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Terrebonne Farms, Louisiana: an Anthropogeographic Study of a New Deal Resettlement.

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UMI
TERREBONNE FARMS, LOUISIANA:
AN ANTHROPOGEOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A
NEW DEAL RESETTLEMENT

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 Geography and Anthropology

by

Lisa Kay Adam
B.A., University of Texas, 1986
B.S. in Education, University of Texas, 1988
December 2000

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“acknowledging one’s obligations and implicating one’s friends,” I have much sincere
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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ............................................................................................. ii

List of Figures .................................................................................................... iv

Abstract ............................................................................................................ vi

Chapter 1 Introduction ...................................................................................... 1

Chapter 2 Washington ...................................................................................... 12

Chapter 3 Louisiana .......................................................................................... 37

Chapter 4 Plan ................................................................................................... 47

Chapter 5 Place .................................................................................................. 77

Chapter 6 Cooperation ....................................................................................... 115

Chapter 7 Community ....................................................................................... 141

Chapter 8 Home ............................................................................................... 172

Chapter 9 Farm ................................................................................................. 204

Chapter 10 Closure ........................................................................................... 247

Chapter 11 Conclusion ...................................................................................... 265

Bibliography ...................................................................................................... 273

Appendix A Corporate Charter ......................................................................... 280

Appendix B Member List .................................................................................... 286

Appendix C Home Management Plan .............................................................. 287

Vita ....................................................................................................................... 291
## List of Figures

1. FSA posters .................................................................................................. 3
2. Area map...................................................................................................... 5
3. Washington and Louisiana ......................................................................... 8
4. FSA Region 6 resettlements ...................................................................... 11
5. “Sugar Cane,” Thomas Hart Benton ....................................................... 18
6. Resettlements nationwide ........................................................................ 28
7. Louisiana Sugar Bowl ................................................................................ 38
8. Plantation quarters .................................................................................... 51
9. Organization of FSA cooperative farms .................................................... 66
10. Project map ............................................................................................... 83
11. Aerial photo of TAI ................................................................................ 85
12. Floor plans ............................................................................................... 92
13. House types ............................................................................................. 93
14. An M-2 house .......................................................................................... 95
15. Six-acres ................................................................................................. 100
16. Project road .............................................................................................. 107
17. St. George plantation home ....................................................................... 108
18. Community meeting ............................................................................... 118
19. Blacks on the project .............................................................................. 148
20. Baseball game ......................................................................................... 166
21. Pantry shelves .......................................................................................... 184
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Pressure cooker</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>The Joseph Roddy family</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Pre-natal clinic</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Planting diagram</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Gang labor and mules</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Curb market</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Tractors</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Foreman</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

This dissertation examines Terrebonne Farms, a 1940's community in south Louisiana established by the federal government during the New Deal period. Planned by the Resettlement Administration and overseen by the Farm Security Administration, the community was one of approximately one hundred experimental towns or resettlements located around the nation. Although these resettlements varied widely in their organization, appearance, and history, few writers have chosen to focus on individual communities. This study combines recollections of original residents and local accounts of Terrebonne Farms with its government records and photographs to create a detailed and contextual description of a single resettlement. In particular, it considers the interplay of government planning with local customs and conditions, and it relates the community to larger social movements such as regionalism and pragmatism.
Chapter 1 Introduction

Schriever, Louisiana, is a pleasant but unremarkable small town. Though located in the rich bayou lands of the state and in the heart of sugarcane country, it has neither the grandeur of columned plantation homes nor the quaintness of a narrow-laned village. A post office marks it from the sprawl of the neighboring college town. South and west of its center is yet another neighborhood, known to a few as “back of Schriever,” with long streets of ordinary frame or brick homes. Yet two of the street names, “Main Project Road” and “Back Project Road,” are testament that this flat and prosaic landscape was once part of something quite remarkable. It was part of a New Deal community building program, and — with varying opinions — a reordering, a fulfillment, or perhaps a failure of the American dream.

Officially named “Terrebonne Farms,” officially labeled “RR LA-12,” but locally dubbed “the projects,” this place was one of approximately one hundred planned communities, or resettlements, initiated nationwide by the federal government between 1933 and 1937. Aiming at more than mere drawing board developments, the government built homes, roads, and community buildings, and they created jobs, encouraged community activities, and established social services at the projects. The Schriever resettlement provided work and homes for the region’s low income families, but the government also described it as an experiment, one of only a handful of projects organized as an incorporated, cooperative farm.

At Terrebonne and elsewhere, the Resettlement Administration (RA) and its successor the Farm Security Administration (FSA), the chief agencies involved, attempted both economic relief and reform, a mixture common to New Deal programs.
Although many of the communities began as antidotes to unemployment and poor housing, government planners also found them testing grounds for new ideas in areas such as architecture, land tenure, or adult education. Taken together, these places were an unprecedented effort to shape American homes, work, lands, and living space. Seen individually, as with this study of Terrebonne Farms, a resettlement was a complicated place created from the stamp of abstract government planning on real landscapes and local traditions and people.

Henry David Thoreau once wrote that he required, “of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life . . . some such account as he would send to his kindred from a distant land.”¹ I offer an abridged version: only the chapter where the Terrebonne project became my own. I first read about the New Deal resettlements while working as curator in a small history museum. A few years later, as a graduate student in a joint department of Anthropology and Geography, I realized that here was a topic which involved both areas of my study. By their very nature, the community building programs addressed both people and place: adult education, social services, health services, for instance, and agriculture, housing, and roads were part and parcel of any one resettlement. Furthermore, government planners gave conscious attention to both elements, and — even more forward thinking — they saw the connections between the two. The RA’s first director, Rexford G. Tugwell, wrote that “the very heart of the resettlement conception was the simultaneous attack on the wastage of people and the inefficient use of resources, each of which was so much the cause of the other.”² At a homelier level, an FSA slogan (Figure 1) expressed the same concept: “A Made-Over Man Makes Over the Land.” Although not directly stated at
the time, the resettlement programs shared concerns of both anthropology and
geography; in short, (or perhaps long) they were “anthropogeographic.” The Greek
roots of this word — *anthropo*, or human, and *geo*, earth or land — even parallel the
FSA slogan.

Like Thoreau's writer who sends an account from a distant land, the
anthropologist as imagined by Miles Richardson, my major professor, is also a traveler.
“Ethnography,” (the written description of people and cultures), he has said, “is a
journey.” In a literal sense my own research of Terrebonne Farms sent me on journeys
to places I might never have visited otherwise. Two very unlike places, the lower
reaches of Bayou Lafourche and the outskirts of Washington, D. C. seemed to share
only their connection with the projects, and a kindness of spirit in the people who
helped me.

The simplest way to travel from the Baton Rouge university campus to Schriever
is to cross the Mississippi and follow Highway 1 south, as shown in Figure 2. On its
upper portion the road skirts the river. Near Donaldsonville, it jags at a bayou fork —
La Fourche, in French — to go further south, further into cane country, and further into
Acadiana. A dimestore map will belie the real nature of Bayou Lafourche, showing
discrete dots for towns like Napoleonville and Labadieville. In fact, buildings sit cheek
to jowl much of its length, both on Highway 1 and its twin road, 308, a shout away on
the opposite bank. Some Louisianaans have called it “the longest village street.”
An atlas will show the reason for this lengthwise expansion: the tiny blue sprigs indicating
the swampy lowlands only a few miles on either side of the line of settlement. Although
Figure 2 — Area map, all roads lead to Schriever
Source: National Archives; Box 279; RCA 35-43; RG 96
the area has been inhabited for centuries, the human presence still seems small: on an
evening drive, no deeper than the long line of front porch lights.

Schriever itself is actually one more turn south, following Bayou Terrebonne as it branches from the Lafourche near Thibodaux. There are no commemorative plaques for the resettlement experiment of sixty years ago. Only the “Main Project Road” suggested its location when I first searched for the community. Even though I interrupted their game, bingo players at the Schriever senior citizen’s center graciously filled in the gaps that first trip: confirming the project’s location, and passing on names and recollections. With that start, I located and interviewed some of the remaining original settlers, visited their government-built homes (now much changed), and traced the outlines of the project underneath the present town.

For better or worse, my talks with former project members were anything but formal interviews or oral history. At a kitchen table or in the living room, they told me about the project with the patience of schoolteachers with their slow student: someone not even sure how to pronounce their names and clearly clueless about such things as sugarcane and mineral rights and making a living when times were bad. Often a spouse or son or daughter chimed in. Families were extremely gracious: some gave me good, black coffee; some gave me cookies; and some called me “cher.” On the other hand, most seemed slightly hesitant to talk too much. Partly this must be the natural reticence most of us would feel about inviting a stranger into our homes and telling her about our lives. But another part stems from their memories of the project and the controversy it generated. Former members, naturally, are aware that their lives are part of “history.”

And in fact, several shared copies of contemporary newspaper or journal articles about
the project which they had collected. Others showed me more substantial mementoes: a
dresser won in a project contest, or old house numbers now displayed on a living room
wall. Controversy or no, former members take pride in their project years: in building
their homes, in transforming weed-choked land into productive fields, and in toughing
out the hard times.

The other location of my research could not have been more different. In
Washington, D. C., the human imprint is written large, on large buildings, and the giant
ideas inscribed over their stone portals. Largest of all, perhaps, is the collective record
of our nation’s activity. The National Archives finally burst it seams in the 1980’s,
leading to the creation of National Archives II in Maryland (Figure 3). No sight for
those perpetually irritated by government bureaucracy and paperwork, the giant
repository is an impressive and exciting place for the researcher. Modern, six stories of
plate glass and steel, the archives boasts 520 miles of shelves in what it calls an
“electric, high-density mobile storage system.” Nonetheless, the records I looked at
had the musty, moldy smell of boxes rarely opened.

I found most of my material in papers of the Farmers Home Administration,
which in 1946 inherited the records, and some of the programs, of the by-then defunct
resettlement agencies. The records are not complete (the government had deemed that
many were of “insufficient intrinsic value” to be kept), sometimes haphazardly
arranged, and only scantly inventoried in 1959. On the other hand, I could also see the
trail marks of others before me, researchers such as Paul Conkin and Donald Holley
(mentioned in later chapters), occasionally recognizing pieces of information they used
in their own writing.
Figure 3 — Washington and Louisiana
Source: National Archives, Eric Taylor; Lisa Adam
While I cannot claim that I found fabulous and formerly unknown mines of information, I hope that I have used my finds in a new way. This is the first longer-length study of Terrebonne Farms, though two authors, Louis Rodriguez and Donald Holley, have written short articles about the project. Likewise, although the resettlements varied widely in their organization and appearance and history, few writers have chosen to focus on individual communities. Three important exceptions are: Main Street Ready-Made by Arnold Alanen and Joseph Eden, Greenbelt: The Cooperative Community by George A. Warner, and Government Project by Edward C. Banfield. In contrast to these works, most studies of resettlements have examined the programs from a regional or national standpoint. Although such works provide very important overall perspective, they often have a bird's eye view of individual projects. From a mere point on an otherwise empty map (Figure 4), I hope this work enlarges the picture of Terrebonne Farms to that of a lived-in place, filled with ruts, roads, weeds, fruit, false-starts, labors and failures, complaints and songs alike. As a much-admired anthropogeographer, Yi-Fu Tuan, has suggested, I have tried to "stand only a little above" and "move only a little below the surfaces of reality in the hope of not losing sight of such surfaces, where nearly all humans joys and sorrows unfold."7

From the government records in D. C. and Maryland, interviews in Schriever, books and historical newspapers in Baton Rouge, I created the graduate student's familiar bushel of loose papers, distilled to boxes of three-by-five index cards, and finally reconstituted to outlines, and the following four pairs of chapters. "Washington" and "Louisiana" give the stage setting for the Schriever project from two different vantage points: the broader history of the federal resettlement programs, and local
conditions during the Great Depression. "Plan" and "Place" examine the creation of the project: on paper, and in barb wire, nails, and cypress staves. "Cooperation" and "Community," two FSA catchwords, discuss human relations on the project: the governing of the cooperative, and the community's social life. "Home" and "Farm" look at the two areas of work recognized, and independently supervised, by the government: the day-to-day activities of women and men, respectively, on the project. Lastly, "Closure" and "Conclusion" finish the story of the Terrebonne project and relate it once again to some of the broader themes of the time period. In the words of Charles Jellison, a more accomplished chronicler of the 1930's, "The following chapters are as true as I could make them."8

Notes


3 Miles Richardson, Introduction to Ethnography, Baton Rouge, January 18, 1994.


5 "Archives II." Brochure from the National Archives at College Park, Maryland.


8 Charles Jellison, Tomatoes were Cheaper: Tales from the Thirties (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1977), p. viii.
Figure 4 — FSA Region 6 resettlements
Source: Holley, 1975, p. 110

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Chapter 2 Washington

In a 1932 speech in Atlanta, Georgia, presidential candidate Franklin Roosevelt exhorted, "The country demands bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something." Reeling from the Depression, Americans seemed ready to try a great many remedies, and they looked to Washington to provide them.

Today, the community building programs are some of the least-remembered among the many "alphabet agencies" of the New Deal. The Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC), the Works Projects Administration (WPA), the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), or Rural Electrification Administration (REA), for starters, are sure to jog memories in those who lived through the era, and just as likely to draw reminiscent praise or angry criticism. At the time, however, the Resettlement Administration, the Farm Security Administration, and an earlier community program in the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, all gained (or perhaps suffered) wide public recognition. For one reason, as two of their names suggest, the creation of resettlements was only one type of activity in organizations with broader programs. A farm family might receive a government loan, a woman might take a job in a mattress factory, or a child might attend a nursery school — all through programs sponsored by these agencies — and never set foot on a resettlement.

But another reason for the name recognition these organizations received was their role as New Deal lightning rods. The resettlement programs represented the best or the worst of the New Deal, depending on who you talked to. Historian Sidney Baldwin described the Farm Security Administration as "many things to many people."

To some of its foes, it was a dangerous radical, an un-American experiment in governmental intervention, paternalism, socialism, or communism...
plaything created for the diversion of utopian dreamers; an organized
conspiracy to undermine the status quo in rural America; or an
anachronistic effort to turn the clock of agricultural progress backward
to the age of the mule and the hand plow. To friends . . . it was an heroic
institution designed to secure social justice and political power for a
neglected class of Americans; a pioneering effort to strike at the causes
of chronic rural poverty; a unique and largely successful experiment
in creative government; an agency embodying the social conscience
of the New Deal; or a model effort in agrarian reform which was destined
to serve as a seedbed for future wars on the poverty.²

Resettlement activities drew the public’s attention because they seemed to
collect and embody many of the nation’s hopes, ideals, questions, and ideas. During
the economic and political crisis of the Depression, Americans of all types wondered,
“Where are we going?” and “How should we live?” Resettlements served as a kind of
visible government road sign that the nation could examine. Of course, there were other
public works expressive of the era, but in their houses, fences, and flower beds the
resettlements were intimate and comprehensible on a scale that a public building,
mountain monument, or giant dam was not.

One indication that resettlement tapped into some deeper and vaster current of
thought was that the same idea occurred in so many places, at the same time, both inside
and outside of government. Since the Civil War, the overwhelming population trend
had been migration from countryside to city, especially as people sought jobs in
industry.³ The Depression, like a great earthquake, halted that flow and even reversed
it, temporarily. In 1933 the Annals of the Association of American Geographers noted
that for the first time more people — some 500,000 that year — were moving from
cities to small towns and rural areas. The article’s author, O. E. Baker, also noted,
somewhat humorously:
many farmers are already moving from the hills down to the highways, while more city people are moving out along these highways and building homes and chicken houses, as well as bizarre eating places and highly illuminated gasoline stations. A few manufacturers are moving their factories from the cities to the small towns and villages. Resettlement of the land has started.

Baker believed that new villages — “thousands of them scattered along the highways” — were the net needed to catch this moving population and provide them with food, jobs, security for young and old, and a wholesome social life.\(^4\)

Countless others shared Baker’s vision. During the 1930’s many private individuals and organizations created new communities as a way to alleviate unemployment, poverty, and outright hunger. Paul Conkin’s path-breaking history of the New Deal resettlements, *Tomorrow a New World*, provides the best overview of these many initiatives, but a few bear repeating. In Michigan, for instance, 300 city families moved onto 10,000 acres to form the Sunrise Co-operative Farm Community. The Salvation Army, which at the turn of the century established three rural colonies for the urban poor, had detailed plans to resettle still thousands more, though their funding fell short.\(^5\) The Delta Co-operative Farm for needy sharecroppers in Mississippi formed under the guiding hands of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and religious leaders such as Sherwood Eddy and Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr.\(^6\) And of course, tens of thousands also made the “march back home” on their own, back to sharecropping, back to family farms, even back to the backlot garden if it could put food on the table.\(^7\)

The lure of the land was so great during those uncertain days that even industrialist Henry Ford ran a series of ads acclaiming “The Land! That is where our roots are.”\(^8\) All of this back-to-the-land, it was part pragmatism, and part something else,
too, more idealistic. After all, if it was really that easy to live off the land, so many
people wouldn't have left in the first place, and so many wouldn't be living in rural
poverty and tenancy, or fighting sand blow-outs in the Dust Bowl, or washed-out
hillsides in Appalachia. The return to land, and the resettlements, too, — in all their
practicality and their vision — were part of a larger American trend called regionalism.

Well, what was this trend? You might say simply, a study of geographic regions
— the Cotton Belt or New England or the Tennessee Valley — but that would be too
narrow. Regionalism is hard to define, even decades after its heyday in the 1930's. It
was trend, and feeling, and theory. It was a catchword among “artists, folklorists, social
scientists, planners, architects, and engineers,” but it was perhaps felt just as deeply,
without name, at local coffee shops. At its heart lay the attachment to and interest in
real places and what made them unique, or home, or impoverished or fruitful, “what
made them tick” in modern parlance.

Many regionalists expressed a deep interest in rural landscapes and problems,
but not all were future farmers. In fact, what unified them most was a concern with
cities, and their after-effects. Regionalists saw the modern forces of urbanization and
industrialization as jack-hammers which were breaking up the old America, uprooting
people from their places of origin, pulverizing traditional ways of life and replacing
them with a uniform but sterile mass culture. The power of these two forces, they
believed, created deep imbalances between city and countryside, and between different
parts of the nation. If regionalists shared a common longing or goal, it was perhaps a
sense of wholeness or balance to life, a quality they believed existed in pre-industrial
cities, or rural villages, or tightly-knit ethnic communities, but was disappearing in
modern America. This they could agree on, but regionalists varied in their responses to
the problem.

The influential Regional Planning Association of America, for instance, saw
decentralized industry, suburbs, and small "garden towns" with plenty of parks and
green space as practical methods for balancing town and country. Mostly architects and
planners, they were hardly anti-urban (as we might guess about a group centered in New
York City), but they were harsh critics of urbanization. Writer and planner Lewis
Mumford, one of the RPAA's most prominent members, characterized modern life as
"nomadry, expansion, and standardization," one of his milder charges. Southern
regionalists, on the other hand, focused more exclusively on the rural side of the
equation. At Chapel Hill, North Carolina, regionalists led by sociologist Howard
Odum decried Southern rural poverty and the dependence of the South on the
"megalopolitan culture" of the north.

Both the RPAA and Chapel Hill (and numerous other) groups proposed concrete
measures to tackle regional problems. As Chapel Hill sociologist Rupert Vance wrote,
"The map may cradle man and mold him but man is also shown re-making the map." Several members of the RPAA, for example, built model garden communities and later contributed to the Resettlement Administration's suburban towns. Howard Odum recommended economic strategies such as improved farm credit and crop diversification which were also taken up by resettlement agencies. In putting ideas to work, regionalists were participating in the even broader and older American tradition of pragmatism, which demanded practical results out of research and inquiry. Proponents such as educator John Dewey believed that learning and achievement came
from trying, from experimenting — not unlike FDR’s common sense prescription to “take a method and try it.”

Other groups and individuals, however, served more as regionalist voices than activists. One famous group of spokesmen were the Southern Agrarians, associated with Vanderbilt University and including writers such as Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom. The Agrarians staunchly defended rural lifeways in their declaration I’ll Take My Stand.15 There were regionalist artists, too, like Thomas Hart Benton, famed for his stylized rural views of the South and West. Benton painted “Sugar Cane,” Figure 5, from a Louisiana scene.

Ordinary people, also, applauded regionalist sentiments in popular music, movies, and books. Consider the agrarian themes, for instance, of four of the five best-selling books of the 1930’s: The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck, God’s Little Acre by Erskine Caldwell, The Good Earth by Pearl Buck, and Gone with the Wind by Margaret Mitchell.16 Interestingly, Louisiana had its own version of the latter. In the 1936 novel Stubborn Roots by Elma Godchaux, hero Anton Schexsnaydre battles both the Mississippi River and his citified wife to hold onto his cherished sugarcane plantation. “He felt identified with the place . . . .” Godchaux wrote:

He felt roots like strong fingers holding on. His roots clung here.
He shunned thoughts of futility. He imagined if he held strongly
and stubbornly he could merge with the place. He would feel nothing
but earth upholding and feeding his cane.17

Schexsnaydre’s love of place, of Donne plantation, perfectly echoed regionalist feeling.

The resettlement programs and regionalism converged in a number of ways. In the broadest sense, regionalism was an unspoken but shared sentiment among many of
Figure 5 — “Sugar Cane,” Thomas Hart Benton, 1943
Source: Illustration in Thomas Hart Benton and the American South
the resettlement participants, ordinary citizens and New Dealers alike: at one end of the spectrum, the migrant worker, longing for a home or farm of her own, or the city dweller, scrimping and saving to buy his little green acre; at the other end, patrician New Yorker FDR, who "always did, and always would, think people better off in the country and would regard the cities as rather hopeless," according to RA Director Rexford Tugwell.18

Regionalism also intersected with the resettlement programs in more specific, even personal, ways. Many members of the RPAA, for instance, joined New Deal staffs, including that of the Resettlement Administration. In turn, Rexford Tugwell, greatly admired Howard Odum and the Chapel Hill regionalist branch.19 As Tugwell's successor, William Alexander, said of New Deal Washington, "there was yeast in the place."20 Regionalists were right in the intellectual mix.

New Deal agencies also snapped up the concept of geographic regions as a way to study and remedy the nation's ills, part by part. Map-makers had a field day: by 1936, various government agencies used over one hundred different plans for parceling up the nation, its people, its resources, and its problems into regional divisions.21 Roosevelt saw one of the first of these maps in 1934, presented by the National Resources Board (which also conducted research for early resettlement plans). The map marked South Louisiana, incidentally, as a "reclamation needed" area.22 Like numerous other agencies, the RA and FSA created regional units and regional offices to administer their programs. Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi comprised Region 6. As William Alexander explained:

We divided the country into twelve regions. We had to treat them all differently. The dust bowl fellow is one person, the sharecropper in
Georgia is another. The starved-out farmer in New England is one problem, and the chicken grower in California is another.\textsuperscript{23}

Alexander also admitted that the divisions, cutting across state lines, helped the resettlement programs sidestep some (but not all) political pressure from state leaders. More importantly, however, the divisions grouped together areas and people who shared common lifeways and common problems.\textsuperscript{24}

The view from Washington was necessarily a somewhat distant one, as planners looked at maps, at regions, at the "big picture" of the nation's problems, particularly those involving natural resources. Here, a drought area; here, depleted soils; just there, played out coal mines, and there — "reclamation needed." By conceiving of economic problems as regional problems, the government attempted to provide solutions to the underlying causes of poverty as well as provide financial relief. Like regionalists, they looked at the "interconnected wholes"\textsuperscript{25} of people and resources for every area.

Such was the case with the first community building agency, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Established in the first urgent months of 1933, FERA began immediately distributing direct relief funds and employing workers on local, state, and federal construction projects. Its director, Harry Hopkins, reportedly disbursed five million dollars during his first two hours in office.\textsuperscript{26} Our interest in FERA, however, lies in one of its four divisions, the Division of Rural Rehabilitation, which engaged in more long-term solutions.

In 1934 Rural Rehabilitation began purchasing poor quality agricultural land in order to "retire" it and thus reduce surplus agricultural commodities, or to convert it to more appropriate, non-agricultural uses.\textsuperscript{27} To assist and relocate the people affected by
these measures, and to help other people on state relief roles, FERA began creating small communities for the resettled families. The government built homes and planned an economic base for each settlement, of which there were a number of types. Of twenty-eight FERA communities, twenty were planned simply as new farm towns located on better land. Of these, FERA designated ten in the Great Plains area as “farm villages,” which they were often compared to European villages with their tight cluster of farm homes, surrounded by the outlying agricultural fields.

FERA also established two of what it called “farm and industrial” settlements in Florida and Georgia. On one to ten acre plots, families raised specialty farm products: scuppernong grapes, gourds, and poultry, for instance. The industrial component was the on-site processing of the farm products and small handicrafts. The remainder of FERA communities had a mixed economy; families would work in nearby, decentralized factories and raise their own food on small farm plots. To oversee its communities, and to handle loans and assistance to individual farmers, FERA created rural rehabilitation corporations for each state.²⁸ The Louisiana Rural Rehabilitation Administration would play a part at the Terrebonne site, as we will see.

Perhaps it was the left hand not knowing what the right hand was doing, but another government agency began building new communities almost at the same time FERA began its resettlements. Like FERA, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, part of the Department of the Interior, received funding under emergency legislation, in this case the National Industrial Recovery Act. Although the word “subsistence” might suggests a sort of meager existence for the homesteaders, in reality it meant that families would grow much of their own food, usually combining this work with some other type
of employment, full or part time. (Again, similar to some of the FERA projects.) The government actually classified the majority of the thirty-four subsistence homestead communities as "industrial." Most were located within commuting distance of a factory or town, and in fact some were developed with pledges of part-time employment from a specific nearby industry.29 Thus, in subsistence homesteads, or FERA's "farm and industrial" settlements, the government attempted to create a new type of community which balanced city and countryside, a combination that so many regional planners considered ideal.

The duplicated efforts between FERA and Subsistence Homesteads eventually became apparent, and in April of 1935 Franklin Roosevelt created the Resettlement Administration by executive order. He transferred the land and community programs of FERA, the entire Subsistence Homesteads program, and a land planning division of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration to the new agency.30 The AAA also unwittingly contributed many idealistic staff members to the RA. In attempts to reduce farm production and boost prices, the AAA had introduced crop quotas and acreage reduction contracts for farmers in 1934. But as big farmers reduced their acreage, many also let go their tenant families, and thousands became homeless and jobless, mostly in the South. Likewise, many of the remaining tenants and share croppers did not receive any of the monetary benefits which the government paid to owners for acreage reduction or soil conservation practices. When a number of AAA employees tried to protest this trend, they were fired: later, the incident became known as the "purge of '35." Many of these employees joined the RA, which was more concerned with adjustments between people and land, than between land and prices.31
Roosevelt appointed another idealist to head the new organization. Rexford Tugwell had been a member of FDR’s legendary “Brain Trust” of pre-election advisors, and he later served as Undersecretary of Agriculture. Tugwell was a complicated and controversial figure. He was somewhat introverted, urbane, and sensitive, qualities not necessarily helpful for the leader of a farm-related agency. He was also frank in his criticism of capitalism’s failings, and passionate about helping the rural underprivileged and reforming agriculture. His successor in the FSA, Will Alexander, characterized resettlement reformers as either “spinners” or “bulldozers.” The former saw the family-owned farm, with its “spinning wheels and garden plots,” as the salvation of agriculture. The latter saw an inevitable future of mechanization, large-scale farming, and urbanization, and a corresponding need for new forms of land use to meet these forces head on. Tugwell was a bulldozer, and he molded the initial direction of the Resettlement Administration.

The new organization had four primary programs. The main function of the Rural Rehabilitation Program was providing “supervised credit” for low-income farm families. The RA extended small, low-interest loans to farmers, or groups of farmers, who were supervised in their use of the money by a county or parish RA agent. Most often, the supervisor helped the family develop written farm and home budgets. By the end of 1937, nearly one million farm families had received loans to buy seed, fertilizer, equipment, and livestock, or to pay off prior debts.

The Land Use Program sought to achieve a “balanced relationship between rural people and their land resources.” It continued FERA activities of buying submarginal agricultural land (over nine million acres by 1937) and converting it to commercial
forests, reseeded grazing lands, recreational areas, or wildlife conservation areas. It continued AAA activities of studying, surveying, and classifying land for its most appropriate use.

The two remaining divisions of the RA, the Rural Resettlement Program and the Suburban Program, both built new communities. Rural Resettlement inherited communities and communities-in-the-works from FERA and Subsistence Homesteads, and it initiated over thirty more. Most of these were ordinary farming resettlements, in which the government built simple homes, erected a few public facilities such as schools, cotton gins, and meeting houses, and leased farm land to individual families. Three communities, however, would break the mold: in Pinal County, Arizona; Jefferson and Arkansas counties, Arkansas; and Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana, the RA established cooperative farm communities. Although almost every resettlement included some cooperative enterprises — stores, gins, livestock associations, or machinery pools, for instance — these three would be the only communities in which the majority of farm land was leased and worked cooperatively.36 (A few others communities would designate portions of their land for cooperative farming.) The large-scale farming on the three cooperatives would make possible the purchase and use of modern machinery, the government believed.

Around the time the RA was planning these three resettlements, Rexford Tugwell published his musings on “Cooperation” in the journal Current History. The article reveals Tugwell’s love of the underdog and his frank if not inflammatory language. “The cooperative movement in America,” he began, “is rapidly reaching a stage of such potential importance that it will undoubtedly raise considerable
controversy before it goes much further.” He acknowledged that although consumer or purchasing cooperatives were familiar enterprises, “cooperation to produce is almost unknown as a modern way of organization.” But, he speculated:

If the Government’s credit agencies should fall into the hands of certain types of administrators who might be described as “socially minded,” producer cooperation also might soon grow to significant size. For instead of financiers, promoters, and stock manipulators having the inside track, as they do inevitably, with private bankers, there might be a chance for cooperative groups to get started and to operate successfully. With the wide spread of technical knowledge resulting from our universal education, monopolies of skill and knowledge are everywhere broken down. Only financial overlordship stands in the way of a good deal of this kind of insurgency.37

Meanwhile, the socially minded RA had a start in its three cooperative farms, as well as its numerous other cooperative enterprises.

The Suburban Resettlement Program also built three innovative communities, and only three, out of a planned twenty-five. Greenbelt, Maryland, Greendale, Wisconsin, and Greenhills, Ohio were based on the garden city concept, a balance of countryside and town. The communities’ numerous public buildings and homes were generously interspersed with garden spaces and playgrounds, and surrounded by a “green-belt” of farms or forest. Planners located the towns close enough to cities (Washington, D.C., Cincinnati, and Milwaukee) for residents to commute, but the greenbelts protected the towns from the cities’ future expansion. The suburbs’ innovative designs drew over one million visitors in a single year,38 and they still elicit enthusiasm among students of urban planning. The three greenbelt towns were special pets of Rexford Tugwell, and like the three cooperative farm communities, they were a forward-thinking response to change: mechanization, industrialization, or urbanization.
The Resettlement Administration was the last of the New Deal agencies to initiate new communities, though the task of actually building or completing some of the them fell to its successor, the FSA. The number of resettlements created by all the organizations, one hundred, is only very approximate and might be enlarged by dozens, except that some of the settlements were so small or loosely clustered that they hardly qualified as communities. As already suggested, the resettlements varied in a number of way. In size they ranged from a mere ten farms in a Great Plains village to nearly 900 residences at Greenbelt. Their economic bases included farming, industry and handicrafts, forestry (two communities in Wisconsin and Kentucky), specialized crops, and combinations of all of the above.

The government offered several forms of tenure agreements, as well. For subsistence communities the government sponsored local homestead associations which would sell or lease individual units. Most rural communities had “lease and purchase” contracts, similar to the “rent to own” concept today — with more bureaucratic complications. The FSA, in fact, could apply numerous conditions to the mortgage, limiting what the family could do with the property. Both subsistence and rural communities usually had forty-year contracts. A few communities, like the Terrebonne Parish resettlement, would have ninety-nine year government leases.

The government hand-picked all resettlement residents, but general membership varied across the communities. Each of the founding organizations, for instance, had different financial requirements of its settlers. FERA settlers largely came from the relief roles. The director of Subsistence Homesteads, on the other hand, admitted that his program was “a middle class movement for selected people.” Although the agency’s
criteria still favored families earning less than $1200 a year, over half of them earned more.\textsuperscript{41} Settlers varied in race and ethnicity as well. Poor blacks in the South needed homes and land as much (or in many cases, more) than whites, and the resettlement projects addressed their needs in limited ways. The government established nine communities solely for blacks; about two dozen more resettlements included, but segregated, whites and blacks.\textsuperscript{42} Jersey Homesteads, near Hightown, New Jersey, created homes, gardens, and a small garment factory for Jewish families. Granger Homesteads in Iowa had an ethnically diverse population — mostly Croatian and Italian, but also Slovakian, Irish, Austrian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Dutch, English, and American! — but a majority were Roman Catholics informally sponsored for membership by a local priest and the Catholic Rural Life Conference.\textsuperscript{43} Perhaps the very name of Terrebonne Farms gives away something of its ethnic make-up.

As seen in Figure 6, the government planted its new communities across the nation — but not haphazardly. All of the resettlement agencies had limited funds. The Division of Subsistence Homesteads, for instance, had twenty-five million to use; FERA had eight-five, but only a portion of that for its community-building division. At best, the agencies could hope to directly help a limited number of people, and show the way for a great many more through the examples of their communities.\textsuperscript{44} Thus, resettlements were a limited commodity, and planners gave much thought their disbursement.

As often happens, these public programs were not immune to personal influence. One of the earliest communities, Arthurdale, happened to be a pet project of Eleanor Roosevelt. The first lady had toured the depressed coal mining region of West Virginia
Figure 6 — Resettlements nationwide
Source: Resettlement Administration, First Annual Report, p. viii
in 1933, and she pushed for the establishment of a resettlement there. Later, she selected the architect, helped plan house interiors, and even spent several thousand dollars of her own money. Likewise, the very first loan for a subsistence homestead went to a community near Dayton, Ohio, which was already being developed by an influential planner and writer named Ralph Borsodi.45

In an era desperate for economic growth and employment, politicians and public alike sometimes treated resettlements as another type of “pork barrel” project.46 Looking at the Figure 6 map again, one region seems particularly plump with resettlements: the South. In part, this bounty reflected the political clout which the South held during the New Deal, through positions such as Vice President (John Garner of Texas), Speaker of the House (John Bankhead of Alabama and Sam Rayburn of Texas), Senate Majority Leader (Joe Robinson of Arkansas), or even chairman of the crucial Senate Finance Committee (Pat Harrison of Mississippi). Some New Deal insiders also hoped that southern resettlement projects would calm the discontent that fueled firebrand Huey Long of Louisiana, always a political threat to Roosevelt.47

Of course, political clout alone does not account for the large numbers of Southern resettlements. The same long-standing dependence of the region on agriculture, the same preponderance of tenancy and sharecropping, the same impoverishment that fed the power of politicians like Long, also made the South good material for resettlement programs. In 1938 FDR called the region the “Nation’s No. 1 economic problem,” to the chagrin or anger of many Southerners.48 Although they might dispute the ranking, few could have denied the problem. And in fact, Southern
tenancy was one of the two main causes for the creation of the final resettlement agency, the Farm Security Administration, the previous year.

In 1936, FDR had appointed the Special Committee on Farm Tenancy. The committee returned with a startling report of rural poverty, and it proposed a solution: widespread family farm ownership through low-interest government loans. A few dissenters spoke up, but not many. Huey Long, for one, was pessimistic, and believed those selling land would benefit more than those buying. In Senate session he lambasted the plan:

This is what the owners of those plantations are going to do: they want to sell out to the government. . . . So they will call in poor old colored ‘Mose,’ or an old white man . . . who is worn out and broken down and has about 3 more years to live, and he will sign a 60-year mortgage and move on the farm and that will be the last to be heard of him . . . . [His] condition will be worse instead of better.

What do you mean when your tears are streaming because of the pity you have for the [tenant] farmer? . . . I can almost see the tears of the landlords down on Red River . . . as they weep over the condition of the tenants, and about them going to make a sale of some of their mortgaged land, upon which they cannot make any profit in this day and time!\(^49\)

One committee member (sounding very much like another Rex Tugwell) said the creation of more family farms was an “an economic anachronism, foredoomed to failure” and urged more government-supervised cooperatives, but his plea was ignored.\(^50\) The “spinners” carried the day over the “bulldozers.” To carry out the committees’ recommendation, Congress passed the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act in July 1937. Two months later, it created the Farm Security Administration to oversee the act — and — to replace the Resettlement Administration.
Why a new agency? The FSA’s authorized purposes show the reason. It would continue with rural rehabilitation (supervised credit); it would continue with submarginal land retirement; it would create a farm-purchase program for tenants, sharecroppers, and laborers; and it would complete *but not initiate* resettlements as begun by its predecessor.\(^{51}\) No more new communities. They had proven too costly, in more ways than one.

