleans as a cultural city. Saxon repeatedly stressed that the Creoles were the finest people ever to live in New Orleans.

1 Lyle Saxon, Fabulous New Orleans (New Orleans, 1950), 247. Saxon also wrote of the Mississippi River and New Orleans: "During the early days of steamboating... New Orleans rose to be the wealthiest city in the Union, the third in population, and disputed with New York the rank of first port in America. No other American city ever occupied the metropolitan position that New Orleans filled for half of the century during its 'flush days.'" 249.

2 ibid., 248.
"As far as I am concerned," he wrote, "the old Section Vieux Carre (the area where the Creoles lived) must always remain the most interesting, for it was the cradle of the city's history." What the Tigris and Euphrates rivers were to the cradle of civilization, the Creole's Vieux Carre was to New Orleans.³

When the Creoles dominated the affairs of Orleanians, life, according to Saxon, was idyllic. This was a time, he wrote, when "nobody looked to the future," when "the city was extravagantly gay," and when there were "balls every night. The Mardi Gras festivities had begun, and were growing more lavish every year." This was a period when "theater and opera flourished," and "the Americans had learned something of the Creole's art of good living." The area "above Canal Street was filled with magnificent mansions," and Royal Street "was lined with gambling houses" where "Creole planters matched their skill" against professional gamblers and Americans visiting New Orleans.⁴

What Saxon liked so much about the past then, was the "by gone culture," the culture of the Creoles, their leisure, their appreciation of opera and theater, their exquisite standard of living.

³Ibid., 260.
⁴Ibid., 247-248.
Mrs. Caroline Durieux also enlightens one as to Saxon's appreciation of the Creoles when she agreed that the ante-bellum period was the best period in Louisiana. This she felt was a period when people had money to buy the finest trappings for their homes. Since culture was somewhat directly related to money, Creole wealth enabled the people to have culture and art. The money some Louisiana families have today, Mrs. Durieux said, came from some of the Creole families of ante-bellum Louisiana.\(^5\)

Adding to the delight of Creole life, said Saxon, were the beautiful quadroon women. According to Saxon, these women were special because they were fathered, loved, and kept by Creole men. They were virtuous, then, not because they were quadrooms; for quadroon men were not held in the same esteem as their quadroon sisters, but because they were the product of Creole life. Had, for instance, quadroon women loved Negro men instead of Creole men, the esteem the Creoles had for quadroons, undoubtedly, would have lessened.

Saxon feared that because the quadroon girls exchanged their sexual activities for monetary compensation, some readers might consider them prostitutes. "Now it must not be assumed,"

\(^5\)Interview with Caroline Durieux, January 27, 1974.
he wrote, "that these women were prostitutes—they were not. They were reared in chastity, and they were as well educated as the times would permit...Their chastity was their chief stock in trade, in addition to their beauty. Their mothers watched them as hawks watch chickens." 6

The golden age about which Saxon wrote was also based upon the institution of slavery. Saxon noted that slavery was the basis for Creole wealth, but he did not dwell upon the topic of slavery in his writings. "The prosperity of New Orleans was based," he noted, "upon an economic system which Louisiana believed to be sound: river commerce and slave labor." The slave system enabled the plantation system to survive. "The plantation system was based upon the work of slaves; for without cheap labor these immense tracts of land were worthless. The South," he continued, "knew nothing about production except on a large scale. Gaily and blindly, it went onward to its doom." 7

The "doom" to which Saxon referred was the Civil War. Like slavery, the war was a topic about which Saxon summarily wrote. The Civil War seemed to be an event too tragic for Saxon

6 Saxon, Fabulous New Orleans, 181.
7 Ibid., 248.
to recall, for it killed his beloved Golden Age. "The invasion by
the Federal army marks the end of the Golden Age in New Orleans,"
he wrote, and the war "killed prosperity on the river." After the
Civil War, "the history of New Orleans becomes a part of the
History of the United States." This phase of history of New Orleans
was distasteful to Saxon: "I shall not go into the causes of the Civil
War, nor shall I attempt to tell the history of New Orleans during
wartime." He could not, and would not bring himself to write about
the war, for it had no redeeming legacy such as preservation of the
union, liberation of the slaves, or viability of the concept of
federalism. Instead, the Civil War "mark[ed] the end of the Golden
Age in New Orleans" and ushered in the American Age.®

For Saxon the years from 1860 to the 1930's were like a
great crevice separating the past from his present. This period had

® Ibid., 251. Saxon also wrote of the Civil War and
Reconstruction: "The history of the old New Orleans ends with the
Civil War. Again, I must say that this history is known too well
for me to write of it here. The period of Reconstruction in Louisiana
is the most tragic part of the story. New Orleans had been one of
the richest—if not the richest—city in the country. It became one
of the poorest. Not only were men stripped of all that they had, but
the basis of their commercial life had been destroyed. The slave
system was gone, and the commercial usefulness of the river had
been destroyed by the railroads." 255.
to be breached, for the interregnum was intolerable. Saxon hoped to bridge the gap by reconstructing the Golden Age, at least part of it.

Saxon was a realist as well as a romanticist. He could not restore the Golden Age in its entirety, but he seemed confused as to what he could restore of this period. The Civil War permanently displaced the Mississippi River as the major source of transportation. He could not reverse the nation's dependency on railroads, highways, and air travel. He could not send the "foreigners," Northerners who had come south to work and live, back north, and replace them with Creoles. Nor could he resurrect dead Creoles or annul their marriages to Americans. He certainly did not wish to reinstitute the system of slavery. He had to restore the glory of the Golden Age without the corresponding institutions upon which it was based. In this effort to restore the spirit without the substance, his romanticism received its greatest test.

One means by which Saxon hoped to restore the Golden Age in New Orleans was by exposing his potential converts to the redeeming atmosphere of the Vieux Carre. Saxon felt that enough of the spirit of the old city remained to make converts of all who immersed themselves in its transforming atmosphere. The process was certain, but it did take time. Saxon explained how this could be achieved:
PAGES 320 THROUGH 322
PICTURES PERTAINING TO LYLE SAXON

320  -(left to right) Joe Gilmore and Lyle Saxon*
321  -Lyle Saxon at a Tomb on Grand Isle*
322  -Headstone of Lyle Saxon at Magnolia Cemetery, Baton Rouge**

*Picture located in The Friends of Joe Gilmore
**Picture by author

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LYLE SAXON AND JOE GILMORE – Madison Street House, French Quarter, New Orleans
The Chighizolas were among those who, with Lafitte, the Pirate, helped Jackson win the Battle of New Orleans.
My advice to you is to stay for a while in the old section of the city, sit for a time in Jackson Square and let the old world charm you. Take time and wander slowly; look twice at the old houses, they are worth it. Talk to the beggars in the street; talk to any one you chance to meet. The Natives of the Quarter are pleasant people and they will gladly tell you anything they happen to know. Those who live in the Quarter live there because they like it. They are proud of the old houses; they like your admiration and your interest... Take time and wander through, and then if you have a heart in you, you will want to return, for in the Vieux Carre of New Orleans, and the Vieux Carre alone, you will find that lingering charm of the Old World, that remnant of a bygone culture which is unique in America. 9

For Saxon, then the Vieux Carre was something of a holy city, the mecca one visited for conversion or renewal of spirit. The city and its people had mystical powers to cause one, "if he had a heart," to become enamored with the "Old World," the "bygone culture which is unique in America." The old city, however, had almost become extinct by the time Saxon was a young man. This greatly alarmed him for he knew that the influencing power of the French Quarter was directly proportional to its antiquity. If the French Quarter disappeared, that "which is unique in America" would also vanish. Saxon thus sought to restore the Golden Age by preserving and restoring the Vieux Carre to its former greatness.

9Ibid., 270.
Mrs. Durieux spoke of Saxon's restoration efforts. She said that the Vieux Carre was about to be destroyed before Saxon became interested in preserving it. Saxon and about five other Orleanians, she said, were singularly responsible for saving the area from ruin. Robert Tallant, like Mrs. Durieux, also noted Saxon's concern for restoring the Vieux Carre. He commented about this in the foreword of the 1950 edition of Fabulous New Orleans.