In a literal sense, some of the resettlements did cost too much money. Mrs. Roosevelt’s project, Arthurdale, experienced a $500,000 loss, mostly in construction mistakes.\(^{52}\) That was rare enough, but it was also large enough to never be forgiven by resettlement opponents. Other critics saw money plainly misspent. They pointed to embarrassingly high administration costs, which sometimes consumed as much as eighteen percent of the agency’s total budget.\(^{53}\) Critics also mocked some of the organization’s auxiliary activities. The government provided almost all of the communities with some social or educational services. Often, they were as simple as literacy classes, or instruction in budgeting, or health clinics, and few argued with their usefulness. Handicraft instruction, too, might lead to some sort of employment, but as the RA’s Special Skills Division burgeoned to include instruction for woodworking, and metalworking, and furniture design, weaving, sculpture, painting, ceramics, and amateur dramatics — well, that was grist for the critic mill, too.\(^{54}\)

The cooperative farms, as we will see, occasioned fierce criticism. Rexford Tugwell himself seemed dangerously leftist to many; why, the man wrote about “insurgencies,” if nothing else. And while the Resettlement had been created by executive order, the Farm Security Administration would theoretically depend on the
Bankhead-Jones Act and on Congressional appropriations for its continued existence. In reality, it continued to secure funding from other relief appropriations and continued to act on executive orders, behavior which would only exasperate Congress in the long run.55

In reality, there had been a shift in the RA even before its demise. In September of 1936 the agency had announced that it would accept no more proposals for the creation of resettlements. A few months later Tugwell resigned, though he hand picked his successor Will Alexander. At the same time, an executive order placed the agency under the parentage of the Department of Agriculture — coming full circle from the time when purged AAA employees had staffed the RA.56 In both the RA and FSA, rehabilitation and farm purchasing gradually pushed resettlement to a back burner.

Not that the more idealistic or experimental activities ground to a halt with the creation of the FSA. The latter organization inherited the majority of the resettlements, and built many from scratch, since they had been in the mere planning stages in 1937. Ironically, the FSA continued to emphasize the experimental nature of resettlements as a way of justifying their existence. We’re not building any more of them, they reassured the public, but what we’ve got are models. An FSA employee manual explained that “projects serve as proving grounds for social, economic, and educational programs that may be used in a modified form by all handicapped farm families.”57 (“Handicapped,” here, meant disadvantaged, just as “rehabilitation” meant economic and social help.) The FSA also touted the communities as more personal testing grounds, where residents could learn to be farmers, or prove themselves capable, before they actually took the step of farm ownership.58 From one explanation, two solutions. First, the FSA
reassured the public that it “helped those who helped themselves” and that it was not a relief agency spending large amounts of money with no hope of return. Second, it reassured itself that families had a safety net before they took on the debts and obligations of farm ownership.

The FSA name tells something about the new organization’s goals for the families it helped. It concerned itself with poverty, but its name wasn’t Farm Prosperity or Farm Wealth or Farm Help Administration, it was Farm Security. Farm Stability might have been another good name. It saw poverty as a quick stumble or a long slide into hopelessness. The President’s Committee on Tenancy had written about the “precarious” position of poor farmers; the FSA talked about “human erosion” and “uprooted” migrant families. In contrast, it claimed to help families “put down new roots” or “regain the balance and values of rural living.” The President’s Committee on Tenancy had written about the “precarious” position of poor farmers; the FSA talked about “human erosion” and “uprooted” migrant families. In contrast, it claimed to help families “put down new roots” or “regain the balance and values of rural living.”59 Again, they used the language of regionalism in describing their vision of a balanced and land-oriented life for America’s families. Successfully applying that vision to the nation’s real regions would be a more difficult matter.

Notes


Conkin, pp. 17, 30.


7 Conkin, p. 7.

8 Conkin, p. 29.


13 Friedmann, p. 39.

14 Conkin, p. 4; Friedmann, pp. 25-26.

15 Dorman, p. 259.

16 Steiner, p. 438.


19 Friedmann, pp. 30, 35.

20 Dykeman, p. 217.


23 Dykeman, p. 228.

24 ibid.

25 Vance, p. 6.

26 Leuchtenburg, pp. 121, 123.

27 Conkin, p. 134.

28 Conkin, pp. 132-33, 135-37, 334-35.

29 Conkin, pp. 11-13, 332-34.

30 Conkin, p. 143.


32 Conkin, pp. 146-51.

33 Dykeman, p. 221.


35 ibid. p. 6.


39 Conkin, p. 16.

40 Conkin, pp. 216-19.


43 Conkin, pp. 109, 256-76, 298-99.

44 Schlesinger, pp. 264-66.

45 Schlesinger, p. 256; Conkin, p. 108.

46 Craig, p. 342.

47 Donald Holley, Uncle Sam’s Farmers: The New Deal Communities in the Lower Mississippi Valley (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1975), p. 66.


50 Tindall, p. 424.


52 Conkin, p. 246.

53 Conkin, p. 182.

54 Conkin, p. 195.

55 Conkin, p. 220.

56 Conkin, p 181.


58 Baldwin, p. 214; Conkin, p. 218.

59 Gaer, pp. 55, 63, 94-95.
Chapter 3 Louisiana

In May 1928, a man penciled a manila postcard to his governor, Huey Long. "It hard to ask you a Job old friend But Let me know by Return mail Your Friend . . . send me a Letter Please."1 "We have a small Farm of 5 ac.,” a woman wrote him, “but . . . everything we try to raise there is something always ruins the crop . . . Gov. help us to get my Husband some kind of work so we be able to keep our little Home."2 Even before the Crash, Louisiana knew about hard times.

In some ways, the Great Depression was a reminder to the nation that the poor were always with us. As historian Paul Mertz has pointed out, New Dealers sometimes discovered a very blurred line between depression-related unemployment and plain dirt poverty, especially in the South.3 In many agricultural areas, for instance, seasonal unemployment and low wages were longstanding patterns. Hardly consequences of the depression, they added to its severity and shaped its local symptoms. In south Louisiana, the state's "Sugar Bowl," living conditions during the 1930's turned on events and circumstances decades old.

Some nineteen parishes traditionally made up the Sugar Bowl. The region included nearly ten thousand square miles, but much of the cane cultivation centered on rich alluvial lands such as those near the Mississippi, and Bayous Lafourche, Terrebonne, Teche, and Vermillion.4 In those areas, shown in Figure 7, cane indelibly shaped economics, landscapes, and livelihoods (as it continues to do). A 1930's yearbook of The Sugar Journal recorded some of the statistics. Of Terrebonne Parish, it said, "sugar is the main crop" and "chief source of wealth." In 1937, the parish made nearly a million and a half dollars from the crop, 89% of its agricultural income.

Lafourche Parish made nearly two million. "For nearly one hundred years now," the
Figure 7 — Louisiana Sugar Bowl

Source: The Year Book of the Louisiana Sugar Cane Industry 1939, p. 32
yearbook noted, “Assumption Parish has lived on sugar alone.” Cane made up 91% of that nearby parish’s farm income.³

Sugarcane grew on tens of thousands of acres in the bowl, presenting a unique landscape. Benjamin Appel, a novelist and reporter traveling the nation in the 1930’s, penned his impressions of the region:

There are few farms, few cows, the land a plantation, the tall cane washing up to the doors of the unpainted gray shacks like a green tide. The shacks, gray islands of men and women and children, are surrounded, hemmed in, overwhelmed by the endless cane . . . . At Bayou Lafourche, somebody has painted: No Cane Eating on the Bridge. Pink hyacinths gleam on the stagnant waters.⁶

Appel’s vision gives a sense of both fertility and futility. On one hand, the Sugar Bowl was not the Dust Bowl of the South. Although the cane industry had endured its share of natural calamities over a century and more, the land could still produce bountifully, aided by modern fertilizers. Then, too, in the 1930’s new plant varieties allowed farmers to grow cane on even less than ideal soils.⁷ And yet, the traditional pattern of cane production meant that even in flush years, many of its cultivators suffered want amidst plenty.

That traditional pattern was the plantation, still present decades after the Civil War. As geographer Merle Prunty has pointed out, and locals intuitively understood, the word “plantation” could mean any large landholding with a labor force (not necessarily slaves) and a market crop.⁸ Plantations first gained a foothold in the Lafourche region during the 1820’s and 30’s, crowding many of the small farmers, petit habitants, onto smaller bayous or brulees, fire-cleared backlands.⁹ Despite the continued presence of small farmers, plantations dominated the landscape and economy.
in the Sugar Bowl. In 1935, only seven per cent of growers owned more than thirty acres, but those same seven per cent also held over seventy per cent of all the acreage put into cane. Again: seven per cent of growers owned nearly three-quarters of all the cane land.10

In a 1940 study, sociologist Harold Hoffsommer called the large sugarcane farm a “lineal descendant” of the pre-Civil War plantation,11 and in many ways the cane plantation retained its antebellum patterns even more than those in the Cotton Belt. In the latter, new forms of the plantation became important, tenancy and share-cropping, as large landowners and workers came to post-war arrangements. Croppers or tenants worked rented portions of the larger unit; workers’ houses, and in some cases barns and pasture, scattered across the plantation.12

In the Sugar Bowl, however, most plantation owners used “gang” or group labor to work their entire holding, and paid their workers cash wages. Owners found day laborers cheaper to hire than tenants — as long as wages were low. Workers typically lived in the clustered houses and cabins that made up the old plantation “quarters.” Although provided free by the owners, the homes were notoriously rundown or crowded. In fact, when German POW’s worked as cane laborers in World War II, a prominent planter tactfully suggested they be housed in CCC camps rather than quarters — more or less admitting the homes could not even meet standards for prisoners.13 Whites and blacks both worked as laborers, though blacks still made up a majority of some sixty per cent or more.14

This was the cane growing pattern, old but by no means perfected to everyone’s satisfaction. As Hoffsommer blandly explained, the “adjustments” between owner and
workers were “still incomplete.” Actually, in his own study, three-quarters of the owners he interviewed said they saw no need for any changes in the arrangements. Laborers – not interviewed – surely had more to complain about. Workdays were long, ten to twelve or even thirteen hours, or from “can” see to “can’t.” Day wages were low. In Hoffsommer’s study, $1.00 a day was average. During harvest or cutting season, pay went up to around $1.36. Some plantations, however, paid “piecework” at harvest. To earn 60¢, a worker had to cut and bend and cut and toss one ton of sugarcane. Low as the pay was, workers had to get while the getting was good, so to speak. Like most any type of agriculture, cane work was seasonal. At harvest, extra laborers joined a plantation’s workforce; the rest of the year’s employment was their own business. Those living on a plantation could expect to stay on the whole year, but during slow periods, they might work only a day or two a week. Their already slim earnings went up and down during the busy and slack seasons.

The entire industry of sugarcane, too, had its ups and down over time. As Mark Twain once observed:

The cane is cultivated after a modern and intricate scientific fashion, too elaborate and complex for me to attempt to describe; but it lost forty thousand dollars last year. I forget the other details.

Hoffsommer described the industry’s history as “precarious.” By its very nature as a tropical plant, cane leads a made-to-fit existence in more temperate Louisiana. Its growing season shortens to nine months; freezes may kill it outright. Weather, disease, and pests, as well as economic conditions, can spell the difference between a boom or bust year – or decade.
As it happened in the Sugar Bowl, the depression of the 1930's tasted like the second dose of very bitter medicine. The 1920's were the first dose. Among that decade's calamities: borers, rot, and a disease called "mosaic" which very nearly wiped out the most common types of cane. The year 1924 saw widespread drought, and to clinch the decade, a disastrous freeze hit in 1929. From over 300,000 tons at the decade's beginning, production plummeted to a miserable low of 47,000 in 1926.18

Economic conditions, more than natural ones, afflicted growers the next decade. At the same time as disease-resistant cane varieties (such as the famous P.O.J., or "Please Oh Jesus" cane) helped production rebound dramatically, sugar prices steadily fell, from 5¢ a pound in 1926, to below 3¢ in '32.19 The government offered little tariff protection from foreign, especially Cuban, sugar. FDR's own Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace, reputedly saw American sugar as an inefficient industry which should work out its fate, for better or worse, in world competition.20 Nevertheless, by the mid-1930's, the AAA, hoping to eventually bolster prices, enacted crop reduction measures for sugar as it did for cotton and other staples. These measures would definitely have a bearing on the future Terrebonne project.

Even a stranger could pick out the most obvious effects of these two decades: derelict sugar mills and abandoned fields. Smaller sugar factories had been closing since the 1890's. Now the trend worsened, and centralized mills, serving many growers, faced even bigger crushes during grinding season. In Terrebonne Parish, where eighteen or nineteen factories served in 1911, only four remained in 1936.21 Tremendous amounts of land lay idle, abandoned or bankrupt. In 1934, over 260,000 cultivable acres sat empty in thirteen sugar parishes; large tracts of 1,000 or more acres...
made up over half of this land. Louis Brunet, not yet a resident of Terrebonne Farms, hunted rabbits in the weed-covered plantations between Schriever and Houma.

Abandoned fields represented more than an eyesore; they meant lost jobs and lost wages. These human consequences have not been as thoroughly documented, however. Again, perhaps because it was such a short, quiet slip from underemployment to unemployment, or from low pay to no pay. Some looked for help in the wrong place, a measure of desperation. In 1936, the Houma Courier ran a sad but telling article. A regional official of the Resettlement Administration warned of fraudulent farm societies conning scores of people with “false promises of ‘a government farm and all that goes with it’.” Local leaders were asked to help protect potential victims, who were often illiterate, unable to read the written warnings.

Many of the needy went on relief. In 1937, Terrebonne Parish had 530 relief clients, which did not include wives or children. But in the Sugar Bowl and many other places in the South, local and state powers only reluctantly extended aid to the rural needy, believing they could fend for themselves. As one Louisiana planter pronounced in 1934:

The general attitude of people is that if they get relief they will get all they can . . . . The quicker our farming people know they are going to have to rely on their own resources, the better off they will be . . . .

When Hoffsommer made his sociological study of the cane region, he discovered a “most persistent complaint” among the generally satisfied planters: government relief took away their harvest cutters. Eventually, under pressure from the owners, it became
standard policy of the WPA to fire or lay off their workers during harvest to encourage them to cut cane. Not enough work most of the year; too much for two months. 

Something else loomed on the horizon, threatening to throw the labor situation even further out of kilter. One local spelled it out to reporter Appel:

Machinery! For long time since 1800, cane crops planted and cultivated like long ago, but now they make and cultivate a crop with machine. Plowin’ tractor pull the plow. Tractor pull the machine hoe and do the work of twenty hands with hoes. Machine hoe pull out the weed. Where the hand go? Go on charity? The hand work from ‘kin to ‘kain’t but with machine he no work at all.

Hoes and mules were slowly, but steadily, giving way to tractors and attachments. Without a mechanized harvester, however, planters still needed their “hands.” By the end of the 1930’s, though, developers would be closing in on the creation of practical machine harvesters. A giant Terrebonne Parish landholder would use five prototypes in the 1939 season. Labadieville and Thibodaux companies sold them by ’40 and ’41.

Asked what would happen with his day laborers when he began using harvesters, one planter replied simply, “I guess they will go into town on relief.”

Perhaps the most pithy description of the Great Depression was made by a social scientist of the era. “In short,” he wrote, “society seemed to be decidedly out of joint.”

A good description for south Louisiana, too, whose “adjustments” were “incomplete,” whose disparate elements didn’t fit quite together: men, and machines; abundant soils, and abandoned land; many who labored, few who reaped. But just south of Thibodaux, back of Schrieve, the federal government would try to fit these things together in a brand new pattern.
Notes

1 W. J. Hebert, to Huey P. Long; 21 May 1928; Huey P. Long Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge; Box 4, Folder 143.


3 Mertz, p. 47.


9 Kane, pp. 158-59.


11 Hoffsommer, p. 11.

12 Sitterson, p. 347.


14 Hoffsommer, p. 23.

15 Hoffsommer, p. 11.

16 Hoffsommer, pp. 64-66.

17 Mark Twain, Life on the Mississippi. (need page)

18 Hoffsommer, pp. 9-10.


21 Houma Courier, February 2, 1936.

22 Sitterson, p. 381.

23 Interview, Louis Brunet; October 19, 1995.

24 Houma Courier, January 9, 1936.

25 Houma Courier, April 8, 1938.

26 Mertz, pp. 75-77.

27 Hoffsommer, p. 39.

28 Becnel, pp. 36-38.


30 Gilmore, pp. ix., 20, 33.


Chapter 4  Plan

In July of 1935, a committee of 19 small cane farmers, led by Davis W. Pipes of Terrebonne parish, met with Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace to discuss the importance of government support for the sugarcane industry of south Louisiana. While the men were in Washington, they also met with Resettlement Administration Director Rexford Tugwell and asked about possible RA activities for the cane country. According to the committee’s report, Tugwell “promised to approve any reasonable program that his field agents in the state recommended.”1 The road from promise to completed plan would be a long one.

Consideration of a Terrebonne Parish project began as early as August of 1935, not long after the creation of the Resettlement Administration itself. In a memo of that date, E. B. Whitaker, the Region 6 Assistant Director, listed the parish as number one in order of preference for seven proposed Louisiana projects, each described only by parish name and acreage.2 Clearly considered important, it also ranked number three in preference among twenty-two projects throughout Region 6.3 In October of the same year, Whitaker wrote to a Washington official that he expected to submit soon a plan for an unnamed project in both Terrebonne and Tangipahoa Parishes for 500 families on 80 acres each, for a total of 40,000 acres at a cost of $200,000 — a significant and mammoth project indeed if it had been more than numbers on paper.4 Such it must have been, however, because at the end of the year, a Region 6 official noted that in regard to the Terrebonne Parish project, “we are pushing vigorously in an effort to locate desirable land.”5

The fact that the parish was selected for a resettlement even before land had been located or a definite plan conceived might indicate something about its origins.

Certainly, the Sugar Bowl and its inhabitants merited consideration for relief, but where
to locate a project in that nineteen parish area? As we have seen in other cases, political or personal factors sometimes appeared to play a role in locating projects, and Terrebonne Farms may have been one more plum allotted to Louisiana during the 1930’s. Though Huey Long was assassinated in 1935, associates such as Governor Dick Leche remained in power during the scandal-clouded years that followed. Harnett T. Kane, chronicler of that period known as the “Louisiana Hayride,” described the federal bounty that descended on the state:

Peace, it was wonderful! Buildings, bridges, hospitals, grade crossings, zoos, swimming pools, playgrounds . . . Washington was the father of all good; a kindly, older friend who cut corners, snipped red tape, looked with a special altruism on projects marked Louisiana. Governor Dick went early and often to Washington on neighborly, folksy calls on the President and his assistants. He made regular rounds of the departments, knew everybody, was “Dick” to administrators and sub-administrators.6

Perhaps even more important to the Terrebonne project, the parish was home to one of the Louisiana senators, Allen J. Ellender. Born in Montegut south of Houma, Senator Ellender had worked at sugar mills when young, attended Tulane University, and served as a state representative. He had also assisted in Huey Long’s senate campaigns.7 Any economic benefits of a resettlement in Terrebonne would enrich Ellender’s own constituents.

And, when the government finally purchased land for its Terrebonne project in the summer of 1936, its location adjacent to the town of Schriever placed it near two of Ellender’s own campaign supporters: Sam Polmer, an owner of Polmer Brothers stores in the town, and Julius Dupont, officer in the nearby Magnolia sugar mill cooperative.8 Both men were on a first name basis with the Senator, as seen in correspondence found
in the Ellender Archives, and presumably both stood to gain new business from a
resettlement project. Still, we must also bear in mind that Secretary of Agriculture
Henry Wallace said that “good land at a good price” was the ultimate criterion for the
Terrebonne project’s location.9

The land in question consisted of four plantations surrounding the town of
Schriever and stacked north to south along Bayou Terrebonne and Louisiana Highway
69 (today Highway 24): Julia, Waubun, St. George, and Isle of Cuba. The latter three
were adjacent, but the northernmost plantation, Julia, was separated from the others by
Ducros plantation belonging to the Polmer family. All the plantations had changed
hands several times since the turn of the century, and in 1936 the government purchased
the Julia, Waubun, and St. George from a single owner.10 The Isle of Cuba had its own
interesting genealogy. At one time it has been owned by a socialist community near
Leesville, Louisiana called New Llano; still later the RA purchased it from the Federal
Land Bank for a completely separate resettlement plan called the La Delta Farms.11 Its
2,453 acres, added to the 3,796 acres of the other three plantations, formed a giant
property of over 6000 acres. The government paid $145,178.60 for it all, and $7,718.24
in acquisition expenses.12 At one time, all had been working sugarcane plantations, and
before the bleak cane years of the 1920’s, Waubun and Isle of Cuba still had operating
sugar mills. At the time of the purchase, the lands were mostly idle, save for some
grazing cattle.13

The government purchase of these lands first came to public attention in an
optimistic editorial in the Houma Courier in July of 1936. The author suggested that a
government resettlement might be one element in a trend to revitalize the cane industry
with the creation of more sugar mills and more “comparatively small” cane operations. Of the newly purchased plantations, “it is proposed,” he wrote, “to cut up these places into small farm tracts to be equipped with houses, barns, mules, implements and seed, and thus offer them for sale on longer terms to practical farmers.” Here we see suggested the Terrebonne variation of “forty acres and a mule,” a promise the government never made completely nor outright, but one that would cling like a briar to the project throughout its existence. In addition, we might notice that the plan is conceived to be for “practical” farmers. For this editor and for some other locals, as we will see shortly, who the project was for meant as much as what kind of project it was, and the two issues were linked.

Both concerns would be adamantly expressed over the next year, because rather than immediately begin work on any kind of community at Schriever, the RA temporarily leased the project to the rural rehabilitation division of the Louisiana Emergency Rehabilitation Administration, a state-level continuation of FERA. As described earlier, this division’s chief purpose was to provide “supervised credit” and instruction to needy farmers; it generally assisted families “in place” rather than move them to a newly built community. In this case, the place would be the recently purchased Schriever plantations; though described as “idle” and uncultivated, they were not by any means vacant or uninhabited. Twenty-two houses such as that seen in Figure 8 still stood on the plantations (others stood in ruins), and in February of 1937 sixteen families living there became rehabilitation clients. Previously day laborers, twelve black men and four white men and their families became government tenants, renewing sugarcane farming on the land under a government supervisor. They paid rent in the
Figure 8 — Plantation quarters on the project
Source: Library of Congress, LCUSF34, Neg. 55270D
traditional currency of 1/5 the cane crop and 1/4 the corn; they rented mules which the
government paid to feed and quarter; and they received a small allowance for
necessities.\textsuperscript{17} Rural Rehabilitation’s lease on the property would end January 1, 1939,
at which time the FSA (having meanwhile replaced the RA) would take over activities
on the site.

In Terrebonne Parish as a whole, rehabilitation officials oversaw one hundred to
two hundred client families in 1936 and ’37, and introduced such varied projects as
poultry raising; home improvements with whitewash, fences, screens, and extra beds;
and dosings of quinine and other important medicines. “Terrebonne farmers and their
wives are happy to receive supervision, says one who has their interest at heart,”
concluded a local official in a newspaper account of division activities.\textsuperscript{18} Such may
have been the case or not, but at the Schriever location, some neighbors became very
unhappy with rehabilitation activities. Though pausing to examine their complaints
may seem to detour from the story of the eventual resettlement, it actually reveals a
good deal about the intentions and attitudes of those requesting resettlement and those
creating it.

Complaints about rehabilitation from local citizens, as seen in letters to Senator
Ellender, expressed a mixture of self-interest and altruism, in varying proportions. Even
before the sixteen families were actually made clients, M. J. Polmer (nephew to Samuel)
warned the Senator that if rehabilitation took over the project “we will all surely suffer;
as they will only farm only a part of the plantations; on a tennant [sic] basis and there
will be no development . . . . there will be no jobs for anyone.” He urged Ellender to
support a resettlement, adding that he knew the Senator to be “very much interested in
farm development for the poor under dog.”  Several months later and in a less clement mood, Polmer bluntly wrote the Senator, “If you can kill this project you will do a lot of good.” Perhaps thinking about the Polmer family retail and plantation incomes, he delivered a variety of worries and complaints:

They are hiring all the extra labor around here to do this work, working short hours, etc. . . . Understand from good information that they contemplate establishing their own commissary [in competition with] the small merchants who should benefit from these clients as they are the parties that pay the taxes. . . . If by chance you come down please come over and I will tell you lots more that cannot be written.

He concluded the letter with a postscripted grievance that perhaps only a farmer could appreciate:

Just learnt that they expect to plant cow peas in the land that they are digging potatoes from in July.20

Apparently these were fighting words.

His uncle Samuel Polmer also had complaints concerning farm practices: that the government supervisor used a Ducros canal for drainage, that the clients were allowed to cross Ducros (without charge) in order to reach the Julia plantation, and so forth.21 H. B. Naquin, who owned a hardware and farm implements store in Thibodaux, likewise complained about rehabilitation on the project:

They are operating a plantation just like our farmers. Drawing labor from farms and labor is so scarce and being spoiled. . . . What they call rehabilitation on that project is nothing but white and black, 3 niggers to every white man, day labor which can never be anything but day labor.22

He asked that Ellender see that the citizens’ tax money be spent on the original small farm resettlement plan which was of “great interest to all merchants in this locality and
to everybody who wants the real farmers to own their own place.” We can only guess from his letter who exactly Naquin thought “real farmers” were. Incidentally, though in a similar letter he assured the Senator, “I am not asking anything for myself,” Naquin would be disappointed enough later. When the project awarded a tractor contract to a rival business he would write directly to Henry Wallace, charging graft and asking for an investigation.

Other letters from citizens and organizations such as the Rotary continued the same theme, reaching an almost incensed climax around the end of 1937. M. J. Polmer retold his grievances in a letter that December, adding indignantly that if the Waubun house was sold by the government, as rumored, would the government “try and see that it would not be sold for a night club, as we have been at Schriever for over forty years and never permitted drunkenness or gambling.” That he and others believed they could “permit” or forbid such behavior speaks volumes in itself, but perhaps is another story.

Still other writers saw a kind of conspiracy in the fact that some resettlement projects were underway while Terrebonne remained under rehabilitation. An anonymous author sent Ellender a list of all Region 6 projects with the date construction commenced, ending with the scathing verdict:

TERREBONNE ---------- STILL SUCKING THE HIND TIT.

Another (or perhaps the same) anonymous and excitable writer saw rehabilitation itself as the offense. In a document to Ellender entitled “RESETTLEMENT VERSUS RURAL REHABILITATION” he or she called the latter:
The Smoke Screen of the Century! The Camouflaged Dole! The Padded Relief Roll! Blood Loans that even a Wall Street Shyster wouldn’t stoop to practice on any unfortunate.  

Though we might ascribe such vehement outcries to only a narrow segment of the population, they also serve to remind us just how controversial these and other New Deal programs could be, not only in abstract political rhetoric but in the real language of people affected by them. Along with extreme or self-serving views were humanitarian ones as well. A Presbyterian missionary working in the Thibodaux area perhaps represented these best in a letter to Louisiana Senator John Overton. The Reverend Edward Ford believed that the worst feature of rehabilitation at Terrebonne was that the clients were still no closer to being independent farmers and home-owners. “There are 4000 applications for homes on file at Schriever,” he wrote, “not one for tenancy.”

Meanwhile, the rehabilitation program on the plantations was generating another controversy, one interesting to us in that it foreshadows some of the themes of the future Terrebonne resettlement: issues of supervision, class, race, and local knowledge and customs versus those of the government. The debate centered around one man, A.B. Dauterive, Project Manager and native Louisianan. From the records in the Ellender Archives, it almost seems that the hapless man initiated the problems himself when in the summer of 1937 he wrote to the state director of Rural Rehabilitation, requesting that his assigned assistant be transferred or put on leave. This employee, I. C. Borland, would not be transferred, and in fact remained in his capacity of farm supervisor when the actual resettlement later began. But to Dauterive, Borland was hopeless. He complained that Borland misused government funds, and — more seriously in his view — was generally inept and knew nothing about sugarcane production. “Please send us,“
Dauterive wrote:

a real practiced “bull puncher” — one who will be in the field from “cant to cant”; who will ride a horse — not an automobile headland overseer who does not see the grass nor know what is in the patch; one who knows how to handle labor, knows cane harvesting and how to prepare for it. You could get one around here . . . and it would go good with all of the better class of people around here, Thibodaux and Houma.31

The state official, E. C. McInnis made no replay to comments on Borland’s aptitude but did have something to say about attitude. It bears quoting as well:

The government does not employ “bull-punchers” to drive human beings from daylight to dark, but instead wants employees who have a sympathetic understanding of the down and out farmers’ problems, and who are capable of giving them a vision of better things, and through inspiration, personal interest and sound advice are capacitated to assist them in bettering themselves.32

The two views could not have been more different, nor differently expressed:

Dauterive’s earthy and pragmatic figures of speech contrasted with McInnis’ abstract language of ideas.

The controversy ran on as Dauterive took his case to other authorities. In a letter to E. B. Whitaker, he noted that McInnis warned him about too close an association with the “best element in this section, saying it was not evidence of loyalty to the association.” Dauterive noted, though, that “it should be remembered that this Project is in their back yard — they know more about the people and sugarcane than any one else in the organization — bar none — and cannot be ignored.”33 He also predicted an “inevitable showdown” in which the Polmers and others would stand by him. He was exactly correct. The government dismissed him in February of 1938, stating that he was “not in sympathy with our rehabilitation program, and . . . unable to get an adequate amount of work out of laborers or handle them in a satisfactory manner.”34
In a lengthy (nine page!) letter of protest sent to William Alexander, FSA Director, Dauterive tried to exonerate himself. He cited the overall discontent stemming from uncertainty of the operations and their future (rehabilitation or resettlement and when?), and the doubt this cast upon such basics as payroll and farm planning. He also threw problems back on McInnis, saying that the latter knew “next to nothing about it [the project], nor is he in sympathy with the mannerism, culture, customs, lives of these people, etc. — a pure case of the blind leading the blind.” As for a poor cane crop, he explained that the government had not seen fit to provide him with any assistance except Borland: no secretary, bookkeeper, timekeeper, paymaster, cane dispatcher, weigher, nor watchman. More importantly, despite repeated requests, he claimed he had not been given authorization to contract with the local cane factories to include their operation’s cane when the mills were planning out their daily grinding capacities, a complicated and detailed process. As he had predicted, they were left “holding the bag” when a severe freeze hit. “No cane factory is stupid enough to advance money on frozen cane,” he explained, and what cane they did save with their small labor force would be reduced in value because of acidity from the freeze. Even if Dauterive had so far acquitted himself well, it was probably a mistake for him to admit:

I am guilty . . . of failure to co-operate with the Rehabilitation program by refusing to, in violation of Administration Orders, be a party to placing clients indiscriminately on this project without the proper selection and placing white and negro families mixed alongside of each other in plantation quarters, where their children will mix and play together. This is very obnoxious to Southern people, as you, Doctor Alexander, well know.

Doctor Alexander was probably not sympathetic, being well-known himself for his progressive view of race relations (though apparently not to Dauterive).
Dauterive was also correct in thinking that the “best element” would support him. H. B. Naquin repeated Dauterive’s own estimation of himself when he said that Dauterive “speaks the local lingo, knows the customs, ways and manners of our people, is in sympathy with their desires.” 

Telegrams to Senator Ellender in his behalf came from bankers, lawyers, sugar planters, store owners, and many local civic leaders. But while the government may have considered local assets and needs in locating the project, it took its own counsel considering the nature of that project. Dauterive was not reinstated. He was replaced with a new project manager, George Harmount, who would remain throughout the government’s involvement with the Terrebonne project.

In all the confusion surrounding Dauterive (and the evidence here is just a small portion of the jumble of correspondence), we may never know fully why he was dismissed. Perhaps the government saw the “inevitable showdown” and change of personnel as timely, for all the while this local controversy stormed on, Washington and Region 6 RA officials were quietly making new plans for the Terrebonne project.

Reverend Ford, the Presbyterian minister, complained to Senator Ellender that D. C. officials came and went — and came and went again — without so much as a word to the locals about their thoughts and plans. Beginning early in 1937 and continuing through ’38, over twenty different RA, and later FSA, officials visited the site, including representatives from divisions such as farm management, personnel selection, publicity, and finances. Dr. Alexander also visited, indicating something of the importance the government accorded the project. This parade of specialists surely must have piqued the interest of rehabilitation clients and other locals. When a similar project was being developed in a north Louisiana parish, one nearby resident wrote to Ellender to
complain, somewhat tongue in cheek, about:

the small army of so-called plantation managers, accountants, farm
operators, clerks, bookkeepers, machinists, cooks, entomologists,
geologists, ornithologists, health authorities and surveyors, and
most of all those wonderful economists, which seem to be so plentiful
this day and time.  

And yet, amazingly, these official visitors may have represented the tail end of
the planning, since one government memo to the Secretary of Agriculture indicated that
Terrebonne was 75% planned in April of 1937. (Of course, this might also represent
an optimistic report presented to a superior official.) One year later, an FSA official
announced in the Houma Courier the imminent commencement of some “permanent
development” at the Schriever site. With the government playing its cards close to the
vest, however, the official was still “unable [or perhaps unwilling] to say on just what
basis the project here would be developed, but he stated that previous projects in which
he had worked had been organized with the highest type of tenant farmer as clients.”

In another release a few days later, still other officials attempted to explain the delay in
any permanent project, stating that in the time it had taken to investigate titles to the
land, that year’s appropriations had been expended. Resettlement authorities had then
decided to finish cultivation of sugarcane already planted. Thus in these
announcements the government seemed to try to mollify two local concerns: that the
project was somehow being purposely thwarted, or that it would involve any but
“worthy,” “practical,” or perhaps “white” farmers. Still, at least one local must have
gotten wind of government plans, because in June of 1938 the Reverend Ford had
something to say about them to Senator Ellender:
It would seem as if the Farm Security Administration, in order to show contempt for you and the Terrebonne and LaFourche their advocates of Resettlement, had gone to the very limit of the opposite extreme. 45

What were these contemptuous and radical plans? As we know, the Terrebonne project was to be organized as an incorporated cooperative. The corporation, rather than its members, would hold a ninety-nine year lease on the land from the government; members would work the land cooperatively as a single, large sugarcane and vegetable farm. In addition, they would rent small, four-acre tracts for family cultivation. Terrebonne would be one of only four resettlements to be developed as a cooperative land-leasing project, and only one of ten having such a long lease term. 46 Saving the organizational details for a later point in the narrative, we might ask the same question that the locals were surely wondering — Why? And how? This decision must have been baffling, especially after months of guarded government comments and a few vague references to family farms.

The truth is that the official record is sketchy even on this important and intriguing point. It is possible, anyway, that the final reasoning never went on record, being reached in a late night talk, an over-the-phone compromise, or a behind-the-scenes agreement — things certainly not unheard of in government circles. A few records still exist, however, that give a suggestion of the debate that went on among officials involved in the process.

In a 1968 interview with Donald Holley, author of Uncle Sam’s Farmers, E. B. Whittaker stated that the RA had initially planned to develop the Terrebonne project in imitation of a European village: a tight cluster of houses with fields surrounding them. 47 Though they would ultimately reject the physical lay-out as impractical,
perhaps the village notion still influenced both the placement and the organization of
the project as a whole. Where better to locate a European-style village than among
French-speaking Cajuns, whom one scholarly journal of the day described as “the
largest unassimilated national group in America?” 
And, as will be noted later,
officials would invite French Catholics especially to apply as members of this “village.”
Likewise, it may be that the Cajun reputation for mutual assistance and solidarity, the
“coup de main” or helping hand, and the “ti’[petit] gift” of social exchange, made the
Terrebonne project a good candidate for an experiment in organized cooperation.

Still, as already noted, resettlement programs promoted some form of
cooperation, often a marketing or purchasing group, on most resettlements. And, as
often as they looked to European precedents they also noted the “American roots” of the
cooperative movement. The cooperative leasing of land, however, made Terrebonne
more unusual; here, too, local traditions were important. Though officially silent on any
intentions to create a hybrid European-Cajun village, resettlement officials explicitly
stated that the Terrebonne project was designed to fit the requirements of sugarcane
cultivation. At a meeting of the Thibodaux Rotary club, one FSA official explained that
“cane lends itself well to cooperative effort. This was proved by the tendency of large
plantations to organize themselves as they have in the past.” The traditional “gang”
labor system on cane plantations was itself a type of cooperative fieldwork. Such
allusions to the plantation system may have reassured locals that the government was
not really developing such a radical project after all. Of course, the FSA did not wholly
formulate nor express its plans in terms of the past; officials also looked to the future of
of cane production. They explained that the cooperative would afford purchasing power
for heavy machinery as well as the large tract of land which allowed its effective use. 52

Thus, we might imagine that the resettlement officials who devised the cooperative scheme, whether consciously or not, conceived of Terrebonne as a hybrid creature: part European, part ethnic Cajun, part all-American, a village adapted to local conditions as well as twentieth-century corporate America.

However it was conceived, the cooperative plan still had to run the gauntlet within the resettlement administrations. It was not without its detractors even among the planners. Region 6 officials had been wary that the cooperative might be compared to a Soviet collective. 53 F. F. Aylesworth, the Acting Chief of the FSA Farm and Home Management Section, had directed more severe and specific criticisms at the Terrebonne project. Reviewing the plans in 1938, he had disapproved especially of its cooperative organization. “We do not favor the cooperative method of operating this property for the following reasons:

1. It is experimental.
2. We believe that cooperative effort should be voluntary on the part of the cooperators rather than joining of a cooperative be requisite for the opportunity of resettlement. It is questionable whether or not the clients will give wholehearted support when the responsibility for success is wholly on management, while the workers are getting a satisfactory living. Many of the clients will probably have been laborers and they may consider themselves such under a cooperative. . . . After they become established on the units there will be an excellent opportunity for voluntary cooperative effort. 54

In a final caution he noted that since locals already criticized the apparent change in plans as well as current rehabilitation activities, this new plan might well be looked upon with skepticism. In anticipation of such a reaction, he had recommended that in
any plan, one or more local leaders be included as corporation members, providing “a valuable source of knowledge with regard to local conditions” and helping to maintain “friendly and cooperative relations” with the local community. This suggestion was not followed.

But while some officials like Aylesworth had disapproved of cooperative land leasing, still others were not convinced that the family-owned farm was necessarily a good plan either, for Terrebonne or any other region. It was a deeply-rooted schism in the resettlement programs. Looking back over a decade later, William Alexander recalled that some resettlement officials “doubted that private ownership was a sound thing at all,” especially if it demanded the sacrifice of a family’s education or health or social well-being, and that it was “foolish” to encourage land-ownership among people on the lower rung. “We never could quite decide,” he confessed.55 Apparently the Terrebonne planners had had a difficult time deciding, too. The Chief Solicitor of the FSA wrote to Alexander that at Terrebonne, it was most important to “decide definitely whether the ultimate aim is to operate the property as a cooperative, or to ultimately subdivide it into a number of small farms,” and that until this “fundamental determination” was made, definite plans were impossible.56 Personally, he recommended a cooperative form, since:

We infer from the statements contained in the proposed method of operating this project . . . that the homesteaders will not be, for some years, sufficiently competent and equipped to produce sugar on an individual basis, and that their producing activities will require detailed supervision.57

Doubts about experimentation had contended with doubts about property ownership. In the end, there may have been no single reason for the decision to
organize Terrebonne as a cooperative. Will Alexander recalled that in some cases, officials simply said, “Well, let’s just make a cooperative out of this and see what happens.” “We were trying to learn something,” he added.\textsuperscript{58} Even though the die had been cast, the ambiguity and uncertainty of the government’s deliberations were transmitted to the public. At another Rotary meeting, this time in Houma, an FSA official characterized the Terrebonne cooperative as an experiment which would help the government “learn which people are deserving of eventual farm ownership,” and that — perhaps — the cooperative’s land would be eventually subdivided and sold.\textsuperscript{59} He thus tried to refute charges (by that persistent critic the Reverend Ford) that the cooperative would “destroy personal initiative since ownership is never made possible,”\textsuperscript{60} a charge often leveled against socialism.

Interestingly, other locals such as the Pointers seem to have left no record of complaint about the cooperative plans. Perhaps they were simply glad that the Terrebonne project was underway at all, soon to bring in new construction and new consumers. And, they may have been sufficiently assured that the new venture was not too radical. When the \textit{New Orleans Times-Picayune} carried its first feature article on Terrebonne, it quoted the project manager, Mr. Harmount, as saying, “Socialized farming? Communistic? Radical? I don’t like those words. They do not apply here. We are operating a business. Strictly business.”\textsuperscript{61} The article went on to optimistically proclaim that the Terrebonne project “might set a pattern for the agricultural world — a scheme that might solve once and for all the vital tenant farmer problem.”\textsuperscript{62}

To understand the specific organization of that pattern, which underlaid Terrebonne and the other cooperative farms, it is helpful to refer to a diagram such as
Figure 9. The cooperatives — like many a government endeavor before and since — were complex. Chapter 6 will provide more detail on the duties of different FSA personnel and their relationship with members; here it is most important to notice the dual nature of the organization. These parallel but linked structures reflected a compromise and conflict within the cooperatives: the idea of democratic control, as seen in the corporate structure on the left side; and the need for safeguarding the public funds spent on the projects, through the supervisory structure on the right. The two halves connected at several points, the most important link between the Project Manager, the Farm Manager, and the member-elected Board of Directors. The two managers, both FSA personnel selected by the government, have already been introduced. The controversial Mr. Borland served as Farm Manager at Terrebonne during rehabilitation and resettlement alike. The Project Manager for resettlement, replacing Dauterive, was George J. Harmount. Mr. Harmount was a graduate of Yale and the Sheffield Scientific School, but he had lived in Louisiana over twenty years. He had served as vice president of the Louisiana Potato Association and as president of the Terrebonne Cooperative Association, a parish organization affiliated with the National Farm Bureau Federation. One former project resident characterized him as strictly “a government man,” but another said that though he “was over the whole bunch . . . he listened to the farmers and went along with them.” In either case, Harmount and Borland were part of a hierarchical chain of command which reached all the way to Washington.

The cooperative-corporation side of the project tempered this hierarchy with democratic organization. Yet here, too, the government played a determining role by
Figure 9 — Organization of FSA cooperative farms
Source: Eaton, 1943, p. 109
screening and selecting members and by creating the corporate structure itself. In an
average, non-governmental cooperative, members organize themselves and their
association. At Terrebonne and the other co-op farms, the government suggested the
corporate form and details; members chiefly signed on the dotted line, or made their
mark, as did one Terrebonne incorporator.66 The project was originally organized under
Louisiana business corporation law on May 11, 1938 as “Terrebonne Farm, Inc.”67
After the state passed the Agricultural Cooperative Association Act the next month, the
FSA Solicitor suggested it re-incorporate as an agricultural cooperative to take
advantage of a substantial tax savings.68 Thus, on November 8, 1938, The “Terrebonne
Association, Inc.” was formed.

Appendix A provides the full text of the 1938 Articles of Association for TAI, as
it was sometimes abbreviated. In summary, the Articles provided the corporation with a
number of powers enabling it to conduct agricultural activities, to market or
manufacture by-products of this activity, to construct homes and other buildings, and to
provide economic or educational services. The power “to cooperate with any
governmental agency or agencies . . . to effectuate the purposes herein set forth”69
permitted the corporate half of the project to coordinate with the FSA supervisory half.
Other than this clause, there is no reference to the government, and Article IV states that
“the affairs of this Association shall be managed and directed by a Board of five
directors, a majority of whom shall be elected by the members from their own
number.”70 The articles stated that membership would be comprised of an adult
representative from each family; in practice; the male head of household served. The
association would issue no capital stock of any kind, and any net earnings would be
distributed to members as dividends proportionate to the hours of work performed.

Though government officials and members alike would refer to "wages" earned working on the farm, members actually would receive advances on these anticipated dividends. 71

Thus, as shown earlier in Figure 9, members formed the backbone of the cooperative corporation. They were the owners and voters in the corporation. They were its official directors. And they were its workers. No one recognized the importance of the membership more than the FSA itself, and it took pains to make sure it was strong and healthy — both figuratively and literally. The success of the Terrebonne experiment depended greatly on the attitudes and abilities of its participants. Thus member selection was no mere afterthought; it was as essential to the project plan as any other part.

When the first joint meeting of the TAI incorporators was held on November 19, 1938, the eleven members and Mr. Harmount acted to formally consider each of the applications for membership submitted, of which there were, according to the Minutes: "NONE." 72 If this had been the real upshot of years of planning and debate, Terrebonne would have been in trouble indeed, but the statement is misleading. Membership to TAI and the other resettlements was truly a case in which "many are called, but few are chosen." 73 Applicants underwent a rigorous screening process by the FSA before their case ever reached consideration by the board of directors. 74

The RA and the FSA preferred to establish "culturally homogeneous" communities which followed local social patterns. 75 This had at least two important implication. First, it meant that they selected settlers from a region around the future community project. Second, it meant that in practice most resettlements were single-
race communities, though officially the government was non-discriminatory. Both of these applications played out at Terrebonne. Since TAI was to be a sugarcane farm, the FSA placed advertisements for the project in newspapers throughout the “Sugar Bowl” parishes, and they also may have posted circulars in area post offices. A newspaper notice in Franklin, Louisiana, some fifty miles from Schriever, encouraged “white farm tenants and farm laborers in St. Mary Parish” to apply at the local FSA office for the Terrebonne project. The article explained that the project was of a “cooperative nature” and that:

Each family going in the project will be furnished a comfortable house and five acres of land. Any truck crop may be planted by the family on this individual tract, and the income therefrom is for the family’s use. A yearly rental of $35.00 is charged. This rental goes to pay for livestock and equipment on the project. In addition, the head of each family and any other male member able to do manual labor is employed at current wages on the Resettlement Plantation. At the end of each year after deducting expenses, each family shares in the profit of the plantation.

Preference will be given to French Catholic families, who are familiar with the growing of cane, potatoes, and beans. The applicant must have made farming his principal occupation. It is not necessary that the family own workstock but is desirable if they own subsistence stock such as cows, hogs, poultry, etc. and subsistence foods. Young families are desirable, the age range being from 25-35, though this may be extended from 21-35 if the applicant is in good health and meets the other necessary qualifications.

Families who responded to this and other notices for TAI would then undergo a screening process. The FSA employed trained “Family Selection Specialists” (Mr. Alvis Roberts worked at TAI) and supplied them with a bevy of forms. Among Region 6 forms were those for family referrals (from other government agencies or relief organizations), for application, for interviews, and for preliminary selection. Though there may have been variations in their use, these forms give us some picture of
the many hurdles a family had to pass. The application form, four pages of fine print, may have been enough to discourage some. It began with detailed questions on general biographical information for all family members, such as might be on any government form or job application. It continued with more unusual questions about religious affiliation, membership in unions or lodges, experience in the arts or handicrafts (embroidery? singing? whittling?), present living arrangements (indoor toilets? electricity?), and personal property owned or partly owned (appliances? quilts? flat-irons?).81

After submitting an application, families would be visited by government representatives for an interview. A form entitled “A Field Interviewer’s Analysis of Prospective Rural Community Colonist” followed up on many of the application questions, but required more subjectivity and discrimination of the interviewer. He or she would evaluate husband, wife, and children on qualities such as industry, intelligence, morality, “hereditary weaknesses,” even their aesthetic sensibilities (“Considering the limitation of the family’s resources, is the home fitted up with taste and dignity?”). In a strange mix of questions, the form probed for mundane information such as how many quarts of vegetables the wife canned in a year, and for subtle evaluations such as whether the family’s political, economic, and religious beliefs were “extreme or emotional.” The form asked the employee to “Give facts” or provide specific instances when qualities such as initiative or cooperativeness had been demonstrated.82 Another form called the “Agricultural Data Sheet” required more detail on the husband’s farm employment record, with questions on annual gross income (for several years), crop yields, and an inventory and valuation of his farm equipment, if
The “Medical History” sheet surveyed the general health history and vital
statistics of each family member, even addressing such personal and delicate issues as
hernias, abnormal-looking urine, spitting blood (“give details”), and intoxication (“State
how often, how recently and duration”)!84

After a family’s general fitness for resettlement was sounded, weighed,
calibrated, and finally approved or rejected, they would be passed on to the Terrebonne
Board of Directors for approval. One other method was also employed in the process, at
least in the early stages. In a 1937 letter, M. J. Polmer thanked Senator Ellender for
placing twenty more persons on the resettlement eligibility list.85

Perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised if the FSA found it difficult to satisfy its own
criteria for colonists. The Terrebonne project repeatedly sought applicants in newspaper
articles. A Houma Courier article of September 1938 stated that the project was still
seeking eligible families. Perhaps as a caution, it added:

The plan for the development of this project is something new and it
will be to those families who first enter into it; therefore, it is necessary
that families be capable of understanding and adapting themselves to
these new conditions.86

This description is quite different from the Franklin reference to the project as
“Terrebonne plantation.” Age requirements also changed, gradually expanding from
“25 to 35,” to “25 to 43,” to “21 to 50,” as more applicants were sought.87 Even as late
as the summer of 1940, while the project celebrated its “Settler’s Day,” one project
house stood empty. “Qualified tenants could not be found” to fill it, a newspaper
caption stated.88 Membership selection halted along as slowly as had the rest of
planning. For those found willing and fit, however, the Terrebonne project promised the opportunity of — hard work, and a place to call home if they could make it theirs.

Notes


2 E. B. Whittaker to Carl Taylor, 27 January 1935; Box 4, File “W” RP-060-070; General Correspondence 1935-1942 (GC 35-42); Record Group 96 (RG 96); National Archives, Washington, D.C. All primary documents from the National Archives, Washington, D.C., unless otherwise noted.

3 Letter to Carl Taylor, 27 August 1935; Box 4, File “W” RP-060-070; GC 35-42; RG 96.

4 E. B. Whittaker to Carl Taylor, 11 October 1935; Box 4, File “W” RP-060-070; GC 35-42; RG 96.

5 T. Roy Reid to Rexford Tugwell, 28 December 1935; Box 58; GC 35-42, RG 96.


8 Houma Courier, 23 January 1936, 14 June 1936, 18 June 1936.

9 Henry Wallace to Allen Ellender, 13 March 1937; Box 391, File 200; Project Records 1935-1940 (PR 35-40); RG 96.


12 Appraisal report; Box 278, File 8; Records of Cooperative Associations 1935-1954 (RCA 35-54); File 300, PR 35-40; RG 96.
13 “Terrebonne Project Development,” Box 67, 86-LA-12; General Correspondence and Records of Regional Offices, Region 6 (GCR6); RG 96.

14 Henry Wallace to Allen Ellender, 1 February 1940; Box 77, Folder 3 Projects; Record Group 16 (RG 16).


17 Allen Ellender, handwritten notes, n.d.; C. B. Baldwin to Allen Ellender, 8 September 1937; Allen J. Ellender Papers (AEP); Box 1, Folder 2 (all correspondence from this folder unless otherwise noted); Allen J. Ellender Archives, Ellender Memorial Library, Nicholls State University; Thibodaux, Louisiana.

18 Houma Courier, 16 January 1936, 14 March 1937.

19 M. J. Polmer to Allen Ellender, 26 February 1937, AEP.

20 ibid.

21 Sam Polmer to Allen Ellender, 9 April 1937, AEP.

22 H. B. Naquin to Allen Ellender, 12 October 1937, AEP.

23 ibid.

24 H. B. Naquin to Allen Ellender, 6 January 1938, AEP.

25 H. B. Naquin to Henry Wallace, 19 April 1939; Index to Correspondence, Secretary of Agriculture 1906-1970; RG 16.

26 Miscellaneous letters and telegrams, AEP.

27 M. J. Polmer to Allen Ellender, 1 December 1937, AEP.

28 Anonymous, n.d.; AEP.

29 Anonymous, n.d.; AEP.

30 Reverend Edward Ford to Senator John Overton, 23 November 1937; File 913-01; PR 35-40; RG 96.
31 A. B. Dauterive to E. C. McInnis, 19 July 1937, AEP.

32 E. C. McInnis to A. B. Dauterive, 2 August 1937, AEP.

33 A. B. Dauterive to E. B. Whitaker, 9 August 1937, AEP.

34 A. B. Dauterive to William Alexander, 31 January 1938, citing letter from E. C. McInnis, AEP.

36 H. B. Naquin to Allen Ellender, 6 January 1938, AEP.

37 Miscellaneous telegrams, AEP.

38 E. C. McInnis to A. B. Dauterive, 17 February 1938, AEP.

39 Reverend Edward Ford to Allen Ellender, 15 April 1938, AEP.


41 J. Martian Hamley to Allen Ellender, 11 September 1939; Box 1, Folder 3, AEP.

42 William Alexander to Henry Wallace, 14 April 1937; Box 2630, Files Resettlement Projects, January-July; RG 16.

43 Houma Courier, 5 April 1938.

44 Houma Courier, 8 April 1938.

45 Reverend Edward Ford to Allen Ellender, 10 June 1938; AEP.

46 “Long Term Leases;” Box 2, Records Relating to the History of the FSA, RG 96.

47 Interview with E. B. Whitaker, in Holley, “Two Louisiana Projects,” p. 158.


49 Kane, Bayous, pp. 169-70.

Houma Courier, 30 September 1938.


Holley, “Two Louisiana Projects,” p. 152.

F. F. Aylesworth to J. O. Walker, 26 February 1938; File 300 LA1-LA13; PR 35-40; RG 96.


Office of the Solicitor to William Alexander, 26 March 1938; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

ibid.


Houma Courier, 30 September 1938.

Houma Courier, 23 September 1938.

New Orleans Times-Picayune, 8 April 1939.

ibid.

Eaton, p. 108.

Houma Courier, 21 May 1936; New Orleans Times-Picayune, 8 April 1939.

Mrs. Henry Blanchard, personal interview; Schiever, Louisiana; 15 November 1995, 7 March 1996. Mrs. Dorothy Smith and Mrs. Larue LeBlanc, personal interview; Schiever, Louisiana; 5 March 1996.

Eaton, pp. 87-89.

Articles of Incorporation; Terrebonne Farm, Inc.; 10 May 1938; Records of the Secretary of State, Louisiana; Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Office of the Solicitor to William Alexander; Box 279, File 8; RCA 35-54; RG 96.
69 Articles of Incorporation; Terrebonne Association, Inc.; 8 November 1938; Records of the Secretary of State, Louisiana; Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

70 ibid.

71 Eaton, p. 141.

72 Minutes (of the Terrebonne Association, Inc.); Box 279, File 7; Box 280; RCA 35-54; RG 96. (Hereafter identified as “Minutes.”)


74 Eaton, p. 94.


76 ibid.

77 New Orleans Times-Picayune, 9 October 1938. Memo to Post Office Department; FS 1938, Box 2783, File 2 Projects; GC; RG 16.

78 The Banner-Tribune: Franklin, Louisiana; 5 August 1938.

79 Wendell Lund to J. O. Walker; Box 72, File 950; GC 35-42; RG 96.

80 Series of forms sent to T. Roy Reid, Region 6; Box 64; GC 35-42; RG 96.

81 ibid., “Application.”

82 ibid., “A Field Interviewer's Analysis of Prospective Rural Community Colonist.”

83 ibid, “Agricultural Data Sheet.”

84 ibid, “Medical History.”

85 M. J. Polmer to Allen Ellender, 26 February 1937; AEP.

86 Houma Courier, 9 September 1938.

87 New Orleans Times-Picayune, 8 April 1939, 15 November 1939.

88 New Orleans Times-Picayune, 14 July 1940.
Chapter 5 Place

At the official ground breaking ceremonies for the Terrebonne project on January 14, 1939, Mrs. Allen J. Ellender turned the first spade of dirt. FSA officials and local dignitaries made a number of unremembered speeches from a platform built within sight of the Waubun plantation home. Others attending, including some members, sat on plain benches in the field amid winter cane debris. That Saturday the Senator’s wife made the obligatory gesture; many of the others assembled soon would begin the difficult work-week labor of turning the abstract Terrebonne plans into a habitable place.

Southerners of the 1930’s, writes geographer Merle Prunty, “had a highly developed sense of place.” Most lived in the country or in small towns, and they knew the roads, rivers, crops, houses, and landmarks like old neighbors. Newly arriving members of the Terrebonne project, then, must have had two considerable tasks before them. Not only would they help build a new place, but they would also have to make sense of that place. Though the government presented much of the project as a done deal — bought and planned to the last nail — it also involved the members in construction and continued physical improvements. And as a New Orleans newspaper noted, “much that is old and much that is new” would be combined on the project, a challenging lumber for members to hammer out their sense of home and community.

At the time that Mrs. Ellender was turning the ceremonial shovel of earth, several selected families already lived on or near the project. Three incorporators, Conrad LeBlanc, McClean Ledet, O’Neal Naquin, and their families stayed in the St. George plantation house during part of 1938 and ’39. Other men, Robert Thibodaux, Reola LeBeouf, and Claude Percle, listed Schriever as their residence when they signed as incorporators. Charles Duet had lived on the Waubun plantation since he was eleven, and the Isle of Cuba before that. His father had been a hostler, and Charles
drove tractors. Charles had participated in rehabilitation on the project in ’37; he would later join TAI proper.  

Slowly, other families passed the selection hurdles and joined the project roster to await its completion. Leonard Chauvin lived with his parents in New Orleans where his father Morris worked in a restaurant. “All my people were poor farmers,” he says today, but like many others his father had left farming in bad times. Mr. Chauvin remembers all the hope and all the talk in his family about the project as they waited for the government’s go-ahead. Mrs. Henry Blanchard remembers their interview. You could tell, they say, that the government looked for “people of good character, who could work together.” “All we had was a baby in a blanket and $8.00,” she remembers, and they paid a neighbor to move them to the project.  

Mrs. Blanchard and others recall most of their project neighbors as being “locals” from small settlements on the various branches of the LaFourche or Terrebonne bayous. Like other south Louisiana cane workers, many of them had lived several places before coming to the project, and many probably lived several more after leaving it. Generally, the government preferred to choose unrelated families for its cooperatives in order to avoid cliques and clans within the membership, but several Terrebonne families were kin. Mr. and Mrs. Blanchard applied to TAI after his sister urged them to “come give a try;” later, one of his brothers also joined. After Alcide Brunet helped incorporate the project, he encouraged his son and daughter-in-law, Louis and Irma, to join as well. Before coming to the project, Louis had lived a number of places, including Gran Caillou, Bayou Cane, and Little Caillou. Another incorporator, Joseph Roddy, told his son Beady and his wife to “put y’alls application in.” Beady had lived
at Chacahoula and Ashland; his wife moved back to her birthplace near Schriever when they joined TAI.13

Existing government records on Terrebonne do not contain any membership list for the project, but Appendix B gives a list compiled from names found in other types of TAI documents. Even this tally must be far from complete, however, since some families apparently joined and left before they could ever appear in records such as supervisor reports or minutes of monthly meetings. Such as it is, the list does show two things. First, many other families shared surnames. Though unrelated families often share names in Acadian Louisiana, we might guess that some of them at Terrebonne were indeed kin as families encouraged each other to join. Second, a large majority of families were ancestrally French, just as the government had planned.

We can surmise other things about the families, as well, both from TAI records and from south Louisiana circumstances. Many member families were also Roman Catholic, and like other south Louisiana Catholics, their families tended to be large. One 1939 newspaper article stated that project families averaged seven in number.14 Another article of the same year featured the “Biggest Family on Schriever Project.” It described Alfred Gaudet, his wife, and eleven children as “typical of project families . . . a God-fearing people who are determined to gain the better things of life the hard way — via the soil.”15 If TAI was typical of south Louisiana conditions in another way, more of its members had worked as farm laborers than as tenant farmers. When TAI canvassed its members in 1940 for mules and machinery they could sell to the association, only a handful of members listed any.16 Of course, some may have been reluctant to sell even for a good price; on the other hand, the average laborer probably
would not have owned the plows, cultivators, or planters which tenant farmers might have and some members listed. Interestingly, a newspaper article which profiled board member and president Conrad LeBlanc noted that he had gone into “farming for himself” in 1933 as a tenant.17 Today, that phrase usually implies ownership; in the 1930’s Sugar Bowl it distinguished someone from the more typical condition of farm worker.

Tenant farmer or not, in a 1970’s interview, Mr. LeBlanc said he didn’t “mind admitting that I was not in good financial condition when I got into the project.” He objected to an article by author Donald Holley which suggested that applicants to TAI had to be in good fiscal shape. “No one in the association was in good financial condition when they applied,” he continued. “It was the worst part of a depression, and the purpose of the project was to give the people jobs to get them into good financial condition.”18 Actually, the FSA assumed its applicants were probably in debt, but they favored those whose debts were not too deep.19 And, of course, those who were hard-working and resourceful. Early news stories about the Terrebonne project often featured profiles of just such members. A Houma Courier article lauded O’Neil Naquin and Conrad LeBlanc for their success with an RA loan to make straw brooms.20 Mr. Naquin’s daughter, Dorothy Smith, remembers the laborious process: her father would hook one end of wire on a nail in the wall, and holding the other end tightly, he would slowly wrap the broomstraw to the handle by pulling himself across the floor on a sack. In such a fashion he turned out hundreds of brooms in several sizes — in addition to his regular work.21
Two longer feature articles in the spring of ’39 also profiled hard-working member-incorporators. A New Orleans Times-Picayune article in April quoted 42-year-old tenant farmer Milton Toups as saying, “I think we are going to put it over. I think everybody will get together and work hard and put it across. I know I’ll make a better living.” Described as “typical” and “tanned by the hot suns of many summers,” Mr. Toups went on to explain:

I was born and reared on plantations and I’ve raised sugar cane, corn and beans all my life. This is all the work that I know how to do, but I’ve never been able to get anywhere. . . . Now I’m on the project and I’m going to make a better living. I’m working now and getting paid for it, and when we make a crop I’ll get part of the profits. I’ve got two chances to make money and there isn’t a kick on anything. . . . My wife is tickled to death over the whole situation and everybody at home is well pleased. I feel more independent, too.22

The “kick” that Mr. Toups mentioned probably refers to the “kickback,” an illegal practice of short-changing wages or making a worker pay back some of his wages.23

A New Orleans Sunday Item-Tribune feature two months later included an interview with Robert Thibodaux, project member and great-grandson of former Louisiana governor Henry Schuyler Thibodaux. Robert Thibodaux had worked as a laborer, a tenant, and a painter to support his eight children. Like Toups, Thibodaux also was described as a rugged son of the soil: “tall, thin, weather-beaten.” “I guess every man would like to own land,” he was quote, adding:

But it’s pretty hard to raise a family and acquire land as a farm worker or tenant. I think this project gives my family more security. I know we’ll eat better. I do some reading. I’ve read how bad off those floating farmers are in California. I guess we’re pretty well off right here.24

New stories featuring articulate and diligent settlers such as Toups and Thibodaux were surely meant to demonstrate the worthiness of the project as a whole and of individual
members. The stories painted an optimistic picture of their future on the project, through the application of hard work, of course. In articles such as these, the FSA re-emphasized to the public that it was not a relief agency, that there would be no free lunches, only a chance to build a better life. As Mrs. Augustin Rodrigue says, looking back at the project years when she raised seven of her eighteen children, “It was no honey and pie.”

Even though members such as these made the courageous step to move their families to the new and much-untried project, the community was in no sense a blank slate for them. Personally, they brought their own expectations, skills, and opinions, along with quilts, chickens, dishes, and the like. Physically, the project site itself never approached the featureless, empty space which its map (Figure 10) might lead us to believe — though everyone involved might have preferred it that way. Instead, arriving settlers confronted new homes, and: crops, weeds, briars, shacks, debris, rubble, ruts, and other such accumulations that might cling to old plantations. Some of these existing features would be a hindrance; others would be useful for the new community.

The ambitious Terrebonne building program included plans for eighty homes, barns, and outbuildings for members; new or improved roads, ditches, and farm and pasture land; a roadside market; community and office buildings (including a clinic and a library); a blacksmith shop; and a vocational shop. According to one Region 6 report, officials also considered eventually adding a potato storage plant, a grist mill, a cooperative store, and “possibly” a cannery and a quick-freezing plant for muskrat fur, shrimp, and for legs. If the project had lasted its proposed ninety-nine years, perhaps more of these facilities would have been actually built. In reality, the considered
Figure 10 — Project map
Source: National Archives; Box 279, File 2; RCA 35-43; RG 96

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projects remained merely that. For the other facilities, the government in several instances used existing structures. They remodeled the St. George and the Waubun plantation homes to house the community and administrative services, and they used some other existing buildings for barns or lumber. The government directed most of its building efforts to the member homes, outbuildings, and roads.

Planners debated the placement of homes well before settling on the final arrangement, best seen in Figure 11. This composite aerial photography made by the Department of Agriculture in December 1940 clearly shows the regularly spaced, twin dots of project houses and barns, their brighter roofs and driveways reflecting white. By looking at this photograph and the preceding map, we can better understand what physical arrangements the government made for TAI, as well as what it rejected.

We already know that planners discarded the idea of a clustered village with outlying fields. Clearly, the project homes are far more widely spaced than the small town of Schriever, the miniscule group of buildings at number 1 on the map. Nor did the project follow the model of a plantation, even though news and government accounts often compared it to one in other respects. The sugarcane plantations of south Louisiana were themselves village-like in design. The workers’ homes or quarters (or slave homes, prior to the Civil War), usually stood either along a small street (called the “linear” quarters by scholars), or on a grid of streets (the “block” quarters). In either case the homes were compactly clustered, as seen in several other plantations in the photograph. The Magnolia plantation home, quarters, and working sugar mill lie south of the project; the home (2) is noticeable by its dark canopy of trees. The project itself
Figure 11 — Aerial photo of TAI, the big picture in 1940
Source: National Archives, Terrebonne Parish, CQC 1941P, Record Group 145

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also contained the remnants of its former plantations, most noticeably the Waubun. The plantation home became the community center (3), seen at the center of the tree-dotted triangle of land. The remains of quarters (4) show as a narrow double line of buildings southwest of the home. The project as a whole dwarfs these small plantation quarters.

Terrebonne project differed from yet another local settlement pattern, as well. With few exceptions, townsfolk, “petit habitant,” and planter alike built their homes alongside the bayous and rivers of south Louisiana. In the aerial photo, for instance, notice the many buildings, including a few project homes, strung like beads along either side of Bayou Terrebonne. This ancient practice stemmed from the survey system used by the French along waterways in Louisiana and other colonial territories. Under the “long lot” system (or the “arpent” system, after a unit of measure), land was held in long strips with their narrow ends fronting the water; thus the homes sat close together, especially as land was subdivided into yet narrower strips. As a cultural practice, long lots particularly suited the unique terrain of south Louisiana. Each landholder had access to the water and parallel road transportation, and to the different types of land which stretched backwards from the bayou. The highest land along the natural or man-made levees offered protection from floods. Behind it fields and pasture sloped ever-so-gradually downward, finally reaching the timber and animal rich swamp or marsh.31

When we look at the TAI map and photograph, we can see that planners largely rejected the traditional bayou settlement pattern. This is especially interesting since at least one social scientist of the time was suggesting this very pattern as the ideal for new communities. In the 1930’s Louisiana State University sociologist T. Lynn Smith published several articles endorsing long-lot settlements as a “third alternative” to either
villages or isolated farms. He argued that like the solitary farmstead, the long lot allowed the individual farmer direct contact with his own property and farm operations; like the village, it offered better access to transportation and social activities.  

TAI planners apparently paid little heed to Smith’s ideas when they distributed the project homes along several miles of roads. It is important to note, however, that the project was still conceived as a community. The homes were not the distant quarter section farms found in other parts of the country; nor were they “infiltration” homes, another type of FSA resettlement. Infiltration placed individual families on available land pocketed in between non-project farms. Outside of the midwest or northeast, however, the government saw too many social and economic advantages in the idea of community to make wide use of isolated, infiltration farms.

In one government study of seven resettlements (TAI not among them), sociologists attributed “increased cooperativeness” to close spacing of resettlement homes. (This was no mere speculation, by the way, but a conclusion from much laborious tracking of members’ social visits, borrowing or sharing of tools, pooling work, and so forth.) Why then, didn’t the government make Terrebonne a tight little village or a bayou-side hamlet? The answer lies, again, in the uncertainty of the project’s ultimate aims. In a 1940 letter to Senator Ellender, Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace explained:

If it should become desirable or necessary at some future time physically to subdivide the project for resale to individual families, a subdivision plat, which was made some time ago, indicates that this could be accomplished in a very satisfactory and equitable manner. When this tentative proposal was prepared, careful thought was given to such matters as location of dwellings, variation in soil, proximity to roads, electric light, school buses, mail routes, etc.
Thus at Terrebonne each house corresponded with a larger unit which existed only on paper, like the Figure 10 map. Each unit was a possible subdivision. The project layout split the difference between the largely unstated possibility of individual farmsteads and the claimed benefits of a cooperative community.

The actual construction and improvements on Terrebonne were also a mixed affair. Some work was contracted to another government agency, the works Projects Administration. WPA men shouldered part of the ongoing work on fences and drainage ditches. Fences, as we will see, were as much a favorite emblem of the FSA as they were necessities. Ditches provided all-important drainage for the sugarcane, which thrives in moist ground and suffers in wet. In rainy and low-lying south Louisiana, ditches cross the landscape like netting.

In earlier projects, the RA and the FSA had employed their own labor for construction. After July of 1938, however, by policy they used private contractors for all construction, while retaining government engineering, supervision, building methods, and plans. Thus, the government avoided the appearance of competing in the housing industry, and more money flowed into local hands. This was what, no doubt, many project supporters had been agitating for. Private companies were awarded bids for building TAI homes, roads, bridges, and culverts; whenever possible they were also urged to hire project members. The government believed that members who helped build their own homes would feel a deeper connection to the place, have more invested in it. And, on a more practical note, they would earn extra money. Though,
as member Louis Brunet allows, it was “twenty cents an hour. No more than forty hours a week? What you gonna do with that? Seven dollars and somethin’ a week!”

Mr. Brunet helped measure out house foundations and set them up with special forms sent out by the government. The combination of private and federal labor, both skilled and unskilled, succeeded because the FSA had developed a detailed and efficient method for house building. Or, at least by 1939 they had. The embarrassingly high construction costs at early resettlements provoked Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes to remark that the government was spending money “like drunken sailors.” By the time TAII was being built, however, the architects and engineers of the FSA’s Construction Division had worked out fairly efficient and standardized methods. They used pre-cutting and pre-fabricating in a centralized yard near a railroad on the project, and took completed house sections out to the homesites. Their engineers provided a detailed set of plans and instructions for the division of labor.

Using such methods, a large number of houses could be erected fairly quickly. Thus, but a few months after groundbreaking, the association’s minutes recorded that “a drawing was held for choice of selection of Houses and the members in turn made first, second and third choices.” Democratic it would be, even if not as satisfying as being able to pick and choose completely. Members joining later sometimes had more say in their choice of homes. In the end, seventy-one, not eighty, were built. Within the larger cooperatively rented property, each house stood within a six acre plot of the member’s own use. Two of the six acres were rent free, and held the house and outbuildings: privy, poultry house, and barn. The government charged $30.00 yearly rent on the other four acres, which were for the family’s orchard, garden, and livestock. Members paid
their rent late in the year, after the cane harvest, because in theory they would have recently shared in the association’s annual profits.46

Although a few resettlements featured more experimental house designs, rammed earth or concrete slab walls, for instance, most followed fairly traditional forms.47 This was not to say the government simply pulled plans from their Sears Roebuck catalog. As with other aspects of resettlement, the RA and FSA gave considerable thought to the housing needs of their settlers (even if the end results might seem obvious). Planners believed housing had importance beyond mere shelter. For rural people, the house was as much a factory as it was a living space. On the porch or in the kitchen, especially, family members canned or dried food, churned butter, sewed and mended, washed and cooked. And, they needed storage for all the food and equipment which they could not easily run to the store and buy.48 Beyond these practical aspects, the government believed (as most of us do) that the house also had a symbolic quality. As an instruction book for FSA employees noted, “poor housing on the farm, as much as any other single factor, has marked the impoverished people on the land and closed the gates of opportunity in their faces.”49

Against the housing needs of settlers, the FSA tried to balance its own political need. It could not afford to spend too much and raise a public outcry, nor to furnish homes which far outshone those of other taxpayers. A 1939 report on resettlement housing marked that “all unnecessary gables, beams, and rafters, as well as all purely decorative features, were eliminated” from FSA homes.50 No architectural gew-gaws. Plantations in the area might boast such fair names as Madewood or Laurel Valley; the Terrebonne Association had the J-3A, the R-1, the K-1A1, and the M-2. These TAI

90

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house types ranged in cost from about $1500 to $1700 each; barns and poultry houses added another $650.00 to the price. Figure 12 shows floor plans and Figure 13 elevations for the four different house types. Each wood frame house had three bedrooms, kitchen (or kitchen-dining area), living room, front porch, and a screened “work porch” to the rear. They differed in size, room arrangement, and number of closet, pantry, or storage spaces.

Within the houses, the kitchens had open shelving and a counter with built-in “zinc” as locals called it. Houses had no indoor plumbing, despite the fact that FSA planners generally claimed it was a necessity. President Roosevelt even had an opinion, reputedly telling a resettlement official, “These people [resettlement families in general] ought to have plumbing. There’s no reason why these people shouldn’t have plumbing. So put in plumbing. Put in bathrooms.” And he drew a sketch of one himself. The Terrebonne project didn’t benefit by the President’s wisdom, but it did have provisions for future plumbing. Each house had a large, cypress stave cistern, and settlers could later buy pipe and connect their sink to it. Also, the pantries were designed to be eventually converted into bathrooms, though one member claims you could bump your knees plenty in such a small space. Meanwhile, families had pre-cast, concrete outhouses, good enough that one member used his all his life, well after a bathroom was added. Neither were project houses initially connected with gas or electricity. At the members’ request, the project installed one emergency-use telephone in 1940.