When, in his early twenties, Lyle Saxon strode through the Vieux Carre's narrow streets and saw the frightful and chaotic state of decay into which the neighborhood had fallen, he knew what it was he wanted to do. He was a young man in love. His friends tried to dissuade him, but he rented, as he later said, 'a sixteen-room house for sixteen dollars a month,' in Royal Street....

Through the years Saxon fought incessantly for what he wanted New Orleans to become.... When the French Opera burned in 1919 he began a long struggle to have it rebuilt. In this he never succeeded, but he never ceased to dream that New Orleans might again become the musical center of the nation it had been a century before. At the time of the fire he wrote in his newspaper account, 'The heart of the old French Quarter has stopped beating.' When Saxon died another reporter, in another paper, commented, 'The heart of New Orleans stopped beating last night.'

Not long ago a friend and I were discussing the current vogue for books about New Orleans, and we decided, inevitably, that although much had been written about the city before Saxon was even born, it was Saxon who was in one way or another responsible for the literary interest in New Orleans so prevalent for the past twenty years....
From the time this book first appeared many visitors to the city thought of Lyle Saxon when they thought of New Orleans... Yet perhaps not even he realized how closely he was identified with the city he loved, and perhaps only a fraction of the horde of visitors who sought him out through the years actually knew how much he had contributed to the city, not only by publicizing New Orleans in his books, but also by working and fighting for the preservation, even for the restoration, of that which he thought most vital to its individuality and charm.10

Saxon sought in his writings to awaken the residents of New Orleans and of the nation to a past which to him was superior to his present. In destroying the buildings of the Vieux Carre, Orleanians were marching to the step of crass materialism. The preference for money rather than culture, he seemed to feel, resulted when Americans replaced the Creoles as leaders of New Orleans. The Creoles had managed to have money and culture, but the Americans only sought money.

Saxon hoped that enough of the atmosphere of the old section remained to transform the Yankee concerned only with money.

"There is a certain leisureliness," he wrote, "a certain willingness to amuse one's self by the way, which is, to me, very delightful. I have heard Northern businessmen complain bitterly about these little interruptions for coffee or what-not," but it "is strange how

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10Ibid., xii, xiv-xv.
soon they adapt themselves to the habits of the city. In time they seem to grow to like it. "11

Saxon also hoped to restore the Golden Age through his writings. His love for the past and for New Orleans influenced all of his writings. His interest in the twentieth century was limited to how much he could make it like the first half of the nineteenth. "I wish it were in my power as a writer," he pleaded, "to make the reader realize the importance of the things which I have touched upon so briefly here. If I could make him see that they were important, he would see, automatically, that they were interesting in themselves." Saxon realized that his task would be difficult, for Americans had become corrupted, he reasoned, by the materialism of the Yankee. He had faith, however, that his goal could be achieved: "There is something so excessively American in this determination to get ahead," he lamented, "and to continue in the face of all odds."12

Saxon hoped through the Project publications to accomplish more than he could in his personal publications. The guides enabled him to describe the past glory of Louisiana, and take his readers, step-by-step, to every remaining vestige of greatness.

11Ibid., 262.

12Ibid., 259.
As suggested in the reviews of the New Orleans City Guide, reviewers seemed to be as impressed with New Orleans as they were with the guide. Several suggested, not that the readers would wish to read the guide several times, but that they would wish to return to New Orleans. Reviewers also concluded that New Orleans was unlike any other American city, as well as that the guide was unlike any other guide.

In Gumbo Ya-Ya, as noted earlier, the discussion of the Creoles, quadroons, and plantations owners was out of the chronological context of the book as part of the living folklore of the 1930's, but not outside the interest of Saxon. He seemed to find every incident he could to convey one message--that New Orleans was unlike any other American city. The publications of the Writers' Project thus became the ideal media through which Saxon presented his message of the Golden Age. It is really not surprising that the Central Office and national reviewers were greatly impressed with these publications, perhaps more so than those produced by directors of other states. These states did not have the zealot Louisiana had.