The lack of conveniences was perhaps not so uncommon for the time, but it was more unusual that the houses did not have fireplaces. One FSA official even specifically criticized the TAI house plans for this deficiency. Instead, the buildings
Figure 12 — Floor plans, bathrooms not included

Source: National Archives, Box 279, File 1, RCA 35-54, RG 96
Figure 13 — House types, trees not included
Source: National Archives, Box 279, File 1, RCA 35-54, RG 96
had chimneys for the members' own stoves and heaters, presuming they had them. This same official also complained that the front porches were too small, and they were in comparison with the long galerie that crosses the front of many a south Louisiana home.° Each house had one or more closets, which may have been a novelty if a family had lived in a very old house before coming to the project. The FSA, ever conscious of the meaning of things as much as their use, said that the general lack of closets in Southern homes contributed "to the disorganizing forces of poverty."°

No detail was too small to overlook. The government also took an interest in the families' furnishings. In a monthly report from 1940, the home supervisor, Mrs. Ruth Lina, noted the Region 6 suggestion to purchase needed items such as beds and stoves and put them in storage until families could buy them.° Later, the project officials displayed furniture for sale in the community office building. Some had been built by other resettlements which had more extensive handicraft programs; some was from the community's own woodworking shop. Mrs. Lina enthused that "the men as well as the women are very well pleased with this opportunity to purchase long muchly needed, stout, well made, durable furniture," and she listed recent purchases and orders for two over-stuffed chairs, cabinet desk, dining suite, folding screen, tables, and stool.

What did members think of their project homes? Mrs. Beady Roddy puts her opinions simply: "This house was NEW when we got here!"° Which of us wouldn't like that — a clean, square, and freshly painted house like the one in Figure 14?. To be the first family to live in a house, perhaps never to have lived in a new house before, is surely a wonderful thing. How much more so when the times were tough? Settlers today all remember how the homes were well built, sturdy, and brand new, at least to
the early families. (Members joining later sometimes lived in houses already vacated by other families.) But, as with most houses, there were a few problems. The association's minutes mention roof leaks several times, and members were repeatedly urged to report other defects they found. In a 1942 statement made as the government was preparing to close the project, community manager Harmount asserted it had been a mistake to use pine wood in the damp, salty climate. (Cypress was a traditional lumber.) In just a few years, several porches had been entirely re-built, some window frames and casing replaced, and Mr. Harmount predicted even heavier repairs ahead. There were smaller problems, too. The floors, for instance, had been oiled with some unpleasant preservative which had to be scrubbed off, especially if families had crawling babies.

Besides the nuts-and-bolts variety of problems, other issues, too, may have challenged the members' sense of home and place, not to mention their sense of humor. The houses' appearance, for example, caused some consternation. According to a local newspaper report, the four different house plans ensured that "a monotonous 'tenement' atmosphere" would not mark the community. Nonetheless, the houses were all vaguely bungalow-style, and every one of them was painted white with yellow trim. Being new, they had few large plants around to individualize them. And so, coming home from visiting, on a late night, with no street lights — it wasn't always easy to tell just which home was your own, says one member! Also, for better or worse, the identical colors and similar styles helped stamp the community as a government project.

Members also may have had to adjust to the distances which the project encompassed. As noted earlier, the houses stood farther from the main road and farther from each other than was customary to the region. Schriever was just a hamlet, and
Thibodaux was another mile and a half away. Few members owned cars when they arrived. These might have been some of the reasons friends of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Blanchard told them: “You’re moving to the sticks!” Mrs. Beady Roddy remembers that neighbors seemed so far away, especially before all the houses were filled. Notice in the preceding photograph that two other houses are just visible, one seen to the left of the porch and another appearing just above the cistern; the neighboring homes on the same road, of course, were closer. When the project first began, settlers had to get their mail near the community center or near the Magnolia plantation south of the project; it was a long walk either way. As the aerial photograph showed, there were few trees, and Mr. and Mrs. Louis Brunet remember that “you could look in any direction and see for a quarter to a half mile.” And yet at times, tall thickets of green and tan cane must have curtained off members on one road from those on the next.

Members likely had little time to reflect on either the differences, the drawbacks, or the advantages this new place might offer; they were too busy transforming it. Author Lois Craig has written that New Deal community planners “shared a vision that was part of a continuing American dream — clean, white, green, and preferably fenced.” The Terrebonne project fell considerably short of that vision in 1939, and members had the job of putting it to rights. In fact, the task was probably bigger than anyone had envisioned. In the Annual Financial Report for 1939, members justified the project’s cash outlays and stated that “we, the undersigned, find the cost of bringing this land, which was untenantable and unsuitable for cultivation, into cultivation amounts to a goodly sum.” They went on to describe improvements made to hundreds of acres, some out of cultivation for ten years: clearing underbrush, briars, shrubs; digging,
cleaning, and cutting banks on ditches; and doing extra plowing. Of course, some cane
had been planted in earlier rehabilitation activities and still remained on the project.
(One planting of cane can yield crops for two or three years.) Building construction,
however, damaged or plowed up much of it, and Region 6 official T. Roy Reid had to
explain some $8000 crop loss to his superiors.\textsuperscript{75}

Individual families also struggled to bring their six acres into shape. Mr. Morris
Chauvin remembers that there was still debris left from Isle of Cuba plantation
buildings all over his family's first unit; they later moved to another site on the project.\textsuperscript{76}
The Blanchards say their lot was corrugated with unleveled rows from cane plantings,
and a six-foot-wide cane row is no mean thing.\textsuperscript{77} During a 1940 house and garden
contest, home supervisor Mrs. Lina reported that many families were cutting down
weeds and cane, and filling and leveling their yards where rows and even road beds had
crossed them.\textsuperscript{78} Without grass to immediately cover them, the bare acres could send up
a cloud of dust on a windy day. Mrs. Beady Roddy remembers one of those days:

\begin{quote}
When we moved here, the grass was tall and we had to cut it. I was so
discouraged the first month we moved here. My husband cut and burnt
ground. I had to wash with a washboard and hang to dry. One day it had
started raining and the wind blew all my clothes down in that burnt
black ground. When I went outside — the back door would latch from
inside — I said Beady \textit{cher} [to her young son], stay in the house. When
I came to come back in he had turned the little latch and I was locked.
And I had some white beans boiling. I started crying, and he was trying
to turn the little latch \ldots Finally Beady got the door open — we were
both crying. The same December we came I said, "Oh Lord, maybe we
shouldn't have moved here."\textsuperscript{79}
\end{quote}

Despite the rough beginnings, the Beady family stayed. With the other families,
they practically pioneered the land all over again.
Unlike most pioneers, however, TAI members were given a master plan to follow when hewing the project "wilderness." Figure 15 shows just that plan. The FSA had already determined the outlines of each six acre unit, and the buildings were in place when most families arrived. Even a person’s walk to the outhouse was clearly laid out. Again, the aerial photograph confirms this arrangement with its miniscule trios of house, barn, and chicken coop. Not visible to the air were the fences. “Oh yes, there were fences everywhere,” recalls Mrs. Henry Blanchard, with a suggestion of amusement.\(^80\) The FSA had made a discovery about fences, it believed. “We discovered,” wrote William Alexander:

> that most of these places where they had rented had no fenced-in garden. Some poor tired woman would say, “We planted a little patch out there in the field, but the mule got in it and ate it up.” So we learned to put some woven wire, and we discovered that, nine times out of ten, when we put a fence around that garden, it became a garden. The fence had psychological value. The woman knew that if she planted something the mule or pig wouldn’t get it. The fence made the place look nicer, too, and made the garden a fixed thing.\(^81\)

Not everyone agreed with this wisdom. The head of the FSA’s Farm and Home Management criticized the six acre plan for Terrebonne, pointing out that so many fences would simply trap more weeds.\(^82\) This may be one reason that the old plantation quarters were rarely fenced.\(^83\) Nevertheless, with FSA guidance the project continued to build fences doggedly, both for the six acres and for pastures. Home supervisor reports and association minutes alike mention the fencing and lack of it, delay in it, handicaps without it, and progress on it. In January of 1941, two years after ground-breaking, the minutes note that only three units still needed fences.\(^84\)
Figure 15 — Six acres and a mule at TAI
Source: Houma Courier, 14 June 1970

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Other observers agreed with the FSA aesthetic. A 1941 visitor to the project described it as “one of the cleanest, best laid out and best maintained” communities he had seen. It was certainly organized. In addition to fences, the FSA had plans for numerous other landscape details on the homesites. Mrs. Lina served as FSA mouthpiece and manager for these ideas. An excerpt from her October 1940 report gives a sample of some of the settlers’ landscaping activity:

The appearance of the interior and exterior of 59 homes now occupied have shown marked improvement as shell road leading to barns and all points of use, and to out houses are being shelled. The Project Engineer spent an entire half-day with Home Management Supervisor in the laying out of yards. Every type of house was staked off, thus all front and back lawns will be uniform and cut up the least possible to permit proper mowing. Wood piles are neatly stacked with much thought and care given to proper placing of wood pile convenient to kitchen door.

As we can somewhat see here, the FSA’s ideal project was marked by uniformity, and progress towards that ideal was tallied in numbers. Would members have to fall back on their own resources to build wash houses? No, a wash house plan would be sent from the Little Rock office, with instructions for its location. What about clotheslines? Mrs. Lina noted that homemakers had received their “mimeographed plan of approved clothes line” and that five had been built to date. Or, that yards (staked and measured) had improved by the purchase of sixteen lawn mowers, thus far. Or, that 80% of the families had mail boxes to date, no doubt all located at the prescribed spot.

Naturally, the FSA also planned for the horticultural aspects of the yards. Region 6 Landscape Architect Lester Hamilton sent out a raft of materials to assist home supervisors: publications such as “The Home Beautiful” and “Model Landscape
Plan for J-3A1 House;” templates or stencils for the arrangement of plants; and
drawings for garden features like gates and trellises. He had instructions for sodding
yards, laying out sidewalks, and propagating shrubs, and helpful hints and cautions such
as: “the improper arrangement of flowers about the home detracts from the beauty.”

Mrs. Lina herself gave demonstrations, advice, and cuttings. At one home
demonstration meeting, for example, women discussed evergreens, they helped
landscape one house, and they took cuttings of the Japanese Yew, Ligustrum, jasmine,
and other plants they had used. Later the project also developed its own nursery, with
shrubs and plants for sale to members.

Landscaping may have been Mrs. Lina’s favorite work, because she certainly
glowed over some of her successes. For two of her demonstrations, 32 women, one
man, and one teenage boy attended, despite pouring rain. “The young boy who
attended,” she wrote:

    told the daughter of the winner in Landscaping during Better Homes
    and Garden week; “Well, Marcia Mae, you might as well get ready
    to move your sign as Charlie is on the Project now and our yard will
    be the 1941 Prize Winner.” Charlie is certainly working towards better
    landscaping as he has their yard leveled, drained, terraced and grass
    planted all in four weeks.

In February of 1941, Mrs. Lina exulted that each of the 58 occupied homes had planted
five trees apiece. They were arranged, she added, according to plan so that “the house
will still be the picture and the yard the picture frame.” In the same report she also
noted that the men were going to plant native trees on the roads, and local palmettos on
ditch banks to prevent caving.
And yet, a year later, Mrs. Lina could write that it was this month that members had “really gone in for proper permanent landscaping” on “homesites heretofore bare.” Twenty-five homes, not fifty or seventy, were “properly” landscaped.\textsuperscript{96} Members may not have been as enthusiastic as Mrs. Lina about the “house beautiful” plans, and, given the original condition of their property, they simply may not have had the time or energy to create prize-winning yards. Ironically, the FSA acknowledged that tenant or laboring families elsewhere had no incentive to make home improvements because of the indefiniteness of their situation, yet the uncertain future of TAI may have created the same attitude. Or, in some cases, families simply may have fallen foul of the FSA’s landscaping ideals. According to members and in-laws Dorothy Smith and LaRue LeBlanc, “they wanted to run this project just like they wanted to run those in Arkansas and other places.”\textsuperscript{97}

Members and administrators sometimes wrangled over what plants to use, for instance. The use of native or regional plants was a sensitive issue at Terrebonne and elsewhere. Mrs. Lina noted in her reports that locally common trees were planted; some members disagree. Mrs. Smith and Mrs. LeBlanc remember that the project wanted them to plant orchard trees such as apples and apricots, not the more usual oranges or figs. The association and individual families grew vegetables such as broccoli and cauliflower which were also unusual for the area. They were intended for home use and for sale, but as the two women explain, “If you’re not used to eating something, if they never ate it in their life, they’re not gonna buy it!”\textsuperscript{99} Still, in the matter of their yards, members had some authority of their own; clearly they must have, because so many did not fall into Mrs. Lina’s victorious percentages. When another woman planted a
weeping willow — common, along with chinaberry, to practically every plantation — Mrs. Lina told her to dig it up. The reply? “Not till I die!” And it stayed. On any project the home supervisor could only advise, cajole, urge, or use any other persuasive technique she might possess; she had no administrative power to demand.

On the other hand, the FSA had absolute authority over the project’s budget, all expenses, and all changes to the budget. As with the clotheslines and wash houses, requests for purchases or improvements went through a bureaucratic chain of petition. The association’s minutes record numerous instances of what was surely a tiresome process. In 1939, when members struggled to bring the old land back into shape, they wanted a drag line. “It seems to be the consensus of the Regional office that a drag line be purchased to do ditching work,” the minutes read, “however, nothing has been decided as of the present.” The next year members decided they needed a stable on Julia plantation, and they selected an FSA plan (Barn Plan 411-12, to be exact) for its construction. They still had to request Mr. Harmount “to secure permission to erect this structure with Project Labor and to send for said plan at once.” Delays must have been common; denials must have been irritating. In another example, Region 6 officials denied permission to install a hot water heater and pressure pump on Isle of Cuba; as it was “needed very badly,” members planned to repeat their requests for it.

Members’ houses may have occasioned friction at times, too. Clearly the FSA cherished opinions of what settlers should do with their homes and landscaping; they also had directions for what they should not do. For example, during one of the monthly community meetings, along with asking members to keep their yards clean and weeded, keep the cows away from fertilizer, and keep all the barns closed, Mr. Harmount also
reminded them not to put nails in the wall or porches of their houses!105 So, were they really “their” houses? Again the next year the minutes record that Mr. Harmount:

cautioned the members in regard to driving large nails in the walls of the houses and also the blocking up of the barns. It was pointed out that the buildings on the Project are the property of the Government and anyone wanting to do any changing whatsoever around the units should get a permit from the office to do so.106

This is not to imply that members and the FSA were constantly wrangling over whether or where they could plant a rosebush or hang a picture. Settlers did make some changes: notice the swing hanging on the porch of the house pictured earlier.

Officially, though, the community manager was correct. None of the settlers owned their homes, nor did the association own the property as a whole. The question was — would they ever? And meanwhile, what kind of place was the project supposed to be, really? As we have seen, the government never clearly stated its purpose, and it’s little wonder that members today have mixed opinions. The Brunets remember that “it was supposed to be a big thing, like what Russia had . . . a kind of communism.” Mr. Leonard Chauvin states that “it was never a commune — only an association to pay off a debt with a promise of a carrot so to speak, of ‘forty acres and a mule’.” Other members simply speak of “working for the government” or working on the plantations.107

And if the FSA sometimes made conflicting statements in print, their architectural message was no clearer. Geographers frequently compare landscapes and buildings to a text which can be read and interpreted. A homelier phrase which we all use is “reading between the lines.” What would a member or a visitor “read,” for instance, just walking along one of the project roads, hearing the shells crunch
underfoot, looking around, and thinking? As seen in Figure 16, on one side might be a
long, unbroken field of cane, much like that found on any plantation. On the other, the
loose string of project houses, with wash flapping on the lines or children on the
porches. Or was each home a little farm of its own, with its gardens and chickens and
pigs out back? Ahead, the community building and the office building, or were they
really still substantial plantation homes? And what, if anything, looked like a
cooperative? What does a cooperative look like?

The members' homes and the plantation buildings seem to contradict each other.
One seems the image of a democratic group of independent farmers: everyone created
equal, down to the number of bedrooms and the size of the barns. The other (Figure 17)
suggests the hierarchy of the plantation, and the power and prestige of those who reside
in the big house. The very fact that the FSA used the plantation homes is interesting in
itself. In nearly two-thirds of all the resettlements, the FSA created new buildings for
their community and administrative functions. "It seems to us," Secretary of
Agriculture Henry Wallace wrote, "that these buildings, because of their focal position,
present unique opportunities to bring to rural people, particularly those of the lower
income strata, many social, educational and cultural advantages they have hitherto been
denied." Consequently, in many cases the FSA recruited artists from the Federal Art
Project to decorate these focal buildings with special murals or sculpture. Thus the
centers themselves, their designs and images, were opportunities for the FSA to convey
its ideals. What did the plantation homes at Terrebonne convey, then? That the
government was merely the new boss? Or that the members were the new bosses?
After all, one house was officially designated the FSA headquarters, but the other held
Figure 16 — Project road, a long walk to a new home
Source: Library of Congress, LCUSF34, Neg. 54261D
the members’ own meetings. Probably the simplest message is that it was cheaper to remodel than to build new! But the FSA, an organization that read meaning into woodpiles and fences and closets, was surely aware that every building on the project carried its own packet of ideas and symbols — even if sometimes ambiguously.

Notes


3 *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 9 October 1938.

4 Smith/Leblanc, interview.

5 Articles of Incorporation, Terrebonne Association, Inc.

6 Mr. and Mrs. Charles Duet, personal interview; Schriever, Louisiana; 27 September, 1995.

7 Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Chauvin, personal interview; Schriever, Louisiana; 7 March 1996.

8 Blanchard, interview.

9 Smith/Leblanc, interview.

10 Eaton, p. 95.

11 Blanchard, interview.

12 Brunet, interview.


15 *Houma Courier*, 6 September 1939.

16 Minutes, 19 April 1940, 13 May 1940.

18 Houma Courier, 19 June 1970.

19 Eaton, p. 95.

20 Houma Courier, 25 June 1936.

21 Smith/Leblanc, interview.

22 The New Orleans Times-Picayune, 8 April 1939.

23 Gaer, p. 194.


25 Mrs. Augustin Rodrigue, personal interview; Schriever, Louisiana; 15 November 1995.

26 “Proposal for Development of Terrebonne Project RR-LA-12;” Box 278, File 1; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

27 “Terrebonne: Scope of Report;” Box 67, 86-LA-12; GCR6; RG 96.


33 First Annual Report, p. 36.

35 Henry Wallace to Allen Ellender 18 May 1940; Box 77, Folder 3, Projects; RG 16.

36 Minutes, 25 October 1939.


40 Eaton, pp. 91-92.

41 Brunet, interview.


44 Minutes, 5 March 1939.

45 “Terrebonne Project Development;” Box 67, 86-LA-12; GCR6; RG 96.

46 Blanchard, interview.


49 Gaer, p. 33.


53 Minutes, 29 May 1940.

54 Blanchard, interview.

55 Chauvin, interview.

56 Minutes, 26 June 1940.

57 “Comments of Economic Justification of Terrebonne Association, Inc.;” Box 279, File 10; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

58 Kane, Bayous, p. 32.

59 Gaer, p. 32.

60 “Semi-Monthly Report of Assistant RR or Home Supervisor” (series of reports hereafter identified as Mo. Rpt. HS), 16 August-September 1940; Box 25, 183-01 Project Reports; GC 35-42: RG 96.


62 Roddy, interview.

63 Minutes, 2 August 1939; 16 August 1939, 30 August 1939, 13 September 1939, 27 September 1939, 11 October 1939, 22 November 1939.

64 “Comments by the Community Manager in the 1943 Financial Statement and Operating of Terrebonne Association, Inc.;” Box 280; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

65 Blanchard, interview.

66 The New Orleans Times-Picayune, 9 October 1938.

67 Houma Courier, 6 September 1939.

68 Blanchard, interview.

69 ibid.

70 Roddy, interview.

71 Roddy, interview; Chauvin, interview.

72 Brunet, interview.
73 Craig, p. 343.


75 T. Roy Reid to W. W. Alexander, 23 May 1940; Box 279, File 9; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

76 Chauvin, interview.

77 Blanchard, interview.

78 Mo. Rpt. HS; 1-15 May 1940.

79 Roddy, interview.

80 The New Orleans Times-Picayune, 8 April 1939.


82 F. F. Aylesworth to J. O. Walker, 26 February 1937; Box 391 LA1-LA13; PR 35-40; RG 96.

83 Rehder, p. 189.

84 Minutes, 19 March 1939, 16 August 1939, 30 August 1939, 13 September 1939, 20 December 1939, 14 January 1941; Mo. Rpt. HS 16 May-June 1940.

85 Houma Daily Courier, 20 May 1941.

86 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 October-November 1940.

87 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 July-August 1940.

88 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 May-June 1940.

89 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 June-July 1940.

90 Monthly Report, TAI (not home supervisor's report; hereafter identified as Mo. Rpt. TAI), 25 February 1942; Box 22, 183-01; GC 35-42; RG 96.

91 E. B. Whittaker to C. B. Baldwin, 13 January 1941; Box 34, 523-530; GC 35-42; RG 96. "Report of Activities for May 27-June 1, 1940 by Lester Hamilton,
Landscape Architect Reg. VI;” Box 12, RP150-RP163, Folder RP 160-0, January 1940; GC 35-42; RG 96.

92 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 October-November 1940.


94 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 July-August 1940.


97 Smith/Leblanc, interview.

98 ibid.

99 ibid., Rehder, p. 189.

100 Eaton, p. 116.

101 Eaton, p. 111.

102 Minutes, 8 November 1939.

103 Minutes 19 April 1940.

104 Minutes 17 June 1941.

105 Minutes 28 August 1940.

106 Minutes 12 March 1941.

107 Brunet, Chauvin, Smith/LeBlanc, Rodrigue, Roddy; interviews.

108 Conkin, pp. 193, 196.

109 Henry Wallace to Harry Hopkins, 6 April 1933; Box 2630, File 2 Resettlement Projects Jan.-June; GC 16.
Chapter 6 Cooperation

Members of the Terrebonne Association gathered for their first Annual Meeting on February 2, 1940. They met not to make decisions but rather to hear about the state of their association from its managers. A treasurer’s report was made, documents explained again for the benefit of newcomers, and the general manager George Harmount gave his report as well. According to the minutes, “he stressed the necessity of working together harmoniously, [and] pointed out that each man was working for himself individually as well as collectively.” It was one variation on the constant theme of cooperation at Terrebonne.

Since the Terrebonne association was organized as a cooperative, it stands to reason that its members would be asked to cooperate themselves. The project was not just a place, a thing, a noun. It was also an action, a verb, and an attitude, at least in theory. Remember that even during the selection process, FSA officials had looked for applicants who showed a willingness to cooperate. Whether in group meetings, daily activities, or financial accounting, cooperation was the ideal standard of behavior for everyone involved in the project. We might wonder, though, just exactly what that meant. Was, for example, cooperating with a neighbor the same as cooperating with a supervisor? Just as FSA officials could slide the description of TAI back and forth between “plantation” and “farms” and “cooperative” depending on the need, likewise, the idea of cooperation could be used broadly to describe, or prescribe, a variety of actions.

Perhaps the reason this one word could cover so much ground was that it was so very popular. In the 1920’s, 30’s, and 40’s, literally hundreds of books, magazines, and pamphlets treated the theme. Nearly every land grant college (and many high schools) offered classes and short courses on cooperative organizations. Marketing and purchasing cooperatives flourished as in no other period in history, and many now-
famous advertising brands were established: Sun-Kist, Land O'Lakes, and Diamond, among others. Presidents and captains of industry and Girl Scouts alike hoisted the flag of cooperation.

In Louisiana, too, cooperation enjoyed a similar currency. One Louisiana social worker, for example, enthusiastically urged neighborhoods to hold cooperative suppers, cooperative picnics, even cooperative fruit punches! In her book The Awakening Community, Mary Mims also provided sample programs, skits, and songs on the cooperative theme. To the tune of "Good Night, Ladies," for example, folks might sing her ditty "Boost for Cooperation." Or they might break out this version of "Pack Up Your Troubles":

Pack up your troubles in your old tin Ford,
And smile, smile, smile;
We've got a chance to be of one accord,
Smile, folks, that's the style.
What's the use of worrying?
It never was worth while, so
Now that cooperation's on the job,
We'll smile, smile, smile.³

Miss Mims came to the Terrebonne project at least twice as a guest speaker and visitor, but we don't know if she was treated to either song by the members.⁴

Louisiana businesses also carried the tune. Consider several ads from the 1938 Houma Courier, for instance. Over a dozen stores subscribed to this advertisement:

CO-OPERATION Builds . . . and Maintains.
The essence of civilization is cooperation.
It makes all things possible . . . and without it most of man's achievements would be impossible.

The conclusion? "BUY at home." The Citizen's Bank of Houma offered, simply "MORE Cooperation." For the opening of the new courthouse, the newspaper declared
that “Cooperation Means Progress.” Another advertisement for hometown buying
proclaimed “Civic Loyalty: One for All — All for One,” echoing an FSA motto of “All for One, One for All on FSA Homestead Projects.”

That government, businesses, and civic groups alike adopted the theme of cooperation illustrates what a broad catchword it was, and what a reassuring one. It was akin to displaying the flag: cooperation was American and democratic. As one author noted, the cooperative movement had “grown from native American roots — in fact from grass roots.” The FSA itself recognized this point. “Working together in groups,” read one of its handbooks, “is one of the oldest farming institutions in America.” Barn raisings, corn huskings, wheat threshings, and quilting bees all exemplified the American cooperative spirit as much as cooperative buying groups.

The FSA encouraged cooperation in some form on most resettlements and among its other farm clients: cooperative marketing groups, or consumer groups, or cooperative machinery pools. In one Louisiana community, it aided the establishment of a “lending pool” of seldom used items, which included hot water bottles, thermometer, ice cream freezer, rubber sheets, and a cat listed as “the best ratter” in the area! But the most celebrated example of FSA cooperation was the group meeting and it, too, was described as “a modern revival of an old American custom.” If a cooperative did have its own image or symbol, it may have been this. FSA photographers made Norman Rockwell-like photographs of community meetings on many of the projects, including the one of TAI members shown in Figure 18. According to the original caption, members met regularly “to discuss all problems and make plans for cooperation.” This photograph no doubt depicts one of the community's general
meetings, in which all members were invited to attend. The agenda at general meetings covered topics ranging widely from poultry feed recipes to Boy Scout projects to national defense. Each member had one vote on any issue raised for balloting, but more than anything the general meetings seemed to be a source of information and instruction. The cooperative's board of directors also held their own business meetings which often concerned managing the government's loans to the project.

Information on both types of assemblies comes from a wonderful collection of typewritten Minutes found in the FSA records on Terrebonne. The minutes provide insight into many of the events, concerns, and problems of TAI. They would have been an even richer source of information had not an unknown government official written to the newly-elected board that it was "not necessary to include such detailed information in minutes"!9 These records have other shortcomings, too. Primarily, they are not complete. Other documents, for instance, suggest that general meetings continued beyond the two years (1940 and 1941) for which their minutes still exist. Also, the minutes have only an official voice. That is, they do not give us the actual words of what people said at the meetings. Members are never directly quoted, and in fact, no idea or suggestion is ever attributed even indirectly to a specific individual member, except for the "motions" and "seconds" of parliamentary procedure. Only comments by the FSA employees are singled out, and even then the minutes do not record them as quotations. It may be that the consistent tone of these records is solely that of their writer, Mr. Robert Thibodaux, who served as board Secretary and Treasurer nearly the entire duration of the project. Regardless, a careful reading of the minutes for their
content and their form still reveals much about the project as its leaders and members met to cooperate.

The project held general meetings twice a month, either in the St. George offices, the Waubun Community Center, or occasionally as St. Bridget's church Hall. This last building stood just outside the project's southeastern corner and is marked with a cross on the project map. The first meeting of each month was for men; both women and men attended the second meeting, as shown in the photograph. The minutes listed by name which members (men, officially) attended each meeting, and which did not, and this list is the main source for the community list in Appendix B. As in many other organizations, initially high attendance seemed to wane over the years, and at several points the FSA supervisors urged members to make a better showing. Minutes for each of the annual meetings (1940 - 1944), for example, show that 40 of 46 members attended the very first annual meeting (87%), but only 17 of 27 the last (63%, with a dozen other families only very recently withdrawn.) Of course membership itself fluctuated in size, something to be discussed later.

The board of directors met more frequently and more irregularly than the entire membership: one, two, three, or even four times a month as needed, but usually at least twice. Elections were held annually and members were urged to "use the utmost care in selecting their Directors, personalities should not enter into their choice and only the best men should be elected to fill the important positions." They were also asked to "give thought to the election of a woman" as a board director. The second suggestion went unheeded: the board remained resolutely male. Community members must have been satisfied with their best men, however, because the board's composition remained
fairly stable. Several different men held the Vice Presidency and two other
directorships. As noted earlier, however, Mr. LeBlanc and Mr. Thibodaux held the
offices of President and Secretary-Treasurer from 1938 for the duration. (Interim
officials served in Mr. Thibodaux' stead after 1943 because of a long-term illness.)
Studies of several other FSA projects in the 1940s discovered a "definite carry-over in
leadership" often occurred as families moved from their old homes into the projects;
such may have happened at Terrebonne as well.\textsuperscript{15} For example, Mr. LeBlanc, who was
born at Paincourtville, had worked as a foremen at several plantations in the area before
moving to TAI. Apparently a respected leader on the project, his daughter-in-law
remembers that "he did his share but he wanted you to do yours, too."\textsuperscript{16}

The board's share was an important but limited one because, as shown earlier, it
was only half of the project's administration. The FSA supplied the other half.
According to one study of FSA cooperatives, the board of directors had seven functions:

\begin{itemize}
\item[a.] selection of, and delegation of authority to management
\item[b.] determination of policies for guidance of management
\item[c.] control of expenditures by authorizing budgets
\item[d.] keeping of members fully informed on the business of the
associations
\item[e.] causing audits to be made at least once a year or oftener
and reports thereof to be made directly to the Board
\item[f.] studying the requirements of members and promoting good
membership relations
\item[g.] prescribing the forms of contracts between the members and
the Association.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{itemize}

Very early on, the Terrebonne board had acted on the first of these functions, delegating
authority.

In what was called a "special meeting," the board met on January 6, 1939 to
study the project's administration. Their decision bears quoting:
The problem of management and operation was discussed at length and the necessity of centering operating authority in some one person became apparent, therefore on a motion of McLean Ledet, seconded by Robert Thibodaux, the General Manager [that is, George Harmount] was instructed to act in all matters pertaining to operation and the following resolution was passed: BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Manager be instructed to proceed and do what is necessary to carry on the details of operation as authorized by the Board of Directors.  

It would be interesting to know exactly how this “problem” and its solution “became apparent” to the board during the meeting, especially since it had been decided in higher FSA circles months earlier. An April 1938 letter from the director of the Resettlement Division to T. Roy Reid and E. B. Whitaker, Region 6 officials, explains the reasoning. Walker acknowledged that Reid wanted the FSA to retain voting control on the board at TAI, but Walker scotched the idea, saying that it would violate “the bona-fide cooperative character of this Association.” Instead, the FSA would countersign all association checks, and would have the association appoint a general manager. Walker further explained:

Cooperation between the Government’s representative on the project and this general manager, who may at the start be the same person (together with the prescribed accounting reports and close supervision of the Association’s activities by the Regional Office), will assure the Government that the terms of the loan agreement and of the approved program are being adhered to.

Of course, at Terrebonne the general manager and the government representative were one and the same throughout the life of the project, making for very close cooperation, indeed.

Unlike Mrs Lina, who could only encourage members to plant their apple and apricot trees, Mr. Harmount and Mr. Borland the farm supervisor both exercised a certain amount of authority on the project. Their decisions could be rejected, since on
paper, the members and their board determined policy. But in turn, the supervisors could appeal to FSA regional or national officials, who gave the red and green lights for all of them.21 The minutes give no indication that the two parties ever disagreed so squarely during their group meetings. But on the other hand, such a show-down would fall far short of the ideal of cooperation and might well be glossed over. Instead, the minutes record a delicate balance between democratic member discussion and FSA guidance in the decision making process.

Even though the minutes do not record all the individual voices of cooperative meetings, Secretary-Treasurer Thibodaux used a variety of phrases to convey the idea of talk, debate, and discussion among all the members. Just a sampling of his repertoire includes:

“ways and means were discussed” (for getting fence posts),

“after considerable talk... it was the consensus” (to get a jack and brood mares), or

“It was also agreed” (to get cattle feeders).

Likewise, meetings sometimes adjourned after a wholesome:

“discussion of the matters of interest to the members,” or

a “further exchange of views and ideas for the good of the Association.”22

In contrast to these snippets, the minutes also have some small reminders that, among equals, some were more equal than others, as novelist George Orwell once penned.23 Names, for instance, indicate a subtle hierarchy. When members are named, they are always written with first and last name only: Harry Usey, Edmond Pertuit, or John Fernandez. Yet FSA employees always receive the prefix of Mr. or Mrs: Mrs. Lina,
Mr. Harmount, Mr. Borland. And the project president, who might be said to straddle the two categories? Invariably, his name is written as "Mr. Conrad LeBlanc," a perfect hybrid of the two styles.

And within its own literature and instructions, the FSA acknowledged that its representatives should and did take a leading role in meetings. An FSA handbook, for example, explained that:

properly conducted, the group meeting can lead the group to feel that they are consulted on a proposed plan and their acceptance of it sought, rather than given as in instruction for them to follow.24

“Greater enthusiasm” and “community feeling” were also listed as products of the properly conducted meeting.

The project manager and the other FSA employees took the lead in a variety of ways. In some cases Mr. Harmount used the meetings as a forum for explaining many of the association's founding documents. In a May 1939 meeting, for example, he read the loan application and loan agreement between TAI and the government, “paragraph after paragraph with a very thorough explanation in order to enable each member to better understand the proceedings of the Association.”25 At other meetings, employees suggested ways in which members could make decisions. When the association was ready to hire a doctor for cooperative medical services, Mrs. Lina came to a general meeting with prepared notes. In addition to tentative fees, she also suggested three different ways the doctor could be selected: by bid, by the supervisors, or by vote of the members.26 On yet another occasion, members debating the purchase of three-wheel or four-wheel tractors postponed their decision until a tractor demonstration could be arranged for them.27
Guidance came in the form of instruction; the FSA wanted its members to learn to cooperate and to run their association. More than once, members were asked to carefully consider an issue before them. A meeting in July of 1940 gives an excellent example and a rare instance in which a resident is identified with his comment or question:

Member Alex Gros then asked if the members would be allowed to put their cows in the new pasture. Mr. Hamount answered that it was a matter that should be thought over carefully by the members as a whole. He explained that there would be some expense in keeping up the pasture and some expense in keeping up the bulls. He explained that some members would have cows with which they could take advantage of this privilege and that some would not. He explained the necessity of being fair to everyone. He told the members to go home and think it over between now and next meeting as to whether a small charge of so much per year should be made and to report back at the next meeting.28

Thus, on this occasion and others, Mr. Hamount spelled out the most desirable course of action, while still leaving the formal decision up to the association's members. Even while he and his fellow employees took the lead at cooperative meetings, they were careful to encourage the process which marked their "bona-fide cooperative character."

But if members were at all doubtful about the existence of this cooperative character, the employees took care to remind them. More than once, Mr. Hamount or Mr. Borland took the floor specifically on the subject of cooperation and ways to carry it out. "Mr. Hamount made a short talk on the subject of cooperation," a March 1939 meeting records, and "the necessity of especially hard and steady work."29 A few months later he returned with a longer lecture, emphasizing the size of the association's loan and the need for "constant cooperation on the part of the members to succeed in paying off the loan." "COST," he emphasized:
has proven to be the downfall of many large corporations and is the thing that we have to be very careful in keeping down as low as possible . . . . Members were cautioned to take care of the tools, seeds and supplies and also to always be very careful and being certain that nothing is left in the fields at night. Foremen on jobs should see that the men under his supervision, be on the job the number of hours turned in by the timekeeper, and if they aren't, he should make a report to the timekeeper.30

Cooperation and costs were both the bottom line, especially the latter. That was one dilemma the FSA faced in a cooperative community, and which further complicated the relationship between the members and their board, and the FSA supervisors. The board and members could be guided, but would they be allowed, for instance, to act in ways which cost the project money?31

Mr. Borland spoke more bluntly on the issue. In what the Minutes call “a very interesting talk on the cooperation of the members,” he said that some members were “loafing, thinking that the management knew nothing about it.” He went on to state that those who did so were:

hurting themselves as well as everyone concerned. Loafing would cause the Project to be a failure, and in being a failure would hurt everyone connected with the Project.32

He asked the members to consider the issue “very seriously to help make the Terrebonne Association a success.” Yet another “very interesting talk” of his concerned the members “getting together and doing a days work;” this particular speech was tagged by the association accountant’s talk on the importance of cost-cutting.33

Taken as a whole, the idea of cooperation described in these meetings seems to cover both the way members related to one another and to the association as a whole. For instance, at one meeting, Mr. Borland urged members to help new residents on the
project, "showing and explaining to them the manner in which the work is carried on."
And in the same talk, he also asked them to report any "irregularities" they might see on
the project to management, and to be careful to observe association practices and
rules.34 We might say that cooperation ran two directions: cooperation worked across
the membership: families were asked to cooperate among themselves, to help one
another generally, and to work together as they farmed the plantations and made
improvements to the project's landscape. Cooperation also worked upward: members
were asked to cooperate with the association, its policies, and by extension, the people
who most influenced those policies, the FSA supervisors. Tellingly, the supervisors'
"interesting talks" on cooperation and other subjects often appear as the last item on the
table before meetings officially adjourned; in those cases, they literally had the last
word.

Perhaps it should be no surprise that at least some members saw meetings as
less than the democratic process they were supposed to be. Recalls one disenchanted
farmer:

Oh yeah, they had meetings, had meetings, had a lot of meetings. They
would preach there and tell you what you had to do and how you had
to handle it — it wasn't the people wanting no meetings.35

Cooperation was a one-sided affair. In fact, from the government's side of the table,
cooperation "upwards" had an entirely different name: its name was supervision. If
cooperation was the public slogan, supervision was the bureaucratic slogan. Members
were urged to cooperate; FSA employees were trained to supervise the cooperation.
And at the Terrebonne project, FSA officials had believed from word one that it would
require "detailed supervision."36
In addition to the de-facto employment of management, the government exercised supervision over its cooperatives through several other methods. Without FSA permission, for instance, no changes could be made to the articles of incorporation. More important on a daily basis, the government employed the accountant on each resettlement; Mr. L. W. Pigott worked at Terrebonne. The FSA had final approval of all expenses, advances in pay, dividends, and any other budget issues. As suggested earlier, cooperation and cost were the bottom line, and supervisors attended closely to costs. Projects, their members, and their supervisors were accountable to the government and to other taxpayers. Consequently, if the group meeting was the emblem of the democratic side of the cooperative, the record-book was the emblem of the supervisory side.

When Mrs. Lina jubilantly recorded the percentage of families planting trees, she was only following FSA training. Measurable projects were accountable projects. One resettlement memo asked supervisors to quantify their reports in just such a fashion, giving its own examples of “10 families did not spend money according to their budgets” or “80 percent of families are keeping their yards cleaned.” The memo also requested illustrations of progress with stories such as “Mrs. Jones would not keep her house clean until I began carrying visitors to see her.” In addition to quantification and illustration, categorization was another option. The FSA recommended that on each resettlement families be classified by the amount of supervision needed. Only two of Mr. Harmount’s monthly reports survive, but in them he carefully tallied the number of “A, B, C, and D” category farmers, homemakers, and homes, as well as the attendance at group meetings of men and women from each category. He also noted the number of
family record books checked and the number of farm and home plans completed. The FSA considered both of these documents, discussed later in more detail, to be crucial in helping families keep account of their resources — and in helping supervisors keep track of families.

By teaching members to better manage their resources, the FSA helped supervise its own assets as well. Many resettlement families received individual grants and loans from the government. In FSA terminology, a grant did not require a repayment; a loan did. Sometimes, however, the words appeared more interchangeable, and in either case the cash came with strings. When the Terrebonne project began, for instance, Mr. Harmount announced that the FSA could make small loans to members (up to $25.00) to cover illness and other family emergencies, and that these loans needed no repayment. These small disbursements were essentially government grants, and by policy the FSA made grants in return for their clients' “pledge of cooperation” to perform certain kinds of work. At Terrebonne, members automatically made this voluntary promise in the process of joining the association. An applicant to TAI filled out a membership form that read:

I hereby apply for membership in Terrebonne Association, Inc., and agree to abide by the provisions of its Articles of Association and By-Laws, and faithfully to perform my obligations thereunder and cooperate with the Association and the Members thereof for the success and progress of the association.

Submitting this form with $1.00 fee payment made the individual “entitled to all benefits of membership and subject to all rules and regulations of Association.” Later, even the $1.00 application fee was made deductible from the first payroll, another reminder that cash was short.
Loans, too, carried conditions. “Farm Security loans,” a government handbook read, “are not given purely as monetary credit. The acceptance of a Farm Security loan bears with it the acceptance of supervision and guidance, which are really more important than the loans.” Many were willing to accept, at least initially. In the spring of 1940, Mrs. Lina noted that 80% of the TAI families made a small loan for buying cows, chicks, fertilizer, canning equipment, sewing machines, and the like. An operating goods loan, made for outlays useful that year alone, required a one year repayment. A capital goods loan, made for items seen as longer-term investments, could be paid in three to five years.

Grants and loans alike made up an important part of the entire FSA program, and they both generated controversy. To observers already critical of New Deal programs, outright grants smacked of charity and the dole. On the other hand, some critics questioned the wisdom of encouraging indebtedness through loans, even from a well-meaning government. Others even questioned the good intentions. The author of an article entitled “The Return of the Carpetbagger!” claimed that FSA officials in the South purposefully burdened clients with unnecessary loans they could never repay. Part of that claim may have been true. R. W. Hudgens, an FSA Assistant Administrator, once suggested that some clients should be allowed to stay in debt, not because of any sinister intentions but because that way they would receive continued supervision and assistance. Though Terrebonne families made loans, they had reservations about the process. Charles Duet resented having to account for every expenditure made from them. When confronted by a supervisor for the particulars of his loan for family clothing, he shot back, “You tell me the day you buy your wife some drawers, THAT’S
the day I'll let you know!” And for other loans, he remembers:

They didn't want to give you your money to farm, to make another crop. They didn't want to give you your money.... They wanted you to borrow more, borrow money from them and leave yours in the bank. I got me a lawyer, and they gave me the money right quick. 50

Needless to say, Mr. Duet and the government dissolved their association. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Blanchard stuck with the project for the duration, but afterwards he vowed that he was “never going to buy but can pay.” Mrs. Blanchard believes that some families left because they were afraid of loans. 51

According to the TAI minutes, many members wanted items on credit rather than cash on loan. Many families were accustomed to buying necessities on credit at local stores or plantation commissaries. Gradually paying off goods already in hand may have been a much less frightening prospect than a cash repayment due at a specified time (perhaps, especially, with a vague “pledge of cooperation” to consider, as well). The government believed that its programs could teach families how to pay off loans and keep out of debt in any fashion. Thus the Terrebonne project denied credit to its families, at first. In the summer of 1940 the minutes noted that:

The question then came up of extending credit on fertilizer and potatoes. Mr. Harmount explained to the Members that Farm Security Administration offered them this privilege through their loan agency and that the Association was not a loan agency and that it was not allowed to give credit and under no circumstances would credit be extended to anybody. 52

It seemed like a resounding “NO,” but the issue persisted, and in 1942 the government relented. When members again complained that they did not want to make loans for seed, animals, fertilizers, and the like, the Board of Directors was “authorized to use its discretion” to advance such goods to members to repay out of their twice-monthly
paychecks. The Board would examine families' past repayment records when making their decisions, and could make payroll deductions after thirty days.\textsuperscript{53}

Likely not everyone would have qualified for credit. The association began dunning members from the outset, or at least repeatedly requesting them to pay various bills and fees: medical co-op fees, insurance fees, four-acre rents, even potato costs.\textsuperscript{54} Not that the project was a collection of families in arrears, but given the state of the economy — and the initial state of the project lands themselves — it's no wonder that some failed to settle. Some apparently could never square their debts. Project officials finally charged off nearly $600.00 in unpaid debts of residents who had moved away and weren't likely to return cash in hand.\textsuperscript{55} Meanwhile, Mr. Harmount “regretfully” made payroll deductions, and continued to dun. In 1941 the association sent out letters concerning the issue. In a general meeting the spring of that year:

The payment of rent, supplies, tractor and mule rent was brought up again. It was pointed out that we have on two occasion sent letters to the Members showing the amount due the Association and to which we have had very little response. Some bills have been past due for quite a while and unless the Members make some efforts to settle these bills, drastic action will have to be taken.\textsuperscript{56}

What would “drastic action” involve? Possibly, eviction. There is no record that any family at the Terrebonne project was evicted, or even strongly encouraged to leave. But eviction did happen on resettlements. A Missouri project, for instance, evicted a member, officially, for an un-cooperative attitude (and, unofficially, for selling his cotton outside his project's marketing cooperative.)\textsuperscript{57} And during the establishment of TAI, project officials had certainly hinted that evictions could, even should, happen.
In their efforts to reassure local powers-that-be, Mr. Harmount and others stressed that only worthy members would be selected — and only worthy members allowed to remain. In a 1938 speech to local Rotarians, for instance, Mr. Harmount explained that:

in the event that a party proves unworthy, becomes ill, or in other ways is unable to discharge the duties implied by stock ownership, it is possible to remove them and purchase their stock at its value at the time the incident occurs.\(^{58}\)

A year later, he still emphasized that families “must show the right attitude in order to be permitted to remain on the plantation.”\(^{59}\)

A *Houma Courier* newspaper article treated the same theme in more detail. It described the twenty-four families then on the project as hard-working and God-fearing, and went on to explain:

They work for each other’s benefit and for themselves, because if they do not show enough initiative and willingness to work they will soon be asked to leave the project to make way for a more ambitious farmer. In the Association, the man who works the most gets the biggest reward, so a man naturally has to work if he expects to receive any kind of reward. At the end of each season, the farmers, who are all stockholders in the Association, divided the profits with the man who works most getting more than the man who ever shirked his work the slightest bit. A man does not have to work if he doesn’t want to — but it is a safe wager that he will not remain on the premises long if he does not put forth any effort to help with the crops.\(^{60}\)

But perhaps the item most suggestive of evictions is a recommendation in the 1942 farm plan to make a study of the membership and “to eliminate those who do not give the association just value for the wages they receive.”\(^{61}\)

All of these comments seem to echo Mr. Harmount's early and emphatic statements that TAI was “strictly business” and in no way that dangerous and feared creature, the social experiment. (Consider that 1938, the year TAI plans came together,
saw more newspaper coverage of the House Un-American Activities Committee than any other domestic story. So, the FSA made perfect disclaimers of any left-leaning intent. Where Karl Marx asserted, “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs,” Terrebonne declared that each according to his abilities, received. If socialism sapped initiative, TAI would promote it. If communism was godless, Terrebonne families were “God-fearing.” In this sense, as a contrast to socialism, TAI was an excellent model of cooperative theory. Proponents of voluntary and democratic cooperation called it the “Middle Way,” a secure passage between the tides of fascism and communism which seemed to be imperiling so much of the world.

Of course, local opinions sometimes differed. In 1936, for instance, the Houma Courier had offered its own political definitions in an editorial entitled “Cooperation vs. Socialism.” “Some critics of farm cooperatives have denounced them as being socialistic,” it read, but called the charge a:

result of misunderstanding of what real cooperatives are and how they are formed. Socialism, roughly defined, involves governmental ownership of productive resources. Thus a socialistic cooperative would be one founded and financed by public money, operated by government agents, with the government treasury standing behind it to pay any losses and to guarantee its members a return no matter how incompetent they were and no matter what conditions were.

The real farm cooperatives, by contrast with this, are excellent examples of a private initiative and enterprise. A group of farmers will get together . . . They put up their own money, and take their own risks. If there are profits, they divide them. If there are losses, they absorb them. This kind of cooperation is not socialism — it is sound business, based on sound economics. Cooperating farmers are individualists, who use the benefits that accrue from mass action to better themselves.

Readers who subscribed to this view may well have raised an eyebrow as the Terrebonne project took shape. Where did it fall in this local distinction between
laudable cooperation and pernicious socialism? Somewhere in the middle of the
"Middle Way," perhaps. Members as a group would take their profits and losses, but
ey hadn't merely "gotten together" nor put up much of their own money. Though, of
course, where the government had staked mere money, families had staked their futures,
a much greater investment. Clearly the government had founded and funded the project,
though, somehow, sometime, ownership was to be transferred to members.

Nevertheless, TAI stood in strong contrast to the idea that cooperatives should
always organize, voluntarily, from the ground up. Here, too, the Terrebonne
association walked a narrow line between democratic and voluntary self-government
and that paradox of "supervised cooperation." Its corporate charter merely authorized it
to cooperate with the government, yet its bureaucratic organization impelled it to. And
on the personal level? Well, the FSA claimed that there was "No Such Word as
'Must'." It chided employees that:

More damage, perhaps, has been done by this word in supervisor-
borrower relations than by anything else. No one likes compulsions
or threats; anyone can be approached in the right manner and influenced
to change in attitude. When the families and supervisors become better
acquainted . . . it becomes much easier to advise and even to insist on
certain practices.

Another fine distinction.

It is interesting to note, too, that at Terrebonne supervisors felt it necessary to
tell members when activities were NOT mandatory. When members discussed an
insurance pool for sickness and accident benefits (5 and later 10 cents a week), they
were encouraged to join but told it was "not compulsory." Nor was a petition to
increase the project's sugarcane quotas, though again members were requested to sign.
At yet another meeting Mrs. Lina explained again that “it was not compulsory to donate” to a children’s Christmas tree, and that “neither would anyone know who or how much money was donated by any one on the Project.” Meetings, too, that chosen symbol of project life, were apparently “not compulsory.” Not really, since the minutes record some of the same names as absent time and time again.

And it goes without saying that, despite home supervisors and farm supervisors and managers, much of project life — as American life — was not compulsory. Embedded within a democratic nation, the project had no claim on family quarrels, elopements, pets, playmates, votes, or prayers. So, much as the government may have recorded loans, plotted woodpiles, orchestrated meetings, diagrammed yards, and planned budgets, much of Terrebonne life must have remained beyond the compass of their fences and rules. To make it otherwise would have been counter to the government’s stated goals of developing a real, living community and guiding the cooperative to eventual maturity and self-government.

Notes

1 First Annual Meeting, Minutes, 2 February 1940.


6 Daniels, p. 18. Gaer, p. 83.
7 Annual Report Summaries, Region VI; Box 36, RP-86-530; GC 35-42; RG 96.

8 Gaer, pp. 92-93.

9 Memo, 19 September 1938; Box 280, File 86-22-12, 300, 591-041; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

10 T. Roy Reid to William Alexander, 23 May 1940; Box 279, File 9; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

11 Minutes, 24 July 1940.

12 Minutes, 11 October 1939, 17 April 1940, 31 January 1940.

13 Minutes, 17 January 1941.

14 Minutes, 20 December 1939.

15 Loomis, Social Relationships, p. 2.


18 Minutes, 6 January 1939.

19 J. O. Walker to T. Roy Reid and E. B. Whitaker, 21 April 1938; Box 278, File 1; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

20 ibid.

21 Eaton, p. 112.

22 Minutes, 5 March 1939, 2 April 1939, 30 August 1939.


24 Gaer, p. 114.

25 Minutes, 28 May 1939.

26 Minutes, 16 April 1939.

137
27 Minutes, 19 April 1940.

28 Minutes, 24 July 1940.

29 Minutes, 5 March 1939.

30 Minutes, 28 May 1939.

31 Eaton, pp. 116-17.

32 Minutes, 9 July 1939.

33 Minutes, 13 May 1940.

34 Minutes, 19 July 1939.

35 Duet, interview.

36 J. O. Walker to William Alexander, 26 March 1938; Box 279, File 8; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

37 Eaton, pp. 110-12.

38 Resettlement Project Memorandum #130 to Project Managers, Farm Supervisors, Home Supervisors; Box 34, 523-530; GC 35-42; RG 96.

39 J. O. Walker to Regional Director at Dallas, Texas 11 November 1937; RA 2 Projects, August; RG 16.

40 FSA Regional Project Supervision Reports, Region VI; 31 October 1940, 28 February 1941; Box 22 183-01; GC 35-42; RG 96.

41 Houma Courier, 30 September 1938.

42 Gaer, pp. 191, 199.

43 Minutes, n. d.

44 Minutes, 6 December 1939.

45 Gaer, pp. 61-61.

46 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 February-March 1940.

47 Gaer, pp. 181, 198. Minutes 7 February 1940, 3 October 1940.

49 Mertz, p. 200.

50 Duet, interview.

51 Blanchard, interview.

52 Minutes, 26 June 1940.

53 Minutes, 26 January 1942.

54 Minutes, 19 July 1939, 16 August 1939, 30 August 1939, 16 December 1939, 31 January 1940, 16 April 1941.

55 Minutes, 11 January 1943.

56 Minutes, 18 March 1942.

57 St. Louis Post Dispatch, 4 May 1942, in Box 641, 1942 FS 3 Projects; RG 16.

58 Houma Courier, 30 September 1938.

59 Houma Courier, 15 November 1939.

60 Houma Courier, 6 September 1939.

61 Annual Budget 1942; Box 279, File 5; RCA 35-42; RG 96.


63 Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program, 1875.

64 Knapp, p. 226.

65 Houma Courier, 23 January 1936.


67 Gaer, p. 112.

68 Minutes, 14 May 1939.
69 Minutes, 15 May 1940.

70 Minutes, 16 December 1939.
Chapter 7 Community

On July 14, 1940 Terrebonne project members held their first annual Settlers’ Day festivities. Families, visitors, officials, and the press participated in activities such as a flag-raising, picnic lunch, baseball game, tour of homes, and beautiful baby contest. The day was an all-American celebration, and exhibition, of this unusual community.

Along with cooperation, community was another FSA ideal. One study of the government’s cooperative resettlements, for example, acknowledged that yes, they might bear a strong resemblance to plantations and commercial farms, except for their “strong co-operative philosophy and . . . emphasis on community integration.” So, along with the puzzle of “supervised cooperation,” they also offered their version of that strange animal still with us, the “planned community.” But at Terrebonne and other resettlements, planning was not limited to designs on a drawing board, blueprint, or map; nor was community mere physical space. Not content to sow the seeds and wait for their Terrebonne century plant, the government enthusiastically undertook the cultivation of its social life and its integration with the surrounding area.

Also like cooperation, community had a strong currency in the general language of the time and in the jargon of social scientists. In fact, as the depression wore on, its circulation only increased, sometimes at the expense of other ideas. In a survey of sociology articles during the era, one author has traced the gradual rise of the community notion over interest in more controversial issues of class conflict, race relations, and the link between poverty and tenancy; the same shift seemed to occur in the Resettlement Administration and the FSA. Whereas some earlier reformers such as the RA’s Rex Tugwell might rage about the near “sweatshop” conditions of rural
labor or the "financial overlordship" of a few, the trend was towards a less antagonistic, even happier, view.

Thus for Miss Mims, the buoyant Louisiana social worker, there was "no finer word in the language of citizenship than 'community'.” “Building communities,” she believed, “in which there is larger social and economic security for all, with fuller happiness in the community life for everyone, is the chief duty of citizenship in the modern democratic state.” Likewise, a 1940 FSA study of seven resettlements could conclude that community life was important because it kept conflict at a minimum and morale at a high, and it established that all-important “we feeling.” And the chief duty of cultivating that sentiment, on resettlements, fell to project officials and leaders. At the Schriever project, officials believed that “the fine community life which is expected to develop” would become “a basis for stronger character and better rural life.”

In one way, the government surely frustrated itself in its efforts to build the Terrebonne social life. Their own experts recognized the importance of selecting and gathering member families speedily, else, as they worded it, a “degenerative process may set in” before the project really got off the ground. But TAI, as we have seen, had a fairly long birthing; some families were around before houses were even built. On the other hand, since the FSA apparently had difficulty finding settlers to suit them (and vice-versa), families came and went throughout the project’s existence. The Annual Report for 1940 noted that of 414 applications, 204 had been rejected, and another 158 had withdrawn, either before (145) or after (13) moving in. Expert advise not withstanding, the lengthy selection process discouraged some. In a 1942 monthly

142
report, Mr. Harmount noted that 3 of 4 recent applicants had found other places to farm before their applications cleared. “It is the practice here,” he wrote:

For applicants to come in one day and expect to move the next. Increasing difficulty has been met in dealing with landowners as they do not wish their workers to leave. Applicants are afraid to let landowners know they have been to the project until they are reasonably sure of some chance of acceptance.10

Perhaps project families might have developed that “we feeling” simply from the common experience of having run the gauntlet of selection. By the government’s own standards, however, the gradual movement of families in, and out, of the project, worked against it.

Other factors, however, surely helped. The FSA, which seemed fascinated with traditional ethic communities, largely achieved the French Catholic population for the project that it had originally sought. Of course, advertising for white families in south Louisiana, their chances had been good. Strangely enough, though, there seemed to be scant official notice of the language and religion of the project members, both factors which surely would create a “we feeling” better than any planned activities or experiences. With religion, naturally, the government had to preserve separation of church and state, yet the FSA had shown a decided interest in religion and community feeling. In some of their research they had looked to studies of such varied groups as Mormons, Mennonites, and Dukhobors (a Russian sect with emigrants to North America), concluding that cooperative communities with a basis in religion had been more enduring than secular ones. They had even noted a favorable relationship between church attendance and good farming practices.11
On their own projects, FSA managers were to neither discourage nor encourage religious activity of families. Nevertheless, the administration provided guidelines for the use of community buildings for religious purposes and for the building of churches on project lands. In both cases, members had to initiate the activity. If community buildings were used, all denominations had to have equal access, and if any churches were built, the FSA — no surprise! — had to approve the plans. Its planning division could even assist in church design if such did not interfere with regular duties.¹²

Through academic research or plain observation the government no doubt knew that religion, next to family, was one of the strongest bonds in south Louisiana life.¹³ Given the need to remain impartial, perhaps the FSA considered merely locating the TAI project within a religious population sufficient to their purposes. St. Bridget’s Catholic church sat just outside the community boundary, and on several occasions its priest, Father Roth, was invited to community meetings as a visitor or speaker. The association assisted its members’ religious life in several other ways, as well. Since few families owned cars, the association had a truck which, covered with a sheltering “tarpolian,” it sometimes sent round to collect members for meetings and also for church on Sundays.¹⁴ Not every family was Catholic, and adjustments were made for them, too. One year, for instance, the project changes the date of its Saturday annual meetings for religious reasons.¹⁵ On several occasions Protestant services were held in the community center, though Mrs. Lina (perhaps Protestant herself) noted glumly in her reports that attendance was meager.¹⁶
If supervisors paid little official attention to the members’ religious life, they paid even less to their language. Not only were many families French in origin, many spoke French daily, in their homes and at work in the fields. In fact, in some families, the adults spoke little or no English. One member recalls a neighbor couple who “didn’t know how to ask anything in English at all. But they could do everything, and she would even plow!” Or another family — “good people” — whose father’s English was limited to the cheerful phrase “Oh, I go good.” Though it might seem that speaking only French would have prevented families from even joining the cooperative, many would have had nearly-grown children who could represent their parents in dealings with English speakers. Similarly, the FSA expected that in some cases, children would keep their family’s record books and budgets. But the lack of English certainly may have limited participation in some activities; it also may explain why some members regularly missed meetings. Presumably, supervisors conducted meetings in English, hence the sole direct reference to the French language in the association’s minutes.

After an important resolution concerning government sugarcane quotas, the minutes note:

Mr. Harmount then requested the President, Mr. Conrad M. LeBlanc, Sr., to explain to the members in French so there would be no misunderstanding as to the terms and interpretations of the agreement that they were entering into upon placing their signatures to this agreement.

The situation suggests that despite the FSA’s emphasis on meetings and cooperative self-government, their final criteria in selecting members may have been something else, perhaps the ability to “do everything”: plow, garden, cook, build, sew, and make a success of everyday life on the project.
Given so few references to the heritage of TAI members, it should be no surprise
that yet another aspect of project life remains largely invisible in official documents.
Not everyone involved with the project was white. And yet at Terrebonne the FSA had
advertised and accepted only white families as members, as they had at many other
resettlements, despite doubts among administration leadership. Many of resettlement’s
advocates — Tugwell, Harry Hopkins of FERA, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes,
Will Alexander — had liberal views of race relations, and in some measure influenced
racial policy of the various agencies. The RA, for instance, tried to hire white and black
personnel based upon proportions of each race on relief, and they hired blacks in every
level of their agency. Also, both the RA and FSA established communities for blacks,
even a few projects with separate areas for whites and blacks, but they never created
fully-integrated resettlements. 20 The political life of the agencies depended too much on
public approval, and as Will Alexander recalled of resettlements in the South, “We
accepted the pattern.” 21 Terrebonne was no different. Officially, white; unofficially,
something more.

Black families actually participated in the Terrebonne project in several ways,
though their presence went largely unrecorded. When the government first bought the
four plantations, for instance, what happened to the people then living on them, some
three or four white families, and perhaps 14 or 15 blacks? The question is a delicate
one, and the answer, unclear. One member states that the families “couldn’t afford to be
on the Project” and moved off. Another explains that “No, they didn’t have to move off
but most of them did. They didn’t want to get into the project.” Still other members
recall that several black families, including the Smiths and the Winslows, actually
remained on the project lands, living in some of the earlier plantation cabins near the railroad and elsewhere. And in fact, one government document, the simple map of the project from Figure 10, does vaguely mark the presence of blacks on or near the project. Southeast of St. Bridget's in unit 30, a small rectangle is labeled “Levy.” Without other clues, however, no one would know that it marked — not a levee or some other physical feature — but the cluster of homes called “Levy-town.” The name of this small black village most likely derived from the surname Levy, prior owners of the Isle of Cuba plantation.

Other records suggest some of the ties between black families and the association. During the project’s first holiday, members donated funds for a community Christmas Tree and gifts for children, nearly 400 total. Mrs. Lina noted that among these, “the colored families were not neglected as presents were given all children up to twelve years of age the day before Christmas.” In a 1942 report, the community manager recorded that five medical maternity clinics had been held in February, three for “colored” women and two for whites. On this occasion and perhaps others, black families may have benefited from services that the FSA could offer. Still, they did not enjoy the desirable new houses, or elect representatives to the board, or share in any of the other benefits of official membership.

What they most shared was work. The project’s sugarcane fields demanded huge amounts of labor, more than the official membership alone could provide, especially during the intense and time-pressured harvest season. In June of 1940, blacks were working on the project, grassing out cane, and carrying water, as in the Figure 19
photograph. And at least on occasion, blacks worked alongside project members. Mr. Leonard Chauvin, whose parents joined TAI in 1940, says he fell into plantation work naturally as teen-ager, and always he was partnered with the same black man, Mr. Pawn, who later owned a grocery and bar in Levy-town. Thus, although the project was not racially "integrated," it did have links to the black families living on and around it; more than that, it needed them.

In its segregation, and in the language and religion of its members, the project very much resembled other communities in south Louisiana. Even the impermanence of its membership, though undesirable from the FSA's viewpoint, reflected the mobility found in the cane plantation country and its workers. Similar, too, was the social life as recalled by its members. Though the government planned many activities for the project, those remembered most often today center on the south Louisiana trinity of friends, food, and music. Several residents mention the big boucheries held on the project. An activity that supervisors would have heartily endorsed, these cooperative hog-butcherings were festive occasions as well practical ones. Mrs. Henry Blanchard remembers that Mrs. Lina taught the women to preserve the pork in jars. Music was another natural recreation. Members themselves often provided the entertainment. In the Beady Roddy family, for instance, husband, sons, and brother-in-law all played guitar or accordion. An early newspaper article heralded the formation of a:

community night club, with dance music and home talent floor-shows. The orchestra is already being organized. The nucleus for the band are Robert Thibodaux and three of his sons. The four of them play six different instruments right handily.
In addition to the project's home-grown talent, there were dances and parties in Schriever, Chauvin, and other area towns.  

But most of all, as Mrs. Blanchard remembers, "We went visiting." The "ti' call," the evening causerie (literally, chit-chat), visiting: all were popular pastimes in south Louisiana. Nonetheless, TAI supervisors — never shy of preaching to the converted — asked project families "to help and be friendly" with each other and with new members. Everyone was on the receiving end at some point. "The second day we moved here," Mrs. Roddy recalls:

My father-in-law and mother-in-law had come to visit. We were sitting on the porch and we see this lady and this man, with four children, coming down the road. It was Mrs. Schouest and her family — they made friends with us.

The Schouest and Roddy families still live on the project. Another of their neighbors, the Badots, left TAI for New Orleans, but came back to visit their old friends once a year afterwards.

As a teenager growing up on the project, Mr. Leonard Chauvin agrees that there were parties and dances but otherwise, he concedes, "there was really not much social life." They did those kind of things that would keep you aware and interested, and so you could get to know people," he explains. The FSA was not in the entertainment business, but they were willing to entertain in order to educate or to boost the project's "we feeling." Thus project officials sponsored a bevy of meetings, classes, and celebrations — all in addition to regular farm, home, and general meetings. The busiest New Orleans socialite would look like a piker in comparison with any project family who actually took part in them all!
To put the community ball in motion, the FSA called upon Miss Mims, the State Extension Sociologist. At Terrebonne and the three other Louisiana resettlements, she organized members in "community clubs" which in turn planned evening socials. Their programs were "inspirational, education, and recreational," and, if we can believe Mrs. Lina's accounts, very popular. When Mr. Harmount called off a March 1940 community night because of potato planting, she noted that "a great number of complaints have been heard, as the families like their meetings and feel they should have them regardless of anything." Today, when even the sit-down family dinner is becoming a rarity, we might look with nostalgia at some of the club's wholesome activities. A supervisor or member sometimes led the group in readings or songs, an activity Miss Mims especially recommended. "Get folks singing together and you have created new and binding ties," she advised in her book. Other programs featured films. The Chilean Nitrate Company sponsored one picture; another featured the war on tuberculosis in Mexico. Yet another was described as a "moving Technicolor picture . . . on the cutting, cooking and carving of meat and the place of meat in the diet." Blockbusters they were not, though perhaps informative.

More often, members practiced that art nearly lost today: they entertained themselves. At an April 1940 meeting of the "Community Get-To-Gether Club," families overflowed the Community Center meeting room and sat or stood in the hall and porch. Mrs. Lina called it one of the most enjoyable programs, in which the Chairman "called on different members to sing, jig, recite, tell jokes or 'What can you do?'" In a summer meeting that year, a newly formed Dramatic Club entertained the
rest with recitations, a skit, and clarinet, guitar, and piano performances. Then Father Roth was called upon to lead a family “fishing game,” and finally, “the club adjoined after three hours of business and pleasure and everyone seemed reluctant to go home.”

Not always fun and games, a 1942 meeting featured member talks on national defense and the Red Cross War Relief Drive.

Other social events sponsored by the project included the public at large. In the fall of 1940 the association held an “Indoor Street Fair” to raise funds for Christmas activities. In preparing for the festival, Mrs. Lina explained in her report:

Everything is being done by the Home makers, their children and the members — Are they happy? There will be a picture show “Sew the Modern Way”. The Superintendent of Education of Terrebonne Parish will address the group. Folks from the neighboring parishes have been invited such as Police Jurys, School Boards, Chamber of Commerce, bankers, Rotarians, Lions Club, W.P.A., F.S.A., N.Y.A., Extension and Health offices besides all community folk.

Over 400 people attended the fair, which included a fishing pond for children, a fortune-telling booth, a display of men’s clothing, bingo, and a good south Louisiana meal of chicken sauce piquant with spaghetti or rice, coffee, and ginger cake with molasses. It was this event that helped provide the tree and many gifts mentioned earlier.

But Settlers' Day earlier that summer had been an even bigger event, and one meant especially to showcase the project and its members’ accomplishments. Well before the actual day, Mr. Harmount encouraged families to write to friends and invite them, and “to give their best efforts to make it a success.” Several committees took charge of the Community Center, decorating it with home-grown flowers and cattails, and converting two rooms into exhibit halls for a truly prodigious array of project-made

152

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goods. One room featured the culinary display: fresh vegetables; canned vegetables, fruit juices, and preserved fruit; ketchup, pickles, and chow-chow; condensed and evaporated milk; and dried onions, peppers, garlic, bacon, and ham. The other room displayed goods for the home: dresses, children's clothes, and a layette (49¢ spent); rugs, quilts, and crocheted or woven afghans and bed-spreads; a couch filled with cattail down; an ironing board, cabinet ($5.00), cedar chest ($1.00), bookends (0¢!), rocking chair, straight chair, smoking stands, foot stools, costumer (clothes-tree), and candlesticks! The association president, Mr. Leblanc, also exhibited a set of his mechanical drawings.

Like the autumn street fair, Settlers' Day featured a fund-raising meal, an "old-fashioned farm-folks picnic lunch" sponsored by the project's Home Demonstration Club. Naturally, the festival also included "inspirational and education" aspects. The Dramatic Club put in its appearance with a skit cleverly entitled "Esprit de Co-op." A local priest and minister provided opening and closing prayers, and there were several speakers and round table discussions. Six home makers, for example, conducted a panel talk on topics such as meal planning, food preservation, landscaping, and crafts.

The project children probably gave the most entertainment of the day in the "Better Babies Contest." Four year old Jimmie Davis Usey took first place in health and looks; triplets Melvin, Marion, and Mervin Morvant placed as runners-up, even though they "howled lustily in annoyance." As Mrs. Lina concluded, "blue ribbons were the only material awards, but the joy of the parents made the contest a huge success . . . Everyone is happy." To reporters at the festival, she explained, "We're becoming a population center." Ten children had already been born on the project, and she was
supervising 14 more layettes for mothers-to-be. But more than just entertainment, the baby contest showed how the community was putting down roots. From the perspective of 1940, only two years into the project, anyone could imagine that these children might some day be cooperative members themselves, might make their own homes in the community. They represented their families’ future, and the projects’.

Another investment in the community’s future were its many educational activities and events. The project offered, for example, “trade school” classes for men and boys, and arts and crafts lessons for women and girls. The association employed a Mr. Berryhill to lead the former, which included instruction in wood-working and furniture-making; after his death, Mr. Wenzel became teacher. Mrs. Lina led the women’s classes and noted their accomplishments in her supervisor’s reports. The classes met in a basement room of the community center that was fitted up with project-made furniture and decorated with maps and models. Meeting twice a week (at least during 1940), the crafters specialized in baskets, “mammy” design doorstops, and coasters and trays made from Dennison paper. The women sent one coaster set to Miss Mims in thanks for setting up the Community Club. The rest were earmarked for serious money-making. Mrs. Lina reported that visitors to the project placed many orders, and some women also marketed their items in New Orleans. Ironically, the FSA provided its own consumers as well as producers. Just as other projects had sent furniture for sale to Terrebonne before its own trade school was underway, Terrebonne crafters received orders for their goods from other project supervisors around the state and Region 6. At one point, some women were earning an average of $3.00 a week, and
Mrs. Lina noted approvingly that it was spent on items such as curtains, clothes, dental 
x-rays, and eyeglasses.  

Literacy was another educational concern of the project. When first advertising 
for settlers, the FSA had requested that members (that is, husbands/fathers) have a 
fourth-grade education or better. Since at least a few members spoke only French, it 
seems logical that not all of them met that requirement. Terrebonne Parish itself also 
had one of the highest rates of illiteracy in the state: in 1939, one quarter of its adults 
were thus classified. Consequently, very early in the project’s existence, supervisors 
announced they would secure a teacher for “adults who have little education and also 
children who are backward in school.” By the spring of 1941 at least, an educator 
from the WPA was conducting classes on the project for association and parish 
members alike. Students met in the community center on Wednesday and Friday, or in 
house #59 on Tuesday and Thursday, for classes in literacy, health, safety, and 
“improved family living.”

To further encourage reading, the project also developed its own library 
collection. Mrs. Lina called it a “very bright spot for the entire community with an 
average of 25 to 30 daily check outs.” Quite a record — especially considering some of 
the library’s volumes covered the spell-binding topics of hand weaving, cooperatives in 
America, and cooperatives in Denmark. Perhaps among its more appealing offers 
were two publications of the project’s very own. In 1940 the Community Club, 
community manager, and home supervisor created a TAI yearbook, given to every
family, and for at least a year or so the project also issued a news sheet called *On Dit* (loosely translated as “rumor” or “they say”).

Classes of still a different kind were held during the project’s day-long “Folk School” in the summer of 1941. Most like a cross between conference and festival, the FSA folk schools aimed high and wide. According to the Head of Community and Family Services for Region 6, the folks schools included:

Leadership training, learning how to do the everyday jobs in the home and in the community in a better way; information pertaining to farm activities and better living on the farm . . . training in the field of citizenship . . . wholesome recreation in the form of dramatics, folk dances, movies . . . the creation of a better understanding between the smaller Farm Security Administration Community and the larger Community; acquainting outside technical leaders of the needs and opportunities afforded in these communities; and a general enrichment of the lives of those who participated.

And who should be listed at the head of the TAI school? Miss Mims, of course, sincere promoter of general enrichment. Also on the program: music; a flag ceremony by the local American Legion; a song, dance, and recitation by twenty-five Houma children; classes on such topics as truck crops, nutrition, and dental hygiene; and a talk on “Communism, Fascism, Democracy.” From proper brushing to patriotism, Folk School covered it all; like Settlers’ Day, it offered those attending a view of their place within widening circles of family, farm, community, nation, and even world.