Just as the past Saxon described was forever gone, so was the leisureliness he hoped to restore. The Writers' Project was replaced by World War II. The sound of machine guns drowned
out the clatter of the writers' typewriters. The war ushered in a
celerity greater than ever before. The war transformed various
areas of Louisiana into large industrialized cities. In this rapid
transformation, Saxon seemed to falter. His last few years were
but shadows of their former greatness. Unemployed, ill, and facing
death, Saxon seemed to hurry into the past more rapidly than ever
before. Even his writings slackened, but he tried to leave a legacy
of building future writers to continue his message. Not surprisingly,
his greatest disciple of the Golden Age was Robert Tallant. As noted
earlier, Tallant's writings closely paralleled the topics about which
Saxon wrote. Tallant spoke of Saxon's contributions to New Orleans
and to young writers in his introduction to Saxon's *Fabulous New
Orleans*:

Never rich, he gave away nearly everything
he earned throughout his life. No one knows how
many young writers he helped--with advice, with
encouragement, with money....

For Saxon was always more interested in
living than in writing. He loved to talk and he was
perhaps one of the most brilliant reconteurs of
his time. If he had not chosen to spend nearly
all of his life in New Orleans and had lived it in
larger places there is no doubt at all but that
this would be more widely recognized. It is
unfortunately true that some of the best of his
stories never reached paper. He talked them.
When he was sometimes asked why he didn't write
a certain book of which he talked, his reply was
often, 'You write it,' Frequently this was done, and no one knows how many visiting authors left his company with an entire book whirling in their heads. Now and then he later read one of his own stories in print, signed by some writer who had visited him. He would laugh and say nothing worse than that they had not put it down quite right...

In another of the conversations his friends often had about him after he was gone, I asked why those of us who knew him well thought Saxon so important, more important than his writings. 'It was because he created people,' was one reply. 'No one knows how many people he did create.'

The dual themes of romanticism and realism guiding his actions were also apparent in his concern for the Negro in Louisiana. Although slavery existed during the time of Saxon's Golden Age, he liked the period despite, rather than because of, the existence of slavery. Saxon resented the racial views of the South separating blacks and whites. He occasionally rose above such social restrictions by having blacks into his St. Charles Hotel room for drinks. He frequently told the Dillard Project workers that he was sorry he could not invite them more often to his room, and that he looked forward to the day when segregation ended. Some of the things former Dillard workers remember most about Saxon were his

\[\text{13}^{13}\text{Ibid., xiv-xvi.}\]
Saxon was aware that caricature of the Negro existed in print. In Gumbo Ya-Ya he dealt with the alleged perennial good humor of the Negro:

14Interview with Octave Lilly, January 29, 1974; interview with anonymous writer, January 22, 1974. One former Dillard Project writer related an interesting incident involving Saxon. On this particular occasion, Saxon had invited his black friend to his St. Charles Hotel room for a few drinks. Present at the little festivity was another white. The three men finished their drinks and prepared to resume their activities in various parts of the city. The black said that he customarily exited the hotel out of the servants' entrance. To the horror of Saxon's white friend, and of the hotel patrons, Saxon insisted that his black friend go with him out of the front door of the hotel. A tense situation arose, and Saxon and his party feared for their safety. Saxon quickly regained his composure, feigned inebriation, and placed his arm around his black companion. This quickly calmed the concerned whites, who frequently saw Saxon come in after a night on the town leaning upon his black valet for support. Saxon and the black laughed about the incident, one of many Saxon shared with his black friends.

Saxon also enjoyed the difficulties his black valet, Joe Gilmore (and after whom Saxon named his semi-autobiographical book) had with white women. According to the Dillard writer mentioned above, Gilmore became very irritated with the treatment some haughty white ladies administered him. Saxon would tell Gilmore that he ought to write a book about his difficulties with white women. Gilmore replied that no publisher would print what he thought about these ladies.