These views of the “big picture” — lectures, films, classes on national events or life skills — corresponded with the FSA’s desire to connect resettlements with people and places surrounding them. They did not racially integrate any project, but neither did they wish “to segregate its families from the general fabric of community,” as a
handbook noted. Yet they seemed to recognize how easily this might happen. A 1936 RA memo, for instance, cautioned against the creation of “Federal islands” with the resettlements. The same metaphor reappeared in an FSA reminder that:

A farmer today cannot possibly live like an islander and determine his own needs regardless of the life in the cities and villages around him. Even if he could, it would be undesirable. It is not the intention of the Farm Security Administration to create a group of people who cannot become full participants in the activities of their communities.

Even though the FSA labored to make those connections with the larger communities, the very nature of a resettlement set it somewhat apart from its surroundings. Perhaps the projects came closer to resembling the “islands” of south Louisiana: land-locked, wooded rises in the lowlands and marshes. Accessible, yes, but also conspicuous.

The site and signs of a resettlement must have been unmistakable. If poor housing most marked rural poverty, as the FSA often noted, well, seventy-two nearly identical, evenly-spaced homes surely marked . . . something. Then there was the issue of naming, as well. Administration officials had gone to great lengths in considering how and what to call resettlements, even proposing dual signs for each project: one to identify the community with an ordinary name, and a completely separate one to mark the government offices and activities there. Explained one official:

In many parts of the country the notions current at the time these resettlement communities were built, namely, that they were to be colonies of relief families specially marked apart from their neighbors, have persisted. The occupants of the farms are in many cases desirous of overcoming whatever vague separation of themselves from other farmers in non-Governmental land still exists.

The resettlements were NOT to be called projects. “Project” was, supposedly, only a technical termed used in planning. “Once such a project has become a reality,” an FSA
glossary declared, “it is known by its proper name or referred to as the Community, Settlement, Homestead, as the case may be and the word ‘Project’ . . . used only in official papers and correspondence.” As mentioned earlier, the Terrebonne resettlement answered to a variety of names, but the only one that really stuck was “project.” The only one that people in the area talk about today is “project.”

“You gonna say we’re people of the projects?” asked one former member during an interview. Some fifty years after the entire resettlement experience, and some fifty years into the social welfare policies begun by the New Deal, the word means something different to us today. Former members and locals alike want to make sure we know:

“This place was different,” and

“It wasn’t a housing project,” or

“It was for all white people,” but mostly

“They had to WORK for the land — work hard all their lives to get it.”

Even without the extra meanings that intervening years have laid on, the word and the place were sometimes slighted then, too. One woman who grew up “back of Schriever” felt that some of her non-member friends looked down on project youths. Or there were stories such as the girl whose dance partner rejected her when he found out she was from the projects. Things like that. “Yeah, that’s true,” says Dorothy Smith, also a teen-ager on the project. “People looked down on us. They figured these Cajuns were uneducated and they would make them do what they wanted. But you get a hard-headed Cajun and you find that you won’t push him very far,” she adds.
Something like the project gets talked about. In an 1966 interview, TAI president LeBlanc asserted that the project had had a good relationship with local people, even though some of them called it “Little Russia.”\(^63\) That kind of talk may be one reason TAI officials occasionally tried to keep a little distance between the project and the locals, or at least a little privacy. At one board meeting, for example, Mr. LeBlanc admonished “that the actions of the Board of Directors should not be discussed by the directors except at proper times.”\(^64\) Likewise, Mr. Borland once advised new members on “keeping matters taken up at these meetings to themselves and not to discuss business of the Association outside.”\(^65\) So, just as there was a “back” and “front” to Schriever, there was definitely and “inside” and “outside” to the project. Except for these few instances, however, the FSA and project officials seemed to recognize that barrier and try to open it.

Some measure were deceptively simple ones. Mrs. Lina, for example, often listed how many families bought certain amenities: lawn mowers; radios; burial and ambulance policies; and subscriptions to the local paper, to *Progressive Farmer*, and to other farm magazines.\(^66\) At one level, here was the same old idea of measuring and counting progress. At another level, the purchase of radios and newspapers and magazines meant that families were attuned to life and news outside the project. Such purchases were educational, as well. A survey published in the *Houma Courier*, for example, observed that newspapers ranked fourth in the ways farmers heard about and adopted new farm practices. In that very issue, too, a ready could find advice or instructions about peaches, onions, hay, fertilizer, and doctoring piglets!\(^67\)
Voting was another connection to life off the project. Mr. Harmount announced when the registrar of voters came to Schriever, and what were the voting residency requirements (6 months in a new ward, 12 months in a new parish). Encouraging members to vote encouraged them to participate in the “big picture,” certainly. It also answered some of the critics of resettlement. One such critic was Ralph Borsodi, a famous agrarian writer and philanthropist who had founded a farm colony which received a loan from the division of Subsistence Homesteads. He later backed out of the entire enterprise when he turned fearful it would become a “federal island” where families had no voting rights and states had no criminal or civil jurisdiction. Such was not the case, of course, and the FSA was careful to meet their local and state obligations. The Terrebonne association, for example, paid assessments to the Lafourche-Terrebonne Drainage District, and like other resettlement associations made payments as a body to local taxing authorities.

If local governments received their share from the project, so did local merchants. Many resettlements had their own purchasing cooperatives, but the government planned none for Terrebonne because, a Region 6 official wrote, “of the close proximity of numerous cash stores and the competition would be entirely too keen.” So, families could shop at the Polmer Brothers stores (two in Schriever), for example, or use the services of an area marchand or marchand-charrette. This merchant traveled by truck or car, an up-to-date version of the earlier boat-plying caboteur or chalon who beckoned customers by horn or bell. Leonard Chauvin remembers a traveling grocer, butcher, seafood vendor, and fruit peddler all selling to...
his family and others on the project. Naturally, there may have been a few adjustments to make between local merchants and new customers. Mrs. Lina noted that after consumer education on the project, home makers began demanding an eight-pound gallon, rather than a shorted six or seven. On the other hand, when one family asked about lagniappe, the customary “extra” thrown in with a purchase, a local vendor replied, “Lagniappe dead!”

Outside of the grocers, project and local families met at a number of other places. There were area dances, and church, of course. Members might also join local organizations such as the American Legion, whose local Commander extended a special invitation to the project men. Families participated in agricultural fairs, LSU ag short courses, and local 4-H. In other instances, area folks came to the project. For one meeting the Schriever Community Home Demonstration and the project’s demonstration club gathered at the Community center; another occasion local women assisted Mrs. Lina with in-home canning demonstrations. Still another time local homemakers and project women created a purchasing committee to study and price home equipment. Likewise, both Schriever and project men attended Mr. Berryhill’s trade classes.

But perhaps nowhere did the project and the public come together so conspicuously as they did on tours. The FSA had created the project as a demonstration, a “demonstration as to what might be done to better the social and economic conditions” of families in the Sugar Bowl. And a demonstration presupposed an audience of spectators, or, visitors. Earlier in resettlement planning, the
government had blown hot and cold on the subject of visitors. A 1936 order within the RA, for example, requested that there be no “unnecessary visits” to projects, and official visits only when authorized in advance. Names and locations of projects were given out only on request.  

As a trickle grew into a flood, however, regulations slackened, and TAI and other projects were deluged with official visitors and sightseers alike.

For instance: when the FSA held a national conference in New Orleans in 1941, over 100 personnel toured the project, its offices, clinic, library, craft room, and two houses. Homemakers served dripped coffee with fresh cream, and later declared “they had never answered so many questions in their lives.”

Settlers’ Day had included a tour of homes, and after the project was further underway, the local public was invited to view “proper landscaping” at eleven different project houses (and to note the porch swing on one, made in woodworking class.) Mrs. Lina noted tours given to people from around the state, the nation, and as far away as Brazil, which sent representatives from its agricultural ministry. The Terrebonne project even appeared in the WPA book, *Louisiana: A Guide to the State*, where it was sandwiched between two plantation homes on Tour 11C.

Unlike home demonstrations or 4-H, however, tours were as much about publicity as they were about people. Like today’s politicians and movie stars, the FSA had an uneasy relationship with the public and press. Though wary of criticism, it still needed to present itself and win popular (and Congressional) approval. If it hoped to really demonstrate something, it needed to publicize its efforts. This need ran all the way from Washington down to the individual project. As Region 6 official E. B.
Whittaker told the Terrebonne families:

There are twenty-seven Projects in three states which represented an investment of about Ten Million Dollars by the U.S. Government. These Projects will have to prove a success in order that the Government may be aware of the Projects being able to make money . . . . This Project is part of the community in which we live and all members should impress people living right outside the Project.83

Every tour, every festival, and every encounter was a chance to make that impression. As we have seen, the project appeared in a number of newspaper feature articles, and once it even hosted a radio broadcast. Station WWL of New Orleans held one of its Farm and Home Hours on the project, and five homemakers took part in the program.84 Likewise, Mr. Harmount and other FSA employees spoke often to local civic groups, especially during the project’s start-up. Their August 1941 presentation to the Houma Exchange Club must have been especially interesting; Mr. Harmount and several members presented a “sketch” to the group. The Houma Daily Courier reported that Mr. Davis portrayed the project office receptionist, Mr. Usey acted as a farmer, and “complete details of the project were demonstrated from the time the farmer placed his application” to his acceptance for residency.85

Perhaps the most lasting presentation, and representation, of the project, however, are its photographs. They, too, were created by the Farm Security Administration through its photographic division, headed by a former assistant to Rexford Tugwell named Roy Stryker. The RA initiated the photographic division as a way to document both economic conditions (particularly poor land use and its consequences) as well as the RA’s other activities. Stryker and the FSA expanded the program, envisioning it as a giant documentary of the American land and people. The
program produced some 80,000 prints. Among the famous images are "Migrant Mother" and her children by Dorothea Lange, and the father and son fleeing a dust storm, by Arthur Rothstein, but there were also town meetings, dances, family farms, and countless other American scenes. In 1942, the division was transferred to the Office of War Information where the photographs could serve as reminders of democracy and heritage.\(^86\)

This panoramic view of America in the 1930's and 40's included many of the resettlement communities. The pictures of Terrebonne were taken by Marion Post Wolcott in June of 1940. Mrs. Wolcott produced excellent work at TAI and elsewhere, despite several hindrances. Roy Stryker worried that her position as a woman put her at a disadvantage when she traveled alone in the South. Interviews were more difficult, especially with men, and more especially with black men. Stryker even admonished her that her "gypsy" bandana and bright coat, and even worse — trousers — might raise eyebrows.\(^87\) Sure enough, when she reached south Louisiana, she wrote her boss that the "little Cajun children...would run home or hide or run to get their father in the field," thinking she might be a German spy!\(^88\) Weather, too, hindered her. Rain and flooding postponed one trip to TAI, and even after reaching it she complained about the heat and humidity.\(^89\)

Perhaps her greatest obstacle at Terrebonne, however, might have been the project itself, or rather, her attitude towards it. Even though she recognized it as perhaps "the most important" assignment, for her it was "project work."\(^90\) She was eager to move on to other subjects (such as the Hispanic Isleño community in St.
Bernard Parish) where the FSA placed fewer guidelines on her. Coming to Terrebonne, she wrote Stryker, "momentarily it seemed that I just couldn’t face the sight of another co-op jackass or pressure cooker." But the project was waiting for her, and the members had been urged to come to a baseball game just so she could take a photograph, like Figure 20, which showed "members ‘at play’." The ball game, on an old pasture made into a field, matched perfectly one of the "shots" which the FSA suggested for projects: recreation, or "any one of the scheduled group gatherings showing the homesteader in a jovial mood."

The FSA often assigned "scripts" to their photographers, indicating which aspects of some place or event should be emphasized. Resettlements were generally lumped together in a script called "Life on the Homesteads." "Keep in mind," Stryker wrote of it, that:

the purpose is to show that the residents are leading normal, settled lives. The families eat, sleep, work, laugh, raise children, gossip, picnic, read books and wash clothes. There are certain things, however, they are doing that they have never done before . . . Try to show these new activities against a perfectly normal community background. Stress any incidents that show the residents as responsible, hard working, family loving, settled citizens."

Stryker’s number-one rule was to have at least one project member in every picture: his photographers would “humanize” the resettlements. Though criticism has been aimed at the scripted character of FSA photographs, scripts, too, can capture reality. At Terrebonne they did indeed have new meetings and committees and classes, but like people in communities everywhere, they daily met the challenges of the Great Depression at play, at home, and at work.
Figure 20 — Baseball game and photo opportunity
Source: Library of Congress, LCUSF34, Neg. 54320D
Notes


2 Eaton, p. 165.


5 Mims, p. ix.


7 Houma Courier, 20 September 1938.


9 “Community and Family Services Section, Annual Report January 1, 1940 to December 31, 1940 [for Region VI],” Box 27, 183-02; GC 35-42; RG 96.

10 Mo. Rpt. TAI, 25 February 1942; Box 22, 183-02; GC 35-42; RG 96.


12 Administrator to Newell D. Boardman, Regional Director in Milwaukee, n.d.; 110 (150-01-163) Box 12, File 160 Public Relations; GC 35-42; RG 96.


14 Blanchard, interview.

15 Minutes, 20 December 1939.

16 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 February-March 1940, 15 March-April 1940, 16-30 April 1940.

17 Roddy, interview. Mo. Rpt. HS, 16-30 April 1940.
18 Gaer, p. 122.

19 Minutes, 13 May 1940.


22 Rodrigue, Duet, Roddy, Chauvin; interviews.

23 Statement of the Sugar Cane Crop, 1908 p. 15.


25 Mo. Rpt. TAI, 25 February 1942; Box 22 183-01; GC 35-42; RG 96.

26 Chauvin, interview.

27 Smith/Leblanc, Blanchard, Roddy; interviews.


29 Blanchard, Chauvin; interviews.

30 Blanchard, interview.

31 Kane, Bayous, p. 169.

32 Minutes, 16 August 1939.

33 Roddy, interview.

34 Chauvin, interview.

35 “Community and Family Services Section . . .” 1940.

36 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 February-March 1940.

37 Mims, p. 49.


40 Mo. Rpt. HS, May-June, 1940.


42 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 September-October 1940.

43 Minutes, 26 June 1940, 10 July 1940.


45 Minutes, 25 September 1940, 16 October 1940, 27 January 1941.

46 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 May-June 1940, 16 August-September 1940, 15 October-November 1940.

47 The New Orleans Times-Picayune, 8 April 1939.

48 Houma Courier, 4 April 1939.

49 Minutes, 3 January 1940.

50 Houma Daily Courier, 22 May 1941.

51 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 February-March 1940, 16-30 April 1940.


53 “Monthly Narrative Report of Community and Family Services Section Region VI” by Kate Fulton, 1 August 1941; Box 22 183-01; GC 35-42; RG 96.

54 Houma Daily Courier, 16 July 1941.

55 Gaer, p. 65.

56 Memo: Establishment of Community Organizations, 18 January 1936; Box 6, File F 060; General Correspondence Maintained in the Washington Office, 1935-38; RG 96.

57 Gaer, p. 110.

58 George S. Mitchell to Arthur Thatcher; Box 292, File 3 FS Projects; RG 16.
59 Gaer, p. 200.

60 Blanchard, interview.

61 Schriever senior citizens center, 26 August 1995.

62 Blanchard, Smith/Leblanc, interviews.

63 Rodriguez, p. 275.

64 Minutes, 4 September 1940.

65 Minutes, 30 August 1939.

66 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 May-June 1940, 15 July-August 1940.

67 Houma Courier, 16 July 1936.

68 Minutes, 16 August 1939, 30 August 1939.

69 Conkin, p. 123.


71 T. Roy Reid to William Alexander, 26 April 1938; Box 279, File 8; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

72 Kane, Bayous, pp. 189-90.

73 Chauvin, interview.


75 Smith/Leblanc, interview.

76 Minutes, 24 July 1940, 28 August 1940. Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 March-April 1940, 16 May-June 1040, 16 September-October 1940.

77 List and description of resettlements developed under the RA, 22 November 1935; Box 4, File T RP 060-070; GC 35-42; RG 96.

170
Several documents, including Administrative Order 100, 1936 (quoted) in Box 71, File 935-04; GC 35-42; RG 96.


Houma Daily Courier, 7 July 1941.

Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 July-August 1940, 16 September-October 1940, 16 December-January 1940-41.


Minutes, 31 January 1940.


Houma Daily Courier, 21 August 1941.


Marion Post Wolcott to Roy Stryker, 28-29 July 1940; Roy Stryker papers microform 1912-1972 (hereafter identified as RSP); (Stanford, North Carolina: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1978).

Marion Post Wolcott to Roy Stryker, 19 June 1940; RSP.

Marion Post Wolcott to Roy Stryker, n.d., ca. July 1940, RSP.

ibid.

Minutes, 26 June 1940. “Suggested ‘shots’ for projects,” Series II Part C Section 3, RSP.

“Suggestions for Community Photographs,” Series II Part C Section 3, RSP.

ibid.
Chapter 8 Home

The July 7, 1941 issue of the Houma Daily Courier reported that eleven project home-makers had enrolled in the Terrebonne Red Cross War Relief club. The women would sew flannel shirts, pajamas, and hospital gowns, according to the “Terrebonne Association News” item. As the United States entered wartime, the economies the nation would make on the home front seemed merely a large-scale version of those that project families already made, everyday, in the home.

“The home as such is the real core of all progress,” wrote home economist Abby Marlatt in 1936. Millions of Americans agreed. “The ‘New Deal’ in home economics,” she continued, “should mean the wider vision, the saner philosophy, the visualizing of the individual and the family as part of the whole.” The government agreed. It meant, she concluded, “a training away from selfish standards, toward co-operation, toward larger social and larger spiritual values.” The FSA agreed, and could not have phrased it better themselves. Although the agency’s concern for the family often expressed itself in the small details of weekly budgets or eyeglasses, they, too, took a wide view of the home and its importance. In fact, in its own lexicon, “home management” had a very broad meaning; it covered “every phase of family living, relating to the community as well as the individual family.” Thus, in addition to community-wide programs, the FSA directed activities promoting economic, physical, and social well-being in every resettlement home. For project families, the road to participation in the “larger Community” of national success began right at their front door.

And literally knocking on the front doors at TAI was Mrs. Ruth Lina. Clearly an eager sponsor of the project’s community activities, she made her real mission the home. Not that her presence was all-important; even without her, families would have gone right on cooking breakfasts, mending clothes, cleaning houses, and doing all the
ordinary things that families do. But she is important to the Terrebonne story in several ways. As the home supervisor, she introduced the new element into family life; she represented and taught the ideals of home that the government held for members. Also, because so many of her reports have survived in the archives, she is an important source of information about the project. Reading her often glowing entries, however, we have to keep in mind that they reveal as much about Mrs. Lina, and Mrs. Lina's role, as they do about the project.

By 1936 the Resettlement Administration had already marshaled some 1300 home supervisors for its work across the nation. Many of these women, 80%, had degrees in home economics, and nearly all had lived on a farm or ranch. There is really no biographical information on Mrs. Lina, but one newspaper account noted that she had been head of FSA home economics in Terrebonne Parish for three years before she was transferred to TAI. There she took up residence in one of the project homes, and took up her duties an official home supervisor and unofficial cheerleader. Again and again in her reports she expressed and unflagging optimism about the members and their efforts. "We are trying and we are willing," she wrote, and:

"We will increase our efforts, and that's all!" as well as

the "majority of families still hopeful and last but not least we are trying," and

"We never give up on LA-12." Mrs. Lina may have needed all the encouragement she could muster for herself and for the members. After all, she was to lead the families in the daunting task of turning the project wilderness into productive gardens, full pantries, and manicured
lawns. Encouragement was part of her job description. As Abby Marlatt wrote of home economics work in the RA:

> It is no mean ideal to help the woman to see the needs of the family as a whole, to build up her faith and courage and morale so she can look on life not as a dreary round but as a worthwhile problem to be met and cheerfully solved.\textsuperscript{7}

Encouragement, however, also marked the limitations of her job. The FSA’s slogan of “No Such Word as ‘Must’” applied much more to Mrs. Lina and the home supervisors than it did to the farm or community managers. Given the limits of her authority, it’s no wonder that she sometimes stopped to linger over her successes. The spring of 1940, for example, she recorded that:

> The homemakers bore their share of the burden of Irish Potato Harvest heroically as can be seen by the amount of potatoes stored in food preservation report. The price received for saleable potatoes was above average and it was no little task to convince the families of the value of properly storing a supply for home use. However due to planning by the use of the farm and home plan the families were convinced.\textsuperscript{8}

As we saw earlier in some of Mrs. Lina’s report statistics, not all families were convinced every time. As project homemaker Mrs. Henry Blanchard chose to see it, “the women didn’t have to do certain things, but they had certain advantages available to them on the project”\textsuperscript{9}

In addition to sheer enthusiasm, the home supervisor had several other tools in her kit. Every month, for instance, she made numerous visits to the project homes, some scheduled and some not. “Visits” make them sound like social calls. They weren’t. They were used to give demonstrations, to plan budgets and other home activities, and to investigate conditions in the home. Correctly, the FSA saw that visits
could easily be abused. Even someone as highly placed as the Region 6 director was known to “go stomping” into project houses with questions and criticisms. Thus, the agency reminded its employees that “most people naturally resent the intrusions of strangers in their homes, and although the families visited may seem friendly and affable, one must be careful not to encroach upon any of their rights.” Quite naturally Mrs. Lina saw herself as welcome, even citing a family’s letter to her own superiors. “We do not consider them [FSA supervisors] as intruders who might dictate to us what we must do,” she quoted the Robert Rogers family, “but as sincere friends who will share in our troubles and rejoice in our success.” Whether every family felt equally appreciative is another question.

When Mrs. Lina wasn’t present in the flesh, she could be there in spirit — or at least in print. Memos and letters carried her advice and reminders to every project house. A “Rainy Day List” of activities, for example, was “on its way to the kitchen walls” of project homes in spring of 1940. A circular letter later that year gave families “twenty ways to save cash living costs.” Its practical tips included:

“Raise all you can, can all you can,”

“Bake own bread,“

“Clean and refinish old furniture at home,” and

“Have an approved clothes line...bob wire tears clothing” (apparently some families thought fences were good for something after all). The memo also reminded homemakers to keep their record books and “attend all meetings planned” for them.
In addition to the general community meetings for men and women, committee meetings for special events and projects, and craft and club meetings, project women also had home demonstration meetings. Mrs. Lina kept busy; in one month she gave as many as eleven classes for groups of homemakers. Often project or Schriever women assisted her in demonstrations of canning or cooking or the other arts of home management. On other occasions members attended meetings off the project, such as the Lafayette, Louisiana conference with the theme of “Securing a Better Understanding of the Home Maker’s Responsibility.” Mrs. Beady Roddy remembers riding in the community truck to attend many a project meeting. “They showed us how to cook things,” she explains. “They would have demonstrations and give us all each a taste to taste how it was; we enjoyed them,” she adds. Mrs. Henry Blanchard agrees: “We were taught quite a bit.”

Members had a chance to demonstrate their perfected skills in contests. Competitions, with members matched against each other or a project goal, also offered a sort of carrot when the use of the compulsory stick was limited. In “Better Homes and Garden Week” in 1940, FSA and parish officials awarded first through fourth places to member homes, judging such features as “general appearance of neatness and uniformity of informal landscaping and rotation gardening.” (Incidentally, winners were the families of Oliver Usey, Harry Usey, David Vicknair, and O’Neil Naquin.) In a 1942 competition, Mrs. Lina presented award certificates to eighteen families for growing 75% or more of their own food.
Families also took part in area and regional competitions. For a parish fair, members entered over forty exhibits in food preparation; winners went on to the South Louisiana fair. Such entries were yet another way the project could make a good showing for itself and its families. When Mr. and Mrs. Claude Percle placed first in the parish, and second in the state “Good Provider Contest,” both the New Orleans Times-Picayune and the Houma Daily Courier featured the story. “Splendid Record of Percle Family on Terrebonne Association Farm is Cited here Today,” the latter proclaimed. That record is of interest to us as well, as an example (an outstanding one) of a year’s worth of activity on the project. Mr. Percle worked as one of the farm foremen, and Mrs. Percle served as president of the Home Demonstration Club. Since the contest probably did not have an “experimental cooperative corporation” category, they entered in its “tenant/sharecropper class.” The Percle’s winning record? An average of $30.00 a month sold in vegetables, 450 quarts of food canned, $50.00 sold in milk, and $10.00 won in the cattle exhibit at the parish livestock show. Mrs. Lina and Mr. Harmount took the couple to the luncheon ceremony in the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans where they were awarded a certificate and fifty dollar check. Afterwards, Mrs. Lina reported with approval that Mr. Percle was going to “use the entire amount for seed and fertilizer in hopes of increasing the amount for home improvement in form of electrification and a bath room.”

The Percle’s record also stands as a good example of the FSA’s two-part plan for achieving a healthy home economy. One part addressed the reality of integrating families and communities with national life. If members weren’t going to live like
“islanders,” if they were going to participate in the national economy, if they were ever going to buy tobacco and hairpins and newspapers, they needed cash. How much they needed was debatable. One proposal for TAI estimated that families would have an annual net surplus of about $280.00, which quite conveniently matched their estimated cash expenses; another plan gave the whittled-down figure of $75.00 surplus. In either case, sales from vegetables, milk, or even Denison tray sets, along with wages and the anticipated annual project dividend, could provide members an income.

Part two of the economic plan contained some of the backward-glancing idealism often found among resettlement planners. Though it allowed that families needed some cash, the FSA still wanted them to live as self-sufficiently as possible, drawing on the land and their own skills to provide for their needs. Whenever they could, members grew their own food, sewed their own clothes, and built their own furniture in what was called the “Live-At-Home Program.”

The government referred to all these activities as “enlarging [the] noncash income” of a family. Not simple weekend hobbies, they were to be figured into a home budget as carefully as wages. Not merely a lifestyle, the “Live-At-Home Program” (as might be said of resettlements in general) depended on a complex regimen of record-keeping. “Oh yes,” Mrs. Louis Brunet recalls:

You were allowed money for fertilizer, for potatoes, for tractor fuel, but you couldn’t use any of that money to buy food with. If it was for the farm, it was for the farm. If it was for the house, it was for the house . . . . I had to keep a record of EVERYTHING we spent, what it was spent for, and I had to balance the book at the end of the year.

To assist members like Mrs. Brunet, the FSA provided them with two key documents: a
farm and home management plan of projected yearly income and expenses, and a record book of the year's actual financial activities.

According to an administration handbook, the farm and home plan served as "the hub of the Farm Security program, from which radiate all the other activities." Further, it cautioned that "any mistakes or weaknesses in this plan will affect the family adversely and retard its rehabilitation." Called a "flexible guide," the plan was meant to be prepared jointly by a supervisor and family. Like the loan and grant forms, though, the home plan also contained a kind of pledge of cooperation. The farmer and homemaker signed their names below the statement: "We agree to do our part in carrying out this home plan to the best of our ability." Though every household produced its own plan, the government naturally had guidelines. For Terrebonne Farms, for instance, it developed a sample management plan for an imaginary family of five: a thirty-five year old husband; thirty year old wife; boys, ten and four; and a girl, seven.

For those who like reading the fine print, the entire document is reproduced in Appendix C. In summary, the plan estimated what Mr. and Mrs. Breaux, to give them a name, and their children, would need to produce or buy during a single year. It left nothing to chance. Should Joe wish to subscribe to the Courier, $3.00 was allotted. Should little Celia need glasses, there was $5.00 in reserve for medical supplies. For writing M'mere and P'pere in Labadieville, $2.20 covered postage and paper.

The plan also placed a dollar value on the many items which the family would produce itself. Where city cousins might spend $80.00 on milk, the Breaux family of five would milk their own cow(s) — for some 1460 gallons. Instead of spending $30.00 on pork or bacon, the family would butcher two hogs for 200 pounds of meat.
Instead of buying potatoes, they would sell them, whatever was surplus from their estimated 800 pounds. They would chop eight cords of wood, churn 140 pounds of butter, catch 100 pounds in fish and game, can over 300 quarts of fruits and vegetables. In theory, at least. As the ads say: individual results may vary. Even if there were no “mistakes or weaknesses” in a plan, simple things like illness or aptitude or weather could derail it. In August 1940, for instance, a tropical storm skirting the Louisiana coast flattened project gardens, took out half the orchards, and blew off a few barn doors to boot. To safeguard against such calamities, the FSA required each family to save $10.00 for “contingency funds” and to carry over some supplies from one year to the next.

The family record book was the companion to the farm and home management plan; in some ways it was the more important of the two documents. In it the family recorded their actual expenses and earnings and so could direct their progress through the year. The plan offered a goal; the record book helped the family reach it. But it was probably the more tedious of the two documents, also. The FSA acknowledged that keeping track of every penny and pound was no easy task. To its supervisors it explained that “no family should be asked to keep a record book before it understands and is convinced that the keeping of the record will help them manage their farm and home to their greater advantage.” At Terrebonne the supervisors lost no opportunity to sell its advantages. In one 1940 meeting, all three supervisors took the floor to discuss it. First, Mrs. Lina emphasized the importance of the books to the Live-At-Home Plan. Next, Mr. Harmount asked members to come by the office if the mechanics...
of keeping the books confused them. Finally, Mr. Borland suggested they just bring the books to the next meeting and go over them there, page by page.  

Despite such encouragement, the supervisors believed that too few families use the books, or used them correctly. In one of the reports, for instance, Mrs. Lina noted that during a month when 52 families (nearly all) had kept their books, only 25% were “adequately kept.” To encourage better participation, the project held record book contests during which a grand prize was temptingly displayed in the community building or office. Terrebonne and LaFourche Parish extension agents judged the 1940 contest and awarded a Simmons Company iron bed to the winner. “Some kept them, some did not,” Mrs. Henry Blanchard says of the books. “But I thought I would give it a try, and I did it for four or five years. And I enjoyed it, it turned out.” Mrs. Blanchard’s efforts repaid her in more ways than one; she still owns the metal chest of drawers awarded to her in the 1941 contest.

The record books and management plans were the two main documents undergirding the “Live-At-Home” program, but the FSA also provided a bevy of other budget-related forms: poultry plans, dairy plans, and canning records, for instance. Mrs. Lina wrote that Terrebonne members were supposed to keep their food preservation record on the margin of their garden and home orchard plan and their canning budget, all tacked inside their pantry doors. (Or perhaps pasted inside, since nail holes were discouraged!) Most of these records concerned food in some way, simply because food was the single largest expense for the project family. In terms of money, it took up almost a fourth of the estimated cash income. In the imaginary
Breaux family’s plan, purchased food alone (flour, salt, spices, coffee, and so forth) made up $74.00 of the estimated $267.00 expenses, and was the single largest expense for the year. But in terms of time, food was perhaps even more costly: imagine the hours spent to produce the equivalent of $327.00 of food, as our model family would have.

Canning, especially, consumed much of the family’s time. Or more specifically, much of the women’s time, though on one occasion Mrs. Lina noted that both men and women were canning “fast and furious” to preserve a quickly-ripening vegetable crop. In typical fashion, where most people would simply see next year’s larder, the FSA saw something deeper in this common activity. Canning had a symbolic, even an aesthetic, value, as well as a practical one. As FSA chief Will Alexander reminisced:

> When you put carrots and tomatoes and yellow summer squash in a glass jar, they’re colorful. We would visit these farms, and the woman usually had her canned food arranged so that anyone who came in could see it. She would take you in with great modesty and reticence and show you her jars with as much pride as an artist exhibiting his pictures.

One young project member had just such a pleasure when community photographs were being taken, as seen in Figure 21. Not only is her family’s home-grown produce beautifully displayed in glass jars, the pantry shelves are neatly papered and labeled. Notice, too, the chart which is indeed tacked to the pantry door.

The FSA believed canning was so important that during member selection, interviewers were supposed to ask not only how much a family canned but what method they used. At TAI, Mrs. Lina noted that 23 older homemakers still used tin cans, but glass jars were the preferred containers. During one peak season she requested an
immediate railroad shipment of new fruit jars — an entire carload. The women used pressure cookers to preserve everything from milk to meat in the jars. Figure 22 shows Mrs. Lina (on the left) giving a home demonstration of this piece of equipment, which Will Alexander called “one of the smaller, homely symbols of the FSA in many a household.” Like radios and newspaper subscriptions, the acquisition of a pressure cooker quantified progress. Before a family bought its own cooker, they could borrow one from the association, but by June of 1940, 32 families owned a cooker and 5 had orders underway. That month the 32 women, Mrs. Lina wrote, “delighted the entire family” by learning to prepare a complete meal in the pressure cooker.

But canning was really only a last step in the FSA’s plans for family food, which also included gardening, cooking, and meal planning. The agency had long been concerned with family nutrition and diet, particularly in the rural South, where cotton sometimes overtook the family garden. Will Alexander recalled how the FSA even hired cultural anthropologists to learn how to improve people’s food habits. Their specialists proved none too helpful, however, and in the end the administration fell back on its tried and true method of written plans, especially a calendar for seasonal gardening which was meant to be hung in a family’s kitchen. We might get the impression that these small kitchens would be completely papered with charts and calendars and plans if the government had had its way.

On Terrebonne and the other resettlements, gardening took on large proportions. After all, these were no mere backyard corners; families had several acres on which to raise food for themselves and for sale. Consequently, gardening became a type of
Figure 21 — Pantry shelves trimmed, instructions tacked to door
Source: Library of Congress, LCUSF34, Neg. 54297D
Figure 22 — Pressure cooker, homely symbol of the FSA
Source: Library of Congress, LCUSF34, Neg. 54320D
farming, and fell as much under the direction of the farm supervisor as the home supervisor. On the Schriever project these miniature family farms stood in contrast to — and in competition with — the association’s cooperative farming, as we will see in the next chapter. Food preparation and diet, however, fell thoroughly in Mrs. Lina’s purview, with some assistance from the project’s nurse, Hilda Landry.

Demonstrations and letters carried the FSA’s message of a balanced diet to the project homes. One of Mrs. Lina’s circulars from 1940 put the issue in a larger perspective. “As part of our national defense,” she wrote:

> Woman’s duty is to properly feed our families to build strong and well bodies. The United States is about the only nation without laws forcing every mother to learn how to feed her family properly.47

From this lofty preamble, the letter went on to address the more practical issue of after-school snacks. “Stewed dried fruits, pudding or fruit sandwiches are a joy to children upon arrival at home from school. Did you ever see children that weren’t hungry after school?” it asked. It also counseled that “paper bags are very bad for school lunch containers,” and thus made a metal lunch box for each child another small benchmark of family progress.

Though Mrs. Lina’s demonstrations and advice may have been helpful, members today point out that they weren’t starting from scratch. All of them brought their own skills and experience to the project, and in fact, they wouldn’t have been selected as members without those skills. Canning, for example, was old hat for many women. Says Mrs. Dorothy Smith, “My mama canned since before I could remember. We KNEW how to do it!” Mrs. Augustin Rodrigue agrees, “Me! We knew all about that.”
And Mrs. Blanchard says her daughter was "raised on vegetables" and that FSA gardening instructions were nothing new.

In a similar fashion, sewing was part of most any homemaker's routine, but it was also fair game for the FSA's particular methods of home improvement. Sewing provided an opportunity for members to purchase another desirable item for the home, and another FSA index of progress. In 1940 Mrs. Lina reported there were "eight proud owners" of new sewing machines, and two orders underway. Sewing was the subject of instruction and classes. The project hosted several Singer Clothing Schools, and the home supervisor gave demonstrations of slipcovering, quilting, and related crafts. Sewing was the occasion for more project competitions, such as the 1940 "House Dress Contest." Homemakers modeled their creations at a Community Night meeting where they were judged by demonstration agents from the area parishes. The first place winner received fabric for another dress, and second place won fabric and trim for an apron. Perhaps most importantly, from the FSA's point of view, sewing provided an opportunity for homemakers to learn cooperation and leadership in the group activities of quilting and mattress making.

Important items for the home, quilts and mattresses could be made by members at little cost, thanks to another government program, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. Often hated for its "plow-ups" and slaughters of surplus crops and farm animals in the early 30's, the AAA later sought to distribute surplus commodities. In the winter of 1941, for instance, TAI families received several issues of surplus apples, prunes, beans, and lard. But more abundant than any of these, and found
closer to home, was the South's number one crop, cotton. What to do with millions of bales of cotton selling for a pittance? One solution was to sleep on it, literally, in mattresses and quilts.

Terrebonne project families used their cotton distributions to make these items for their own use and later for the war effort. In the summer of 1940 a committee of project women issued cotton and cotton percale to the families: 7665 pounds of cotton and 3000 yards of fabric in a single month. To tackle this immense bulk of cotton, twelve "mattress leaders" and sixteen "quilt leaders" organized the community women and girls. They shared ten quilting frames and four tufting tables among them, and whatever else they could lay hand on. The home supervisor praised the cleverness of eight members who made nails into roll needles and old umbrella ribs into tufting needles. Working alone or in their groups, project women created quilts and mattresses like those shown in Figure 23. Mrs. Lina included these snapshots in one of her upbeat monthly reports — tangible proof of success in the "Live at Home" program at Terrebonne.

Though a family's economic well-being was most adaptable to improvement and inspection through the budgets and charts of "Live at Home," the FSA also kept in mind a family's physical and social well-being. To improve the health of members, the project sponsored programs in hygiene and nutrition, and medical and dental care. Hilda Landry, the FSA nurse, Mrs. Lina, and later a six-member health committee directed many of these activities. One member recalls Mrs. Landry as "so nice," a girl from the Thibodaux area who made home visits, especially when a project homemaker
was expecting. Mrs. Landry also gave classes in pre-natal care, as shown in Figure 24, and administered “advice, demonstrations, and reassurance,” as one report explained. Mrs. Lina conducted health classes, too, such as a home nursing demonstration where members learned to prepare liquid and soft diets for the sick. Between the two of them, nurse Landry and Mrs. Lina, they saw all manner of ailment and treatment. In one month alone, for example, they reported a dislocated shoulder, two eyeglass prescriptions and eight eye exams for children, one case of venereal disease, amoebic dysentery (“and other parasites”), as well as 100% immunization for diptheria.

Although these project employees supervised some aspects of health care, members themselves made the most important contributions in the form of sick benefits, mentioned earlier, and a medical cooperative. Our nation’s current controversies over health care may make headlines, but they really began in yesterday’s news. Medical cooperatives organized at Terrebonne and the other projects often drew heavy criticism. The American Medical Association and similar groups saw them as “socialized medicine,” according to Will Alexander, and even pressured state medical organizations to forbid doctors to enter co-op agreements. On the other side, rural and small town doctors — who too often saw farms bankrupted and families crippled by poor health and untreated illness — were eager to provide affordable care.

The idea of a medical co-op may have held special appeal to the families at Terrebonne, too, as it was similar to a Louisiana French custom, l’abonnement. This yearly subscription to a doctor’s service assured the doctor of some payment (rather than none), and guaranteed families a fixed, low rate for most treatment. Very similar in
nature, the medical cooperative at Schriever contracted with local doctors Barker and Kleinpeter for home visits, obstetrics, minor injuries, and a weekly clinic. To use the doctor's service, families paid a monthly fee. In 1940 a family of five paid $1.00; those with five to ten members paid $1.50, and families blessed with eleven or more paid $2.00. And as one member explains the system, "childbirth was as good as whooping cough;" the price was the same.

Mrs. Lina may have believed that the greatest obstacle to good health was not economics but attitude, which made her efforts at education all the more important. In one of her reports, for instance, she lamented that it was an "uphill proposition to educate the families to necessity and need of small pox vaccination. This is being accomplished very slowly." Members, however, saw a much more concrete obstacle to medical care; the location and lay-out of the project. Living "in the sticks" with few automobiles meant that, aside from weekly clinics, access to medical treatment was limited. The issue arose twice in community meetings, where supervisors reminded residents that medical dues did not entitle them to transportation to a doctor. The Minutes from December 1939 explained firmly that:

There is nothing in the doctor's contract that requires delivery of medicine, neither is the personnel in a position to run to Thibodaux every time medicine is needed or when there is a case of emergency everyone is willing to do anything, yet in ordinary cases the members will have to provide their own facilities to get medicine, have prescriptions filled and go to the doctor.

On another occasion a mobile dental clinic visited the area, but bad weather prevented some families from walking the several miles for their appointments.
While members daily considered the long roads and vistas of the project, the FSA had its view trained on the more intimate space of the family home. By supervising who lived in project houses, the FSA made another attempt to foster economic and social well-being in the home. When it selected families for any resettlement, the government considered size and sex distribution as one of its criteria. A family needed the right number of boys and right number of girls to be “reasonably accommodated” in the bedrooms available, with (ideally) no more than two people per bed. Once selected, this was the arrangement, and there would be not tampering with it — unless by the FSA, of course. In May of 1940, for example, Mrs. Lina made two reports to the Family Selection Specialist about household changes on the project. She had visited the Robert Rogers’ home “for the purpose of investigating including Wilfred Gravois, Mrs. Roger’s brother as a member of the Rogers’ Household.” Because there were enough beds, and because Mr. Gravois would pay board to the family, she recommended him as an “added asset” to the household. Likewise, she approved member Ivy Badeaux’s brother under a similar arrangement.

When the wife of member Ursin Daigle died in February of 1942, the home supervisor’s investigation followed closely on the heels of the projects’ formal letter of sympathy. The remaining Daigle family was left intact, as Mr. Daigle had two older children to help him manage the home, but Mrs. Lina noted that “if these arrangements do not work out others will be made in the near future.” Another project family’s arrangement did prove unsuitable, and a widowed grandmother moved out because of “lack of family income.” The home supervisor found the woman a job elsewhere as a
live-in housekeeper, noting that her removal from the family’s home (and budget) allowed two girls in the family to remain in school.  

Although new adult members to a family required special approval, infant additions were strictly according to plan. “We’re becoming a population center,” Mrs. Lina enthused about the many babies born on the project. The FSA knew that with these young members they had a chance to impress their ideals on a future generation. Thirteen-year-old Patrick LeBlanc, for example, was described in a New Orleans newspaper article as “learning the co-operative viewpoint at an early age and enjoying it.” But to credit the FSA, it saw a still greater opportunity to assist these young people in achieving the future of their choice on or off the project. Then, as now, the door to that opportunity was education. The agency handbook emphasized:

> The Farm Security Administration recognizes the necessity for assisting... families in keeping their children in school. Every effort is made to enable them to attend school on equal terms with the other children in the community. If children lose out in their opportunity for education when they are young, they are certain to lose out in the opportunities for work in the city and on the farm when they grow older.

If the administration was farsighted in its goals for project children, well, it did overlook some immediate details. Transportation and project size once again put a wrinkle in planning. When project teenager Leonard Chauvin was graduating in 1944 with the first four-year class at Terrebonne High, his main worry was: “How’m I gonna get to graduation?” Project youth attended local Schriever grammar schools and moved on to high schools in Houma. Buses took them to schools, but even catching a bus sometimes meant a long walk. Before the roads were laid with clamshell, it meant a
dusty or muddy walk, too. Mrs. Dorothy Smith remembers traipsing barefoot across the project, her shoes and socks carried to keep them clean for school.\(^75\)

Eventually, Mr. Hamount worked with school employees to improve the project’s bus routes, but area teachers still reported low attendance from TAI youth.\(^76\) It wasn’t just a matter of playing hooky: many teens stayed home, or were kept at home, to help their families with farm and house work.\(^77\) It was an old custom. When Mrs. Lina checked on the teens missing the most school in the winter term of 1940, she found that the parents themselves had left school before the third grade.\(^78\) Economics forced a family’s hand in other ways, too, as in the family who had to choose between the widowed grandmother or the girls’ schooling. In another case, Mrs. Lina helped two teen-agers return to school by finding them suitable clothes to wear.\(^79\) Practical problems aside, project official made an appeal to pride, asking members “to keep up the reputation of the Project by having all our children in school.”\(^80\)

To ease the transition of young adults between home and independence, project supervisors sometimes became vocational counselors; Mrs. Lina wrote about “consulting and completing plans” for project teen-agers.\(^81\) The association’s wood-working classes were one much-advised training avenue, but they were never as well attended as supervisors hoped. Perhaps the potential students saw a limited market for stools, chairs, and magazine racks. Despite “extensive education” and persuasion to the contrary, for example, several woodshop dropouts said they preferred to work and save money for clothes, a car, and a course in barbering — not impractical choices, whatever Mrs. Lina’s disappointments.\(^82\) In other cases, FSA and teen-age plans coincided. One
young man became the woodshop assistant; another began work with the National
Youth Administration. Still others worked in the Civilian Conservation Corps. For
the girls, Mrs. Lina found traditional female employment. The association hired two
young women to clean the community and office buildings for $1.00 a week ("have
purchased curtains for their homes with earnings," Mrs. Lina added.) Four others found
work as "house girls" in Houma and Thibodaux; the home supervisor stated that their
employers had sought out project girls specifically for their thorough training in home
economics.

For children and teens too young to work, the association planned other
activities. Like the organized social events for adults, children's programs often larded
fun and games with more serious goals. The project organized softball teams for both
boys and girls, for instance, with project girls wearing home-made uniforms
emblazoned with "TAI." Along with games, and sometimes cake and ice cream and
swimming, the players practiced several days a week. Consequently, Mrs. Lina noted
that "mothers report much unrest solved by organization of these two teams," and the
young players learned sportsmanship and cooperation. Likewise, a sense of purpose
infused the project's dramatic club. A little farther from off-off-Broadway, players took
their lines from sources such as the "Kansas Safety Council" and made skits on health
and wellness to community members. In another sketch, young members
demonstrated "strength through unity" by trying to break a bundle of sticks. Then
there were Boy and Girl Scout troops, which Schriever children also joined, and 4-H
clubs. Of the 4-H girls, the home supervisor wrote that they "had the privilege of
planning their own projects." For those who wanted even less regimentation, there were always games, bicycles, and some good fishing spots in the bayou or Magnolia canal, as Leonard Chauvin remembers. The boys in Figure 25 probably agreed.

Project homemakers had little time for such unslated, unbuttoned pastimes. Running any household is a time-consuming job; managing a TAI household was truly a full plate. Consider one of Mrs. Lina’s agendas sent out in a circular letter:

Dear Home Makers:

This a busy month with mattress making, quilt making, short course, cooking school and starting our fall gardens in rotation garden planting, keeping record books up-to-date, also Good Provider Contest record books, check home and farm plans for purpose of knowing how we stand, sending in our contribution to ‘ON DIT’ prior to the 15th of each month, attending club meetings and, last but not least, rooting our permanent evergreens for landscaping.

Or admire the daily routine set by Mrs. Milton Toups, as described in the Courier:

One homemaker has set as her goal six quarts daily, these vegetables are prepared and placed in pressure cooker and processed right along with her noon meal. When her family dinner is completed so is her daily food preservation. She then has the entire afternoon to pick market beans or bundle garlic or onion for market, or with an extra hour left over to sit down to do her Red Cross War Relief clothing sewing.

The nation’s entry into world war both altered and increased the routines of the project homemaker, farmer, and community. More Red Cross meetings, and now Farm Defense Plan meetings, too. Among the youth, some joined the service; their younger brothers and sisters spotted planes in a tower built near the market stand. Homemakers stepped up their production of mattresses as part of the AAA National Defense Program; now they were paid 10¢ to 12¢ a tick. In the second month of war, project women made over two hundred mattresses. They gardened and canned like never before, all part of the government’s “Food for Freedom” program, and Mrs. Lina
Figure 25 — Fishing with Huck and Tom on the project
Source: Library of Congress, LCUSF34, Neg. 54259D
boasted, “There will be no food shortage here, on the contrary there is and will be a surplus for our neighbors.” According to their advocates, the FSA cooperatives would serve their nation well during the war. Morally and socially, they would “stand as a bulwark of democracy.” Economically, they would be organized and efficient farms, producing raw materials so important to the nation’s future.

Notes

1 Houma Daily Courier, 7 July 1941.


3 Gaer, p. 192.


5 Houma Courier, 9 March 1939.


7 Marlatt, p. 525.

8 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 May-June 1940.

9 Blanchard, interview.


11 Gaer, p. 112.

12 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16-30 April 1940.

13 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 May-June 1940.

14 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 December-January 1940-41.

15 Mo. Rpt. TAI, 31 October 1940; Box 22 183-01; GC 35-42; RG 96.

16 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 March-April 1940.
17 Roddy, Blanchard; interviews.


19 Minutes, 18 March 1942.

20 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 July-August 1940.

21 Houma Daily Courier, 7 January 1941.


23 “Preliminary Approval of loan to Terrebonne Farms, Inc.” Box 2783, File 4 F Sec 1938; RG 16. “Home Management Plan,” sample for Terrebonne Association Louisiana; Box 278, File 1; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

24 Gaer, p. 195.

25 ibid.

26 Brunet, interview.

27 Gaer, p. 98.

28 ibid.

29 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 July-August 1940.

30 Home Management Plan, Terrebonne Association Louisiana; Box 278, File 1; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

31 Gaer, p. 111.

32 Minutes, 29 May 1940.

33 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 March-April 1940.


35 Blanchard, interview.

36 Various USDA forms; Box 34 523-530; GC 35-42; RG 96.

37 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 May-June 1940.
38 Home Management Plan.

39 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 May-June 1940.


41 Sample form, "Interviewer's Analysis;" Box 64; GC 35-42; RG 96.

42 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 May-June 1940.

43 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 March-April 1940.


45 Blanchard, interview. Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 May-June 1940.


47 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 September-October 1940.

48 Smith/Leblanc, Rodrigue, Blanchard; interviews.

49 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 February-March 1940.

50 ibid.

51 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 March-April 1940.


54 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 July-August 1940.

55 Minutes, 27 April 1941.

56 Roddy, interview.

57 "Activities of Community Nurses Report," Region VI, 31 July 1940; Box 22 183-01; GC 35-42; RG 96.

58 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 March-April 1940.


61 Parenton, p. 77.

62 Minutes, 29 May 1940, 30 May 1940, 26 June 1940.

63 Chauvin, interview.

64 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 July-August 1940.

65 Minutes, 30 August 1939, 20 December 1939.

66 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 July-August 1940.


68 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 May-June 1940.


70 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 August-September 1940.


72 *The Sunday Item-Tribune*, 25 June 1939.

73 Gaer, p. 90.

74 Chauvin, interview.

75 Smith/Leblanc, interview.

76 Minutes, 29 May 1940. Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 October-November 1940.

77 Minutes, 22 November 1939.

78 Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 October-November 1940.

79 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 August-September 1940.

80 Minutes, 28 August 1940.


82 Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 September-October 1940.

Mo. Rpt. HS., 16 May-June 1940, 16 September-October 1940.


Chauvin, interview.


Chauvin, interview.

Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 July-August 1940.

Houma Daily Courier, 30 May 1941.

Minutes, 10 November 1941.

Smith/Leblanc, interview.


Report of the Administrator of the Farm Security Administration 1941, p. 22.
Chapter 9 Farm

A cold, rainy spring in 1942 compacted the black clay soil of 76 project acres meant to be planted in corn. Consequently, on April 6 the board had to formally petition the FSA to allow them to substitute legumes for corn in order to improve the soil. In this and hundreds of other instances, coordination between government and members had very real and sometimes frustrating applications on the farm.

Describing TAI farm operations might seem as simple as reciting crop statistics or rainfall measurements. In fact, along with the organization of the project, the farm activities are perhaps the most complicated part of the project’s story. For one reason, the association was not really a single farm operation, but several. As an FSA agricultural engineer explained, TAI had five interwoven and simultaneous farm systems: sugarcane and its cover crops; sweet, Irish, and truck potatoes; livestock of mules, swine, and cattle; general crops of corn, grains, alfalfa, and pasture; and finally, vegetables and the four-acre tracts rented to members. Furthermore, these five operations were distributed across four different plantations seamed together by little more than a legal charter and half-paved roads. In a more significant complication, TAI farming, more than any other activity, reflected the contradictions found in the project’s organization. Whether the project was a business or an experiment influenced what crops would be grown — dependable market-sellers or unproven varieties. Whether the project was a plantation or a collection of farms affected the hours that men worked, and the patterns they made as they moved from one part of the project to another. Farming turned abstract questions into soil and sweat.

In the beginning, the government seemed to lean towards experimentation. For example, the Farm Security initially regarded vegetable production as a key element in
what one official called “an entirely new system of agriculture and community pattern”
for TAI. The project allotted a sixty-acre tract to this activity, irrigating some of it with
water from a pit on the St. George plantation. Supervisors carefully considered the
selection and care of the vegetable crops, since any one might represent a future
economic bonanza. In 1941, Frank Lister, an FSA cooperative marketing specialist,
produced a detailed list of his recommendations for TAI vegetables based on their early
successes and market demands.

In 1940, for example, the project made nearly 7,000 pounds of onions, and Lister
recommended more acreage the next year to meet an increasing demand in South
America. “Terrebonne growers understand onion culture,” he wrote, “and the crop is
one of the best that could be chosen for the project.” Likewise for garlic, an equally
familiar crop which would bring a good price as war in Europe halted Italian imports.
Eggplant was good for the holiday season, and merited four acres. On the other hand, a
test plot of tomatoes making 133 pounds was judged impractical because of packing
costs. “Our homesteaders are not yet seasoned enough for this type of work,” Lister
advised. Brussels sprouts, too, he believed, were better left to area Italians who
understood its handling requirements.

In all, members tried over two dozen different crops, with varying success:
beans, beets, cabbage, cantaloupe, carrots, cauliflower, sweet corn, cucumbers,
eggplant, kohlrabi, lettuce — and — mustard, okra, onions, peas, peanuts, peppers,
pumpkin, radishes, — and — shallots, spinach, squash, tomato, turnips, and
watermelon. They carefully recorded their results, which ranged from a whopping
23,000 turnips, to a single bunch of radishes.
In an even more venturesome project, members also began growing Easter lilies for sale. The American bulb market relied heavily on imports from Japan (nearly 17,000,000 in 1935); war would create a demand for a domestic source. The Creole variety tried at TAI grew well in Louisiana, especially where a river or bayou helped protect the plants from cold. The FSA introduced lilies at the Schrievers project and seven other resettlements in the South, but with less than spectacular results. The agency's principal horticulturalist complained that it was "difficult to get any of the farmers to visualize the potential possibilities" of the new crop, and "nearly impossible to impress any of them with the fact that an acre of well-grown lilies is worth at least 10 to 15 acres of practically any crop they now grow."  

Another introduction, cauliflower, fared much better. In 1940 the project grew over 19,000 heads, enough to merit praise from the regional director. The crop demanded intensive labor. One member recalls hauling wood for fires to smoke the plants during a heavy freeze. The heads also had to be jacket-tied for whitening and individually cut. Nonetheless, Frank Lister considered the crop "a natural for the project," where they "grew as fine a Snowball flower . . . as can be found."  

Along with these more experimental vegetables, members also grew an old standby, the Irish potato. The government envisioned potato cultivation as one of TAI's most promising enterprises; as early as 1939 the project became a member of the Louisiana Potato Association. That same year, when the resettlement was barely off the ground, it made a contract to ship 500 sacks of certified seed potatoes to Cuba. In the spring of 1940, members planted 103 acres of Irish potatoes, almost the limit allowed by the AAA, which regulated it as a staple crop. They made 5,247 sacks, and
Frank Lister expected future production to reach 25 or 30 train carloads. The potatoes would be sent to Houma, where they were shipped out by rail to more distant markets.\textsuperscript{14} By 1941 the association had passed a resolution that “the raising of potatoes should be considered one of the most important crops . . . on the Terrebonne project.”\textsuperscript{15}

The government expected that potatoes and many of the other vegetables would become more and more significant to the project over time. For the potato crop they wanted better mechanical graders and proper storehouses. Also on the drawing board (and remaining there) were a vegetable packing shed with modern washing equipment, and more rail siding for carlot loading.\textsuperscript{16} Vegetables were one direction the project could take, but sugarcane was the other. The FSA foresaw vegetables as a partial substitute for cane, which was strictly limited by the AAA quotas, but it would take time to develop their potential.\textsuperscript{17} So, very early the question became, how important would sugarcane farming be in comparison to the other farm operations? Exactly how much cane would the government allow the project to grow? Not even the FSA could answer the latter question. Not without permission from the AAA.

The irony of this dilemma was not lost on project members or the public. The \textit{Times Picayune} coverage of 1940 Settlers’ Day, for example, was as much exposé as feature story. “Inquiry among the tenants,” the article read:

revealed that the United States government with one hand offers these Louisiana farmers and their families a home and a farm with the opportunity to work out of debt and make money and with the other hand rigidly limits the crops they are permitted to grow, by quotas of the United States department of agriculture.\textsuperscript{18}

Before the association had even made its first cane crop, however, President LeBlanc had signed a letter to Washington in protest of these very limits.\textsuperscript{19} The FSA backed him
up with a plan. The resettlement agency would once again play on the flexibility (or confusion) surrounding TAI organization.

For the 1940 crop, the AAA had allotted cane to the project based on the quota for a single plantation, only 400 acres. As such, members could “work only at such times and at day wages so that the owner and manager will make a profit,” but no more than that, complained a Region 6 official. In other words, there would not be enough cane, work, or money to go around.20 In response, the FSA requested that the allotment be changed to represent seventy-two individual farmers: the number of members who could join the cooperative. They also proposed assigning individual tracts of land to each member. The AAA did not immediately agree. If they renegotiated the allotment for TAI, might other large plantations with many workers press them to do the same?21

In the summer of 1940, however, the AAA relented. The Schriever project entered into a new agreement with the AAA and with its own members, gaining a per-family cane allotment. The details are tedious but important. At a community meeting on May 15, 1940, Mr. Harmount presented the terms of the new agreement, the heart of which read:

Whereas it is necessary, in order to comply with regulations pertaining to sugar cane quotas, to allot land acreage on a sub-lease to the individual members for the crop year 1940; to execute separate working papers and contracts with the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and to operate the said acreages individually; and WHEREAS, the Association will undertake and agree to furnish labor, materials and supervision in the cultivation and operation of the lands covered by above mentioned sub-leases for the 1940 crop year at prices to be agreed upon. In consideration of the mutual agreements of the Association and the members, it is understood that the individual members . . . will make and execute such agreements, contracts and leases as may be required . . . and accept the terms and condition of said leases and agreements to be determined by the Board.
of Directors of the Association and approved by the duly authorized representative of the Farm Security Administration.22

Just what did the agreement mean? The first clause seems to suggest that project lands would be divided and individually run as seventy-two rented farms. As we saw in Chapter 5, potential sub-lease lines already existed for the project. Notice, however, that in the second clause, the association still agreed to provide the "labor, materials and supervision" for sub-leased lands. Notice, too, that the final word, literally, still belonged to the FSA. To the cooperative, the new agreement meant a better allotment, based on ten acres per family.23 To members it meant business as usual. Sub-lease lines remained lines on a map, and the association continued to run farm operations collectively. In fact, although members received individual allotments, they did not even need to sign their quota applications. As Mr. Harmount explained to them, "the association will sign for the whole."24

Evidence of the cooperative nature of project farming can also be seen in the planting patterns. The aerial photo of Figure 11 shows the patchwork nature of the project lands. Large blocks of cropland and pasture dwarfed the members' six-acre tracts and sprawled across potential sub-lease lines. As the FSA pointed out, the large blocks made best use of group labor and machinery, and also the differences between the project's lighter sandyland and heavier blackjack soils, as well as the five other types carefully mapped by FSA soil experts.23 The photo also allows us to see the project momentarily from a different perspective, an aerial view and at the same time an intimate, insiders' view. In Chapter 5, our person walking along the shell road looking at the homes also saw long, unbroken walls of green. Where he or she may have
registered the sight as simply “cane,” the TAI farmer intuitively discerned one edge of
the complicated pattern which his knowledgeable inner eye could follow across acres
and seasons alike.

Sugarcane, as we have seen, shared the project with vegetables and other crops,
and the cane itself was divided among several varieties. The wonder-canes of the
1920’s, the “Please Oh Jesus” varieties, had themselves become disease susceptible a
decade later. Coimbatore, an Indian cane, began to replace P.O.J. in the early thirties;
after 1935 an even more popular cane from Canal Point, Florida, began to be
introduced. At any one time the Terrebonne project grew several varieties of Co and
CP cane, following the common practice of south Louisiana planters.

Yet another element to this agricultural pattern stemmed from the perennial
nature of cane. Sugarcane is a grass, and although it can produce seed, it is usually
planted vegetatively, that is, from cuttings of stalks. These cuttings, called seed cane,
(not cane seed) produce shoots along the joints of the stalk. The first year’s growth is
called plant cane; after its harvest the plant can regrow for a successful second or even a
third year crop. These secondary crops are called stubble or ratoon cane. Thus, after its
initial year of cultivation, cane stands of different ages grew in various locations across
the project.

Still another dimension to this crop pattern involved rotation, alternately
planting land in primary or cash crops, and then soil-building crops. Planners for TAI at
one time suggested a complicated rotation scheme which played out over six years, but
they finally settled on the locally common four year rotation: three years of cane (plant

210
cane and two years of stubble cane), followed by a soil-building crop of soybeans or inter-cropped corn and soybeans.\textsuperscript{29}

Thus, vegetables, pasturage, soil crops, and different varieties and ages of cane fitted together in a complex whole. The project's agricultural organization required vision that was both detailed (what crops go where?) and far-sighted (what crops in three years?). Cane itself demanded an eye to the future since good or bad condition could affect not just one harvest, but two or three. Ironically, it required a kind of planning which contrasted with both the transience of many labor families in the Sugar Bowl, and with the tenuous, Congressional funding of the FSA. But planning was the rite and creed of the organization, and project leaders repeatedly emphasized organizing the farm program "sufficiently in advance to permit an orderly sequence of farm work."\textsuperscript{30} Together with members they orchestrated a complicated arrangement of land use which rested upon the underlying rhythm of the cane cycle.

The multi-year nature of cane was especially important during preparations for planting. Both project leaders and agricultural experts alike stressed the importance of a "good deep tilth" which had to last for two or three years of cane crops.\textsuperscript{31} Workers broke up cover crops and built six-foot wide rows. The latter, like the cane and corn rotation, was standard Louisiana practice, the culmination of a nearly a century's worth of patient trial and error, but FSA experts only selected it after their planting diagrams (Figure 26) suggested it was compatible with the rest of their agricultural scheme.\textsuperscript{32} By the 1940's, farmers had almost abandoned the practice of spring planting in favor of fall, when they saved some of the stalks from the harvest for seed cane. Laid lengthwise in an opened row, the stalks were carefully covered with dirt in windrows to protect
Figure 26 — Planting diagram based on divisions on 6' cane rows
Source: National Archives; Box 279, File 5; RCA 35-54; RG 96
them from winter cold. Mid-February or so, workers also shaved back the stubble cane to encourage its healthy new growth.

In the early spring, workers helped the cane to germinate by opening the row, that is, removing some of the dirt from around the stalks to let the sun warm the soil. As soon as the cane buds began to send out shoots, the real work of the season began: cultivation to keep down grass and weeds. Farmers cultivated using hoes and plows, and by dirt ing, gradually building soil back up around the growing plants. By the 1940’s, farmers sometimes used tractors with attachments, but mule drawn equipment, like that in Figure 27, was still widespread. The latter had a higher clearance off the ground, and so could be used further along in the season without hurting the cane. Over the spring, cultivation began deep and finished light, so as not to disturb the shallow roots of the cane as it grew. The soil-building crops also needed cultivation, and there were spring vegetables to plant and harvest as well. The rhythm of the season, however, was the repetition of wheels and hooves and hoes over and over the fields.

Only after cultivation is finished will cane begin to make its best growth. Thus mid and late summer was the time of the lay-by. Farmers finished weeding and left the cane to grow undisturbed; the green sprigs massed into thick grassy walls. Meanwhile, they harvested corn and hay, and put in work on their machinery and barns. They also continued the never ending work on ditches and drains, now so important in the sudden, drenching rains of summer. Weather meant everything. If the lay-by passed with neither drought nor hurricane, farmers mopped their brows and hoped their luck held for a dry autumn. In Louisiana, October is usually the driest month. A dry fall made the
Figure 27 — Gang labor and mules, good for a few years more
Source: Library of Congress, LCUSF34, Neg. 55260D
cane more erect, easier to harvest. It also made the plants slow their growth, and covert
their energy into the sweet sugar within.

The end of October and beginning of November marked the final season of the
cane year: the harvest, the grinding, the roulaison, the campaign! The season was
exciting, hectic, back-breaking, and like all farming, fraught with risk. The longer the
cane stayed in the ground, the sweeter the sugar. On the other hand, a sudden hard
freeze could sour the sugar and ruin the crop. The mills, also, influenced timing. They
could grind only so much each day, and since most were centralized or cooperative
mills, they necessarily made contracts to grind cane from several different suppliers
during the harvest. If pressed, farmers could windrow cut cane to protect it from
freezing while it awaited grinding. Often, however, harvesting, hauling, grinding, and
sometimes planting all went on at once, not to mention harvesting winter vegetables
such as cauliflower at TAI. The season frequently stretched into January.

Cane farmers were only beginning to mechanize harvesting in the late 1930’s
and ‘40’s. Like other growers, the Schriever project used both hand cutters and
machines, including the early and popular Thompson “Hurry-Cane Harvester.” Cutting
machines were heavy, complicated, and expensive, and they sometimes damaged the
remaining stubble. On the other hand, the 1941 Louisiana Sugar Manual estimated the
operating costs of a harvester at one third that of hand cutting. Some who have seen it
say there was a poetic rhythm in the work of a good hand cutter, who could top and cut
the cane in a continuous, flashing motion. But machines could cut closer to the ground,
providing more stalk, and more sugar. Hands or machines did essentially the same
thing: cut the stalks at both top and bottom, and lay them in the rows.

215

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The cane was next burnt in the field, another unforgettable sight and a practice continued today. When northerners rake and burn their autumn leaves, south Louisiana has the acrid-sweet fires of the cane fields. The long rows of smoking fires burn off the “trash” of leaves and tops without harm to the sugary stalks. Minus the trash, the cane is easier to load into carts or trucks to take to the mill, where it is weighed and sampled. The price paid depends on the purity and sucrose content of each load. At harvest time today, visitors to the Sugar Bowl are still apt to find themselves driving at slow pace behind a cane truck, seemingly a great lumbering, shaggy beast, shedding debris behind it.

The Terrebonne project sent its cane by tractor cart and truck to Magnolia, the nearby plantation and mill identified as number 2 on the Figure 11 photo. The project also used narrow gauge rail, according to one member, who still recalls the whistling toot of cane cars going to mill. Around 200 tons, sometimes as much as 400 tons, went daily to the Magnolia mill, where it was ground, made into raw sugar, and eventually sold through a New Orleans broker. While AAA quotas existed, the project also sold excess cane to a Thibodaux company for syrup.

Interestingly, Magnolia itself was a child of government programs. A loan of $140,000 from the Federal Bank of Cooperatives helped renovate the idle mill in 1936 and '37, and re-form it as a cooperative with forty members. TAI was one member. Perhaps not surprisingly, cooperative officers included two of the players we have already met in the TAI story: Julius Dupont, a prominent planter and Ellender supporter, and D.W. Piper, one of the growers who had first met with RA Director Rexford.
Tugwell to request an area resettlement. Both men stood to benefit by the Schriever project’s business.

Even though Magnolia and TAI now ran as cooperatives, and the Hurry-Cane harvesters competed with field hands, in many ways the project’s cane farming followed cycles little changed in a century or more. But whatever success trial and error of the years had accomplished, FSA officials hoped to accelerate. Judging by their actions and records, they seemed to believe that success was certain if only they could inject three things into the process: tools, rules, and (naturally) expert advice.

The need for tools and machinery was born right alongside the project. For one thing, FSA officials had originally justified the size of the project as a prerequisite for inevitable mechanization. Unfortunately, the four faded plantations didn’t come fully equipped. The project did inherit some equipment from its former parent, Rural Rehabilitation. Calling for “immediate action” in January 1939, the new board appointed a committee to appraise the tools and work stock transferred to the resettlement. Project leaders next turned to their own residents for more tools. The board formed yet another committee, this time to appraise and buy whatever machinery and livestock members might sell the association. The committee returned with a list of items for sale by ten men, and they recommended purchase of the whole lot. Interestingly, four of the sellers seem not to have been on association rolls, and perhaps were some of the original plantation residents who remained on or near the project.

The $1,460.00 worth of goods offers an interesting, nuts-and-bolts view of farming in 1940, at least from the small end of the looking glass. There was no real machinery in the lot: no harvesters, certainly, and no tractors or trucks either. There
were seven plows, a moldboard, harrow, and middlebuster. There were five cultivators. Four harness sets and two singletrees. Two planters, a hay rake, and a cane wagon. And, Pinkie, Edna, Caledonia, and seven other mules.\textsuperscript{42} The accumulation of years, probably, for the sellers, but fairly slim pickings for an entire community.

By 1942, records show both a larger inventory and a more organized effort by the FSA to assess project needs. An official report by the Chief of Cooperative Services lists eight new and five old tractors and attachments, five trucks and one trailer, one caterpillar, one cane loader, the Hurry-Cane Harvester, a cane shaver, two combines, and fifty mules and gear.\textsuperscript{43} Nevertheless, FSA advisors planned for still more equipment for TAI, especially for crops other than cane. They wanted more tractors, trucks, mowers, planters, transplanters, fertilizing and cultivating attachments; a baler, a rake, a corn picker; and potato diggers, planters, and graders. They wanted some $15,000 to $18,000 more equipment.\textsuperscript{44} What they got is unclear, but former resident Leonard Chauvin judges that by 1943 association farming was mostly mechanized, at least in cane cultivation.\textsuperscript{45}

The same report listing machinery requirements also gave numerous suggestions for equipment maintenance. Ranging from the broad ("develop educational program") to the particular ("keep properly tied up tongues and neck yokes"), such instructions were part of the FSA’s effort to systematize the association’s agriculture.\textsuperscript{44} As early as April of 1939 the project’s board developed a set of "operating rules and regulations" for farming. They explained that the rules were "in no way a reflection on anyone," but simply a way of attaining "the highest degree of efficiency . . . at all times." The regulations reflected a variety of concerns:
No employee member or non-member shall leave his job unless ill, without first reporting to the Management.

All Mules, Tractors, Equipment, etc., be made ready to leave the lot or barn prior to the ringing of the last bell.

No loitering or otherwise loafing will be tolerated on any job. All workers are paid on an hourly basis, consequently it is expected each work accordingly.

Mules are not to be run, jerked, whipped or mistreated at any time. They have feeling same as humans and must be given proper attention for greatest efficiency.

Every worker must ride inside truck, wagons or other vehicles. Hanging on sides or bumpers and riding in any manner that may result in an accident is strictly prohibited.

All tools, must be brought to its proper designated place each night or at noon when only half days are worked.

Trash, empty containers and other refuse must not be left in the field.

All empty containers of value must be saved and returned to headquarters.

Each member must consider it his responsibility to protest all fellow workers and employees against accidents, by removing or reporting any dangerous risks.

Prohibit salesmen, solicitors, peddlers and others not connected with the activities of the Project from contacting employees during working hours.

The rules concluded by anticipating two responses. On one hand, members “should feel free” to add their own suggestions for improvement. On the other hand, complaints were to be taken up with management or at meetings, “in order to avoid dissent or dissatisfaction between workers.” Notice that the project’s rules overlaid an even older sort of regimentation: a plantation bell still rang the work hours.

Likewise, FSA officials superimposed their own expertise over traditional member know-how in the day-to-day methods of farming. Although the project only
accepted experienced cane farmers as members, administrators didn’t hesitate to season
that experience with expert advice. First in line was the project’s own farm manager,
I.C. Borland. Unfortunately, the records give us an unbalanced picture of Mr. Borland.
In Chapter 4 we saw how the rehabilitation manager, Dauterive, caustically described
Borland as an “automobile headland overseer,” but Mr. Borland’s or other records
which might contradict this impression are not preserved.41 Naturally, though, as an
FSA employee he could draw upon agency information and resources at the local,
regional, and national level.

TAI managers also recruited a whole corps of outside experts to advise
members. The project cooperated with the Houma Experiment Station, for example,
with great results anticipated by one FSA official. The station’s help “would stimulate
the interest of the clients as they would have visual evidence of good and poor
practices,” wrote soil expert W.I. Watkins. This in turn “probably would create more
enthusiasm and a greater desire for knowledge and education. All of which would result
in a higher education and social order”!49 The project also hosted many guest speakers,
often LSU professors, who presented on a wide range of farm topics, including beef
production, insect control, new cane varieties, and the care of injured mules.30

Of course, former TAI members are quick to reply that experts didn’t always
have the answers. Mr. Louis Brunet believes that weeds, Johnson grass weeds, “did the
project in.” He remembers trying to plant cane and seeing the grass seeds on the
planter. “You see what we’re doing?” he asked a supervisor, who didn’t see until Mr.
Brunet made it plain, and who didn’t have an answer anyway.31 Mr. Charles Duet
insists, too:
The people that was there farming, most of 'em knew just what they had to do. Like me, I had been on a farm all my life and I knew how to raise sugarcane. I didn’t need nobody to tell me how to raise sugarcane.

He adds that if the supervisors “knew you knew what you were doing, they let you be.”

And, indeed, project records seem to bear that out. More than a few times managers appear to recognize and perhaps even welcome the members’ experience and judgment.

Members’ contributions to the project’s farm operations meant that — to a degree, at least — the project could be true to its democratic and cooperative intentions. And not just from a political or organization standpoint, but from a working, shoulder-to-shoulder standpoint as well. Hence, the use of advisory committees, for instance, such as the ones formed to assess and purchase tools. Or, the roads and drainage committee, the buildings committee, the stock committee, the four-acre committee, or the cane, potato, and feed crop committees! Similarly, as Chapter 6 described, the association encouraged residents to participate at community meetings, and this participation included frequent, practical discussions of the farm operation. The association minutes record various topics, ranging from hog raising to selection of cane wagons, that merited “a full discussion,” or were “discussed at length.”