Octave Lilly recalled the social courtesies Saxon paid him after Lilly left the Project. Lilly, who lived in New Iberia before moving to New Orleans, said that Saxon who frequently traveled to New Iberia to visit his friend Weeks Hall at the Shadows, never failed to call Lilly's mother to inquire about Lilly.
The Negro's continual good humor is a legend. Sometimes the grin is only a mask for the benefit of the 'white folks.' There is little truth in the widespread theory that 'niggers are the happiest people on earth,' Usually, of course, he has his own peculiar philosophy, probably the retionalization 'Times is tough--make the best of them,' and 'times' is always tough for the Negro of a low economic level. But often, too, a secret and shrewd cynicism exists...\(^\text{15}\)

Saxon also wrote of this subject in his novel, *Children of Strangers*. The main character of the story was a mulatto girl, Famie. Her great-great-grandfather had been a prosperous mulatto plantation owner and had left Famie an inheritance of land. Famie was defeated with the passage of time, and lost all self-respect and personal happiness. She had to sell her land, marry a Negro, and give up her son who looked white but was ashamed of his mother's slight color. This is the Famie that Harry and Flossie Smith, two minor white characters in the story, saw riding on a mule with her new Negro husband, Henry Tyler. Flossie said:

'Oh, Harry, just look at the couple on that old white mule! Aren't they wonderful? I must take their picture....

'Oh, come on, Flossie, it's just some niggers on their way home from church.'

But Flossie was signaling Henry Tyler to stop: 'Oh, please wait. I want to take your picture. Yes, turn the mule around a little and ask your wife to look at me...What's the matter, is she shy?'

\(^\text{15}\)Louisiana Writers' Program, *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, 481.
Lift up your head, I can't see your face for that sunbonnet... Well, never mind, you'll look coy with your head down. Maybe it will be better that way, more natural. Now, boy, you smile. Don't look so solemn. Harry, give him a dime, won't you? There, I've got it. But I never did see the woman's face."

'Come on, Flossie, put the camera away and let's go in.'

'Well, of course I'm going in. You didn't think I was going to stay out here in the road all day. They were so typical. You know, Harry, I always say that niggers are the happiest people. Not a care in the world.' [The last sentence of the book.] 16

This type of realism, then, Saxon was capable of understanding and expressing. In the story about Famie, however, he also developed the theme that the past was golden and that the passage of time destroyed Famie. _Children of Strangers_ was the only novel Saxon wrote and the only work not devoted to the Crescent City.

Saxon's love of New Orleans and of the Golden Age was a source of strength and weakness in his writings and in his position as Director of the Louisiana Writers' Projects. He had a cause, a passion to convey to the public. Perhaps this interest explains in

part why the major publications of the Louisiana Writers' Project were so capably produced. These were not mere assignments to be written and forgotten. They were publications through which Saxon might convey his message to the world. This interest might also explain why publications that were supposed to discuss the state-at-large dealt primarily with New Orleans. Lyle Saxon was unable to divorce his private from his public interests, the rest of the state suffered from neglect, and the taxpayers of these areas had little to show either in employment of writers or in publications about their regions. 17

Saxon's view of the past also adversely affected the guides. The New Orleans and the Louisiana of which Saxon wrote was not of the twentieth century, but of the nineteenth. He sought to describe Louisiana as he imagined it used to be, rather than as it was. In a sense, then, he perhaps unintentionally played a great hoax on the reader. The reader was asked to tour a past that no longer existed,

17Saxon's steering of project topics to pre-twentieth century Louisiana enabled him to avoid becoming embroiled in the political controversies that proved to be the undoing of some cultural directors. Saxon was not bothered by political censorship then, but his interest in the past resulted in a form of censorship. He effectively precluded consideration of his own time, and of topics not bearing directly and indirectly with New Orleans. The Louisiana Writers' Project, thus, was not handicapped with political censorship, but it was restricted by the interests of its director.
and perhaps never did in such regality except through the active imagination of Lyle Saxon.
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VITA

The author, Ronnie W. Clayton, was born January 16, 1942, in Alexandria, Louisiana, and attended the public schools of this city. He received his B.A. degree in 1964 from Louisiana College and his M.A. degree in 1968 from Northwestern State University. He then briefly taught at Louisiana College and also served as Acting Dean of Students. He served as Dean of Students and taught for one year at Brewton-Parker College.

He is married to the former Sharon Ann Williams of Pineville, Louisiana.