But, as Chapter 6 also suggested, meetings and committees could serve as window dressing, too, the token nod supervisors made to cooperation. In the case of farm activities, however, supervisors occasionally acknowledged members’ specific suggestions and abilities — though the very act of reporting them resembles a double take at a noteworthy event. Where there were patches of bad plant cane, Mr. Borland recommended additional late-summer planting, because “some of the members claimed that they had tried this and were very successful.” Or, an FSA soil expert noted that a
thought it might be a good idea to rotate the truck fields and select lighter texture soils which had been in soybeans. His statement was based on the fact that cabbage and cauliflower plants survived much better on new fields . . . . Not a bad idea or observation.36

At a community meeting, it was found “remarkable” that member estimates of cane expenses compared so closely to association records.37 Mrs. Lina, the home supervisor, made occasional acknowledgements, too. “Thrift has been shown,” she wrote:

in drying vegetable seed . . . . One homemaker reported they grew their Bermuda onions to suit themselves and kept on replanting until the type of onion in both size and flavor were obtained, then dried 14 pounds of Bermuda seed.38

On yet another occasion, association President LeBlanc recommended that members meet in the fields in order to decide how much stubble cane to save — showing that at least some decisions were made from the ground up, so to speak, and not only in FSA offices.59

On the face of it, members had even more discretion to run the six-acre tracts assigned to each family. Two acres of each plot contained the house and outbuildings; the remainder were for the family’s own use. These four acres, then, stood in contrast to the cooperative fields of the association. They also stood in for the small gardens that plantation owners traditionally allowed their workers to cultivate.60 With a slight difference, of course. The TAI families paid rent on their tracts, $30.00 a year. As Mrs. Beady Roddy saw the situation, “The field for the government — that belonged to the government. The four acres weren’t given to us, but they let us use.”61 Mrs. Roddy was probably more right than she knew. One FSA official even recommended that TAI’s four-acres not be rented at all “unless they can be used to economic advantage” by the
families. The government did rent the tracts, but attached a considerable amount of guidance and prodding to their use. The tracts couldn’t just be left as the weed patches they were when the project started, but they couldn’t be turned into sand lots, either.

Instead, the FSA provided plans to develop the four acres as well as to use the “entire family’s labor supply.” The Figure 28 photo of boys working in their family’s garden fits the bill exactly. Neither land nor labor lay idle; both were valuable commodities in the government’s reckoning. Though the proportions might vary, families divided their four acres into several uses. First, a home garden and orchard produced fruits and vegetables. According to Mrs. Lina, project visitors “exclaimed” over the variety in TAI gardens, and a 1940 sampling lists beets, cauliflower, peas, turnips, beans, potatoes, shallots, tomatoes, okra, cabbage, spinach, collards, mirlitons, peanuts, and pecans on the four acre menu.

Second, a family kept chickens in an FSA-approved chicken house, and larger livestock on some two acres of pasture. An FSA farm management plan recommended two cows, two hogs, and 202 poultry for a Terrebonne family of five. The project as a whole also had livestock operations, cattle and hogs, designed to make use of crop wastes and pasturage. Families would be allowed to breed their own livestock from the association’s, but only after the latter had sufficiently built up its own herds, and then with supervision and a small fee.

The FSA believed that garden and livestock together should produce nearly 75% of a family’s food needs, under “ideal conditions,” anyway. The remainder of the four acres was usually planted in a cash crop such as Irish potatoes or corn. Families could sell both this cash crop and surplus from gardens or livestock for a private income, and
they were frequently urged to do so. On a 1940 visit, for instance, regional director Whittaker told residents, “In regard to four acre tracts . . . members should work in harmony and plant enough vegetables to ship in car lots.” The project had several market channels for the sale of members’ and association produce. They could ship by highway in the association’s truck, or by the Southern Pacific Railroad in the car lots mentioned. They sold at the Little French Market at Thibodaux, and the Farmers’ Market and French Market in New Orleans. But their special outlet, and source of pride, was their own curb market, shown in Figure 29.

The market was in operation by January of 1940. It, too, sold both association and member vegetables, charging a 20% commission for operating costs. The market changed location at least once, which may explain why residents today recall it in different places. Some remember it on Highway 20; others on Highway 24 (the old 69). Both locations still attract the automobile business the market depended on: a “Time Saver” store has replaced it in one spot; a “Shop Rite” in the other. By the fall of 1940, the little stand boasted its own cistern and sanitary toilet, a landscaping of evergreens and grass, and two large signs reading “3-way Curb Market; Fresh Vegetables, Crafts and Road Information.” Mr. Harry Usey, a project member, ran the market for much of its duration; Mrs. Lina reported that he even opened after hours for some regular customers from Houma and Thibodaux. “There is rarely any time from early morning to night that a car is not parked at the market,” she noted. The stand seemed to average about $50.00 in weekly sales during its heyday, though in 1943 it began operating only part-time.
Figure 29 — Curb market, modest but profitable
Source: Library of Congress, LCUSF34, Neg. 55274D
With a cash profit to be made, members probably needed little of the government's encouragement to work their four acres. And as former members have made clear, raising vegetables and doing for yourself was all in a day's work long before they became TAI residents. What they needed were tools and time: several acres is no small plot to work. Therein lay the irony. In the same way the government had established a cane-based cooperative and limited the production of sugar cane, it also provided them the place and the encouragement to make some cash, but not the means. In 1941 members might have sympathized with Churchill as he declaimed, "give us the tools and we will finish the job." 74

Members especially needed mules. Mules played a key role in all southern agriculture; they were transportation and power alike. They were especially important in the development of share-cropping and tenant systems of farming. 75 On the other hand, far fewer cane laborers owned them. Traditionally, the plantation owner furnished use of mules for plowing a garden, just as he furnished a house and firewood. 76 At the Schriever project, members could rent mules from the association, but the system seemed to generate intense controversy, judging from the many comments in official records.

At times, for instance, there were apparently too few mules to go around. At one community meeting, the association stressed that members should make more efficient use of the mules they had. If they needed only one mule, they shouldn't rent two. When the work was done, the member should return the mule immediately. The association acknowledged a shortage of mules, but saw no reason to buy more since the shortage was only seasonal. 77 A little more than a month later, however, when the association as

227
a whole had trouble getting crops in, it backtracked and decided to buy five more teams and equipment. The project also appointed a three-man committee to oversee the mule situation.

Another sore point was the record-keeping involved. Members could rent mules and also buy supplies such as oil or fertilizer from the cooperative, but they had to fill out a ticket for accounting purposes. Mr. Harmount and the board gave several warnings about using the tickets properly and paying bills on time. Members could also rent tractors, but only appointed tractor operators could work them, so members paid for their services as well.

The cost of working the gardens may have been the biggest complaint. In August of 1940 the minutes record an unusually long and frank discussion on the subject:

The members brought up the fact that paying $7.50 per acre for the four acre tracts and 15¢ per hour for mules and equipment with which to cultivate this tract, that it was absolutely impossible to make the rental, even without taking into consideration fertilizer, seed, et cetera. The entire membership present agreed most emphatically.

Mr. Harmount explained that the mule rent was not set up by the Little Rock office but by the Board of Directors and that if it had been proven to be too high, there was a direct means of getting it reduced. He further explained that the cost of depreciation, feed and insurance on the mules must be considered and asked the complaining members to furnish him with their estimated costs; that the mule and equipment rent as set up was a basis from which to figure and of course was subject to changes if it were proven by cost figures that the Association could revise them.

Mr. Harmount [said] that the $7.50 per acre charge was, he knew, more than was charged for land in this section but that it would be necessary for him to take this up with Little Rock. He promised his best efforts in getting this reduced.

The issue came up several more times that year, and by December some rental rates
were lowered.*2 Tractors with drivers could be had for 50¢ an hour; a team with equipment for 10¢ an hour (5¢ less than previously); a single mule for 5¢. Lease rates for the acreage itself apparently remained the same.*3

Had mules been as plentiful as chickens, members still would have faced a challenge in their gardens. Working the individual tracts was really a second job, on top of working the association’s fields. Members also had to tend to the individual drainage ditches for their units, and chop their firewood from the swamp, and in their spare time level and landscape their yards. Resident Dorothy Smith remembers vividly how:

Sunday was supposed to be off, but you had to work that to be able to feed the families. I can still see my Daddy [O’Neil Naquin] comin’ in at night, so tired, for 75¢ a day!*4

On the other hand, TAI president Conrad LeBlanc acknowledged that most men put in an hour or two after the workday in their gardens, but added firmly that “any man who had to skip work in the association field to work his four acres was not much of a farmer.”*5 The FSA insisted that the tracts could “be worked without overworking any members of the family,” especially with use of the “entire family’s labor supply.”*6 But what if not everyone would or could be worked all the time? When asked why some families left, former resident Leonard Chauvin states flatly, “It was too hard. Especially if you didn’t have many kids, or if you had girls.” Five boys among his family’s eight children meant more hands to do heavier farm or garden work.*7

It may have been complaints about the workload which prompted some fairly heated comments from project manager Harmount in February 1942. In his monthly report, he wrote:
During the past year two members took in a gross income of over $150.00 from their gardens, four acres and livestock. This brings out clearly what can be done when intelligent effort is put forth to use the advantage given the members . . . and refutes the arguments of those who say they cannot pay the rent.\[8]

To further sharpen his point, he recalled:

an interesting talk with one member yesterday about the money he expects to take in this year from the sale of produce of all kinds. He has set his goal for $200.00, has already sold over $30.00 worth of produce, but said he could not do it by setting on his front gallery and rocking in an arm chair . . . .\[9]

No doubt some members prospered and some cared less to, but neither were all families the same in age, sex, health, or ability. No one would deny it was hard work.

The official workday may not have run from “can to can’t,” but members generally put in a good nine or ten hours for the association Monday through Friday. If crops were good, Saturday was only a half day. In August of 1939, for instance, the project posted official hours as 5:30 A.M. (yes, A.M.) to 11:30 A.M. with 15 minutes for breakfast, and 1:00 P.M. to 5:15 P.M., with an hour and a half for the noon meal.\[90]

A bell rang the hours for the men in the fields, and a timekeeper clocked them for the books.\[91] Mrs. Henry Blanchard explains that the men usually met every morning at the Waubun headquarters, and from there the association sent them to assigned tasks. Often men worked in teams, and there was much banter and discussion in French. According to Leonard Chauvin, tractor drivers, like those rolling out in Figure 30, worked any and all of the four original plantations, but the rest of the members generally worked a single plantation.\[92] Similarly, the project stabled mules at three of the plantations for the sake of efficiency.\[93]
Figure 30 — Tractors, rolling out the machine age at TAI
Source: Library of Congress, LCUSF34, Neg. 54250D
As suggested already in the description of the cane seasons, at any one time members worked at many different jobs across the project. In January of 1942, for instance, a government official visited the project and observed all of the following activity during a mere two days:

- cleaning ditches by hand,
- opening quarter drains by hand,
- leveling ditch banks with a Caterpillar and grader,
- mowing pasture weeds with two mules and a mowing machine,
- bedding land for soybeans and corn with a Farm-All tractor and lister plow,
- diskining and harrowing for soybeans and corn with cane tractors and attachments,
- shaving stubble cane ridges with a cane tractor and a new stubble shaver,
- off-barring stubble cane with a turnplow and two mules,
- diskining and harrowing beds for potatoes, with mules, a riding cultivator, and harrow,
- planting potatoes with two planters and mules,
- busting potato middles with a middlebuster and mules,
- cleaning a cabbage field and hauling refuse to hogs with a wagon and mules,
- building hoghouses,
- caring for livestock,
- repairing machinery,
- remodeling a stable, and finally,
- manning the roadside market.
Every available man, nine tractors, and thirty mules were set to work across the project during the two days.94

For their efforts, members were paid every two weeks. Officially, they didn’t receive wages; they received advances on the association’s dividends.95 Wages or advances: in any case, they were low. Residents today all agree on that, and most remember to the nickel the small sum of their daily pay. Ninety cents was not an uncommon figure. “If you had a need for more money, you weren’t gonna get it here,” declares Leonard Chauvin. Mrs. Henry Blanchard agrees: “We lived poorly and did without.”96 The project could not afford to pay high wages for two reasons. Economically, the association was under pressure to succeed, to pay off debts, to eventually turn a profit. That meant cutting corners in every possible place, including pay. Politically, the association could not compete too successfully with area planters or businessmen. As earlier chapters noted, even before the project officially began, a few locals complained that the government was “drawing labor from farms” and “hiring all the extra labor around here.”97 As Mr. Harmount had clearly perceived, “increasing difficulty has been met in dealing with landowners as they do not wish their workers to leave.”98 Low pay, in line with the rest of the Sugar Bowl, satisfied important neighbors.

In the broadest sense, project wages may not have been just, but they were legitimate, strictly regulated by the government. As one member explained, there would be no “kick [kickback] on anything.”99 Though wages might not be high, the FSA ruled that they not be lower than locally common, either. The government gave both project members and non-member employees the right to organize and bargain collectively.100
Non-member employees might include older sons of residents, or workers from off the project. Many wage issues fell under regulation by the Sugar Section of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. To receive any AAA benefits, farm employers, including TAI, had to follow a variety of rules: abide by quotas, prohibit child labor under the age of 16, practice soil conservation, and pay fair wages. During the 1939 harvest, for example, the board initially planned to pay cane cutters by the ton. It quickly reversed itself, however, stating that “the former motion of cutting cane by the ton is hereby revoked and from this date all cane will be cut by the day as prescribed by the A.A.A.” Cutters retained the option to be paid by the ton, but they had to continue under their choice the entire season. In a small measure, fairness had overruled incentive. Lest any workers slack, though, the board also stated the “Leaders shall be selected to lead the cutting gang and . . . all men in the gang will be required to keep up with the gang leaders.”

As suggested here and previously, members performed many different types of work and held different positions on the project. Accordingly, they were paid different wages, something not done on all resettlements. Of 27 projects with elements of cooperative farming, only seven paid wages unequally, that is, according to both the hours worked and the task or skill level. A 1938 document, for instance, recommended a series of wage rates based on skill for TAI: 10¢, 15¢, 25¢, and 40¢ an hour. Some positions paid by the day or month, as with the three men appointed to trap the project’s swamp for $1.75 a day in 1940. Naturally, members coveted higher paying jobs. At the Terrebonne project:

It was agreed that the best and fairest method of allocating skilled labor jobs was to have a questionnaire regarding occupational
qualifications filled out and that, after an impartial rating, the ones best fitted for special tasks be given these positions.105

Appointment to skilled jobs was on a trial basis; when an opening for tractor driver arose in 1941, for instance, one member was “given a chance” to fill the job.106 Tractor driving, by the way, was one of the more desirable jobs, and also a sort of yardstick to other wages.107 The minutes several times record that cane cutting foremen or repairmen, for example, were paid “tractor driver’s wages,” about $1.85 in 1940.108

The association created its most important labor assignments in January of the same year. The board of directors voted to subdivide the project into three units with some very familiar names and outlines: Julia, Isle of Cuba, and the Waubun and St. George plantations combined.109 Unlike the measure later that year to subdivide the project into 72 theoretical family farms, this partition actually influenced the way the project functioned on a daily basis. It divided the farm operation into more manageable units; each had its own stable of mules, and members often worked on “their” plantation. The subdivision especially made sense for the Julia plantation, which was separated from the rest of the project by the privately held Ducros place. The measure had another effect as well. It further sorted the membership into different jobs. There was skilled labor, and unskilled labor, and now there were three appointed foremen overseeing each plantation unit. These overseers, however, still answered to a general foreman, and the board, farm manager, and general manager.

The appointment of unit foremen seems to have had as much to do with managing people as with managing land. Almost immediately the board of directors made clear that “the foremen had complete charge of the respective places to which they
are assigned and that all men under their supervision must execute orders.” “It is hoped,” they added, “that all members will work as hard as possible.” As in any group, the association apparently had some members less than willing to give their all. Or, in the words of some former residents, there were a few who were just “plain lazy.” Some who “didn’t want to hardly work.” A 1967 article about TAI noted that such “gold brickers” were looked down upon, and usually left the project. For those who stayed, the association sometimes took matters in their own hands. In 1941, for example, the board of directors moved that:

the work of the Association rest upon the duly appointed foremen who have been appointed for the purpose of carrying on the work, that these foremen are responsible to the Board of Directors for the carrying on of this work and that all men receiving orders from these foremen would be required to accept willingly orders so placed and that if it became necessary for these foremen in the exercising of their duties to reprimand any one for idleness or other causes in performing their duties in the proper manner, that the foremen have the right and the further right, if any person still refuses to perform his work, to send home such person and for him to remain home until such time that he wishes to perform all the work and fulfill the obligation he has taken upon himself in becoming a Member of the Terrebonne Association, Inc.

At some point in time, the association strengthened the hand of a foreman or supervisor in another way, as well. At a general community meeting, someone (we don’t know who) suggested that the project buy a horse for a foreman to use while supervising fieldwork. In a rare show of indifference, however, “no action was taken in the matter.” Perhaps residents remembered all too well other “riding bosses.” Even Will Alexander, the head of the FSA, expressed dismay that too many of its own supervisors were eager to “get a pair of high laced boots and a horse to ride” and

236
become the plantation boss. And yet, in June 1940, FSA photographer Marion Post Wolcott captured the Figure 31 image at the Terrebonne project.

The relationship between supervision and labor, between sugarcane and the vegetable crops and the four acres — all became very clear when the FSA developed its annual budget and farm plan for 1942 at the Terrebonne project. In eight pages the document gave new instructions for picking corn, worming cattle, dirt ing cane, and a host of other farm activities; in reality, all instructions on how to plug a leaking boat.

The project was losing money. In its resolution adopting the plan, the board of directors explained losses as a product of AAA cane quotas. The FSA plan blamed losses on “poor cultural practices,” meaning farm practices. The very construction of project homes had meant a loss when cane was damaged in the building process. And finally, sheer mischance had also had a hand. Drought had ruined a 1939 corn crop, but 1940 was even worse, “an exceptionally bad year” according to Mr. Harmount. In August a tropical storm with gale force winds skirted across the Louisiana coast; at Terrebonne it ruined gardens, blew off a barn door or two, and damaged the cane crop. Then an early freeze that fall sent members rushing to save cane, abandoning frozen gardens completely. Damage from both the storm and the freeze would affect the stubble crops for the next two years.

Ironically, as the project struggled with these problems, its opportunities to make money with sugarcane slowly increased. After the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, the government gradually began encouraging more domestic production of sugar (although it also instituted price ceilings for the benefit of consumers). It allotted additional acreage in 1940 and 1941, lifted marketing quotas in 1942, increased AAA
benefits to growers, and eventually lifted all quotas completely in 1944. Thus, the 1942 plan for TAI held two purposes: “utilizing as rapidly as possible the increased sugar acreage allotment” and, perhaps more importantly, “reducing losses immediately.”

The first lines of the “Farm Program for 1942” could not have been clearer:

Sugar cane production is the major farm operation. No other farm activity should be permitted to interfere with the cane crop.

The plan instructed the general manager to devote as much time as possible to the cane crop, particularly to the adoption of the new “cultural practices.” These detailed recommendations included better and earlier seed bed preparation, better selection of plant cane, and more uniform planting and dirt ing of cane. While increasing cane acreage, the plan also concentrated its planting into the very best lands, for maximum production as well as more efficient mechanized harvesting and transportation.

The new budget also stepped up the project’s livestock operation. Far more than a way to use leftover cabbage, it would become “the second major part” of TAI’s farm program. Meat and milk, like sugar, were vital to the war effort at home and abroad. Members would exchange culls from their existing cattle herd of 86 for younger animals, and buy 45 more beef cows, 60 dairy cows, and 60 gilts (female hogs). The budget also authorized more feed crops and more permanent pasture for livestock and workstock. Leaving no stone unturned, instructions covered such fine points as mule rations and bangboards on corn wagons.

Trailing the livestock operations, the projects’ vegetable production made up the third part of farm operations. Acreage had increased to 100, but it went mostly into potatoes and a few other, select crops. More significantly, the budget only “tentatively
projected" vegetable production for 1943 and beyond. Meanwhile, the plan explained:

it should be distinctly understood that vegetable production by the
Association is not to interfere with either the sugar cane program or
the crop and livestock program.

Members’ four acre tracts came in a distant last, considered as “personal and incidental
operations.” The budget instructed families to organize their work on the units around
the association’s schedule, especially during the cooperative’s peak labor periods.

To carry out these new directives, the 1942 plan tightened the reins in all areas
of labor. Committees for cabbage and cauliflower (considered profitable among the
vegetables) would be dispensed with, for example. Though described as successful, “it
was thought more efficiency and profit could have been made if the responsibility had
not been divided.” The plan recommended that foremen and workers be reselected or
reassigned if unsuited to their tasks, and that a study of members be made “to eliminate
those who do not give the association just value for the wages they receive.”

Supervisors, too, were addressed. The plan ordered the community manager to
forward an excruciatingly thorough weekly report to the Region 6 office, describing:

1. work completed ahead of schedule
2. work completed on schedule
3. work behind schedule
4. work planned for immediate future
5. weather conditions
6. condition of crops
7. condition of livestock
8. labor conditions
9. change in personnel
10. principal purchases
11. principal sales
12. other factors of importance
13. factors of plans to be changed or requiring discussion
   (a) by whom
   (b) when.
If the project needed “systematization,” by God, they were going to get it. Or, that was the plan. As in other cases, the records don’t reveal just how much was carried out. The FSA and the association shuffled on its acceptance. The plan requested “faithful adherence.” The board of directors moved to agree with it, reserving the right to change it, subject to FSA approval. Even so, the plan shows the government steering the project into a new course, or perhaps an old one. Into the worn path of work bells, foremen, and cane all around — slightly modernized by machine harvesters and soil maps. No matter, it was a new start. The 1942 plan concluded with “a growing conviction that the Terrebonne project is going to succeed.”

Notes

1 Minutes, 6 April 1942.

2 A. T. Holman to Brice Mace, 9 September 1941; Box 279, File 9; RCA 35-54; RG 96.


4 Soil Report, W. I. Watkins, n.d.; Box 279, File 5; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

5 Frank Lister to Brice Mace, n.d.; Box 279, File 9; RCA 35-54; RG 96. Minutes, 31 December 1940, Balance Sheet 1 January 1940 to 31 December 1940.


7 Philip Brierley to Frank Lister, 29 May 1941; Box 69, File Ro931-02 Horticulture; GC 35-42; RG 96.

8 Minutes, 31 December 1940, Balance sheet. Minutes, 13 May 1940.

9 Duet, interview.

10 Lister to Mace, n.d.; Box 279, File 9; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

241
Minutes, 11 October 1939.

Minutes, 19 March 1939, 2 April 1939.

Minutes, 9 December 1940.

Lister to Mace, n.d.

Minutes, 14 July 1941.

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The New Orleans Times-Picayune, 14 July 1940.

Minutes, 14 May 1939, 17 April 1940.

E. B. Whitaker to William Alexander, 24 June 1939; Box 279, File 8; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

J. O. Walker to all Regional Directors, 27 April 1940; Box 28, File 184-021 Agricultural Development; GC 35-42; RG 96. T. Roy Reid to William Alexander; Box 28, File 184-021 Agricultural Development; GC 35-42; RG 96.

J. O. Walker to T. Roy Reid, 24 June 1939; Box 279, File 8; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

Minutes, 15 May 1940.

The New Orleans Times-Picayune, 14 July 1940. Minutes, 24 July 1940.

Minutes, 15 May 1940.


Duet, interview. Minutes, 14 February 1940.

Holman to Mace, 9 September 1941.

31 Gilmore, p. xxii.

32 Gilmore, p. x.

33 Gilmore, pp. 116-17.

34 Brunet, interview.

35 Gilmore, pp. 116-17. Holman to Mace, 9 September 1941. Holman to Mace, 29 January 1942; Box 279, File 9; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

36 Minutes, 6 December 1939.

37 Houma Courier, 4 June 1936, 27 January 1937.

38 Gilmore, p. 116.

39 Minutes, 23 January 1939.

40 Minutes, 19 April 1940.

41 Minutes, 13 May 1940.

42 Holman to Mace, 9 September 1941. Holman to Mace, 29 January 1942.

43 Chauvin, interview.

44 Holman to Mace, 9 September 1941.

45 Minutes, 16 April 1939.

46 Dauterive to McInnis, 19 July 1937, AEP.


48 Minutes, 2 April 1939, 16 April 1939, 14 May 1939, 9 July 1030, 16 August 1939, 30 August 1939, 28 February 1940, 20 March 1940, 25 September 1940, 11 December 1940, 17 January 1941, 12 February 1941.

49 Brunet, interview.

50 Duet, interview.
Minutes, 14 July 1941.


Minutes, 19 February 1939.


Minutes, 16 October 1940.

Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 August-September 1940.

Minutes, 11 October 1939.

Rehder, p. 192.

Roddy, interview.

Holman to Mace, 9 September 1941.


Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 October-November 1940.

Farm Management Plan and Home Management Plan Summary; Box 278, File 1 TAI LA; RCA 35-54; RG 96.


Gaer, p. 102.


Minutes, 31 January 1940.

Minutes, 24 July 1940.

Microfilm document, n.d. FSA/OWI.
Minutes, 3 January 1940.

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Mo. Rpt. HS, 15 October-November 1940.

Mo. Rpt. HS, 16 May-June 1940.


Sitterson, p. 389.

Minutes, 2 August 1939.

Minutes, 12 March 1941.

Minutes, 27 April 1941.

Minutes, 16 April 1941.

Minutes, 13 May 1940, 16 April 1941, 5 May 1941.

Minutes, 13 September 1939.

Minutes, 28 August 1940.

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Houma Courier, 14 June 1970.

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90 Chauvin, interview.
92 Minutes, 30 August 1939.
93 Minutes, 8 November 1939.
94 Blanchard, interview.
95 Chauvin, interview.
96 Minutes, 14 February 1940.
97 Holman to Mace, 29 January 1942.
98 Blanchard, interview.
99 Eaton, pp. 141-42.
100 Chauvin, interview.
101 Blanchard, interview.
102 M. J. Polmer to Allen Ellender, 26 February 1937; AEP. H. B. Naquin to Allen Ellender, 12 October 1937; AEP.
104 The New Orleans Times-Picayune, 8 April 1939.
105 Eaton, p. 138.
106 Labor standards, 29 June 1938; Box 278, File 1; RCA 35-54; RG 96.
107 Minutes, 27 September 1939, 16 October 1939.
108 Minutes, 16 October 1939.
109 Eaton, pp. 141-42.
110 Labor standards, 29 June 1938.
111 Minutes, 9 November 1940, 9 December 1940.
Chapter 10 Closure

On March 3, 1943 the Board of Directors approved four new applications for membership (and rejected one). Despite hardships and reversals, there were still families — including eight of the ten original incorporators — willing to test the potential of the TAI experiment. At the same time in Washington, however, Congress was seeking its speedy closure.

The 1942 farm plan for Terrebonne had concluded with an optimistic note, despite recognition of the economic problems besetting the project. By the end of the same year the project's members issued a statement of their own which echoed this assessment. They summarized their farming difficulties and achievements, including the 1942 plan itself, only parts of which they had "found workable." The members, too, concluded that after much struggle, "the Association is now in a position to do its best work this coming year."² Like the 1942 farm plan, the members' statement depicted TAI as a still workable proposition — a project in the active sense of the word — which had only begun to be tested. In justifying their progress, they may also have signaled awareness of the battle over their future which was being fought in circles higher and wider than their own. At the same time that the Schriever project seemed to be getting a foothold, Congress was conducting the investigations and hearings which would eventually lead to the closure of all the cooperative projects, and the end of the FSA itself.

In one of the many ironies of the TAI story, however, in 1942 and '43 the project seemed to undergo a change which might have boded well for its future, had not the Congressional axe fallen. Perhaps it was a change in outlook. We have the members' optimistic statement; general manager Harmount also seemed hopeful. In regard to
four-acre income, for example, he noted in a 1942 monthly report that:

The attitude this year . . . is changing, many who thought in the past that no money could be made, are changing their ideas and many will pass the $150.00 gross sales mark this coming year. I am afraid we expected too much from our members these first two or three years, all that was necessary was a little time for them to learn and get adjusted to this new manner of living.3

Survival of the fittest may have contributed to a change in attitude: not fittest in the most general sense, of course, but most fitted to project life in particular. Like many of the resettlements, Terrebonne Farms’ membership had fluctuated since its creation and by 1943 community numbers had fallen off significantly. Now here was a fact apparently open to interpretation. The FSA, for example, looked on withdrawals as a necessary evil. They disrupted community life as well as farm operations, but they also marked the cooperative’s voluntary and democratic nature. Members “voted with their feet” when they decided to stay or leave. Many TAI members had voted “no,” and left, with increasing frequency over the years. The minutes record cancellation of sixteen leases in the second half of 1942 alone: sixteen memberships represented a quarter of the entire association. And yet, the 1942 members’ statement seemed to suggest that the association had merely dropped to its fighting weight. "It is also felt," they wrote,

most of those members who in the past have not lived up to their obligations have left the project and that a majority of those left now thoroughly understand their responsibility and will do their best this coming year.4

The project’s management also seemed to experience a change, including a similar scaling back. Farm personnel changed slightly. The farm manager, Mr. Borland, who so often had delivered the “interesting talks” on cooperation and efficiency at meetings, had left the project and the FSA by the fall of 1942. The accountant Mr.
Pigott remained, but the FSA ordered TAI to take over payment of his salary — an unexpected financial burden. Mr. Harmount stayed with the project till the very end. Project meetings also changed. Their minutes, for instance, became briefer and less formal. The record for an October 1942 meeting began simply with “All present,” quickly dispatched a discussion and two motions in a few lines, and concluded with “Meeting adjourned.” Of course, the meetings themselves might well have been as long as ever, or they still might have included sermons on FSA ideals, but no one felt any need to officially record them.

Similarly, the project apparently began holding fewer community meetings. In the fall of 1942, only the board of directors met for several months, keeping no minutes at all. Later they explained their meetings had been of a “discussion character” only, and that they had called upon other members to join them as they considered different aspects of the farm program. As 1943 began, a reconfigured body called the "advisory committee" began meeting. The group included the board, three "farm leaders" (the plantation foremen), and — something even more novel — three wives of prominent members. The general manager acted as secretary in at least one of these meetings; no longer elevated by a prefix, however, he is listed simply as G. S. Harmount.

These two groups, the board and the more inclusive advisory committee, developed the farm plan for 1943 at TAI. Unlike the prior year’s plan handed down from on high, this program was hammered out locally, culminating in a January 1943 meeting which lasted, it was precisely noted, from 9:30 AM until 5:10 PM. The plan was developed:
by examining the farming operations of 1942 and previous years and change those practices which have proven unsuccessful and accepting those that have proven successful and abandoning those crops which have not shown to be suitable for this area or work in our present farming operations.9

Again, the project would plant as much sugarcane as possible; again, they would limit vegetable production to cauliflower, cabbage, and the onion family. Like the prior plan, this one gave directions for activities ranging from inoculating livestock to keeping up quarter drains. The widening war and increased shortages were recognized in two areas. The plan emphasized that nothing — nothing — go to waste; that meant, for example, cooking properly proportioned meals and building manure boxes. Although cane came first, the plan also urged members to continue to work on their four acres: to produce more milk, butter, and cheese; to raise more poultry; and to grow vegetables all year round. “Not only increase for our own use,” the minutes noted, “but also products for sale in order to help those who aren’t so fortunate as we are.”10

As the last comment suggests, the project seemed to at last be developing that “we feeling” and self-sufficiency the FSA had long desired for it. The project’s leadership also took up another baton. “See that every member of the Association,” they directed:

is placed on some committee that is a vital part to play with the success of the Association and in this way place responsibility on him. Have older members assist new members in becoming Association conscious.11

So, was it possible that — wiser from setbacks, diminished in numbers — the remaining cadre of project members was really becoming the cooperative that the FSA had envisioned? Would they make a go of it? Mr. Harmount believed so, as we will read
later, but time was up before those questions could be proven. As in any good drama, the end had an ironic twist.

The controversy which had dogged the Resettlement Administration and its successor the FSA had finally come to a head. According to Paul Conkin's history of the resettlement program, lingering charges of socialism, financial losses, and a nation whose attention was directed toward the war all contributed to the organization's downfall. In 1942, the year of optimism for Terrebonne, the nation's most powerful farmers' organization, the Farm Bureau, officially took a stand against the FSA. More significantly, in 1942 and '43 Congress conducted investigational hearings on the FSA. Congress especially looked hard at the FSA's cooperative farming communities, which it insisted on calling "collectives." Comparisons to Russia were made and unmade frequently. One senator even asked (as devil's advocate, we can only hope), "To really cut communistic practices out on the farms you don't think it will be necessary to liquidate these people to maintain democracy?" Although the government never liquidated any of its project citizens, it persisted in using that term for the sale and disposition of the resettlement properties. Congress chiefly criticized the program's financial losses, its heavy use of supervision, and its collectivism and experimentation; Terrebonne Farms was implicated directly or indirectly on all three.

TAI's financial situation was mentioned specifically at the 1942 hearings. Joseph Eaton, director of the Rural Settlement Institute and an FSA defender during the hearings, explained the project's situation:

Terrebonne has had a tough time because (a) the land was not productive until the drainage became effective, (b) it was impossible until 1942 to establish the sugar and field crop rotations, start the hog enterprise and
complete the pasture development. This borrower was permitted to invest its loan fund in construction before the land was ready to produce and has incurred a deficit which it might never have overcome except for the lifting of the restrictions on the production of sugar, which may enable it to get back its losses in the next 5 years. Sugarcane, however, is subject to many hazards, and the future of this farm is highly problematic.14

Although Eaton and the FSA expected the project to operate profitably by 1944, neither could guess when the association would have a net surplus.

With only partial financial records surviving, the project's track record cannot be completely analyzed. But in fact, the project did have a profit of about $20,000 in 1944 as expected.15 Similarly, their cane yields per acre increased substantially, from an abysmally low 11 tons in 1939 to over 18 in 1943.16 The 1942 farm program projected that once the project reached the parish average of 21 tons per acre, it could wipe out its deficits in two years.17 In an interview in the 1970's, president Conrad LeBlanc defended the project's financial record, noting that it met its rent every year, and that it sank any profits back into improvements and equipment.18 Defenders might have argued, too, that since the government placed the association and members on a 99 year lease, effectively to “prove” their management skills, they might have had longer than 4 years to get in the black financially. On the other hand, the mention of a 99 year lease itself might have further provoked Congress, which saw the lengthy terms as contrary to traditions of American land ownership.

Without being specifically mentioned, the Schriever project fell under other Congressional criticisms as well. It certainly suffered its share of government paternalism and close supervision. When Congress compared such problems to the totalitarianism on Russian collectives, Joseph Eaton pointed out important differences:
that FSA cooperative members were free to join and free to leave, and that government supervision would end once operating loans were repaid. On the other hand, when he said that farmers in Russian collectives “are told what to do,” what to grow, and how much to grow by the government — well, he was hardly making a strong case for places like Terrebonne Farms.¹⁹

There was a certain irony for TAI in Congress’ strongest charges of collectivism and experimentation on the projects. Certainly, the FSA had sometimes billed the Terrebonne project as an experiment, and the land had been rented and worked cooperatively by the association and its members. Yet this very pattern had also allowed the FSA, at other times, to promote the project as simply a new kind of plantation, more suited to mechanized agriculture. And as the project had developed, more and more of the experimentation had fallen by the wayside. Beets and carrots and kohlrabi gave way to cane and more cane. Plantation foremen re-emerged from an egalitarian membership. Without expected dividends, members remained, in some ways, day laborers. On the other hand, if changes in 1942 and ’43 meant members were becoming more adept at running their association and farm operations for themselves, then charges of government paternalism were weaker. As a plantation or a corporate farm, Terrebonne was anything but un-American.

Congress was unconvinced. The Agricultural Appropriation Act of 1943 authorized no money to FSA “experiments in collective farming” except to liquidate them.²⁰ The same legislation of 1944 and 1945 ordered all projects to be sold as quickly as possible. Eventually, the FSA itself was abolished in 1946, the remainder of its functions transferred to the Farmers’ Home Administration. The Schriever project
learned its specific fate at a board meeting in May of 1943. After routine business of pricing piglets and approving a new member:

Mr. Harmount then explained to the Board the necessity of changing the Cooperative Set up of the organization to an individual purchase plan. The financial position of the Association together with the Association's cash position, also the legal rights of the Association was brought out clearly, the future of the Association was gone into, also the unit purchase program and the difficulties of putting this program into operation.

The meeting was then open for general discussion going into all angles the meeting adjourned, subject to call, [to] give the members time to think over the matter.21

They surely had much to think over. To complicate matters, the members —

who must have had their ears to the ground during Congressional hearings — may have also heard that the project could be sold out from under them as a single plantation.

Both former residents and FSA records indicate that the government received an offer for the entire property.22 Such a sale would have injured those hoping to purchase individual farms as well as those who had struggled to bring about cooperative ideals. It would have been the antithesis of the security the FSA claimed to represent.

Nonetheless, there was some logic in it. In discussing the offer, the Region 6 director admitted the practicalities of cane farming on a large scale with large investments for big machinery, but deemed that was "in the past." (The very recent past, we can observe.) With cane as a cash crop, subsidiary diversification, and equipment bought cooperatively or rented, he believed small farmers such as the Terrebonne members could also be successful.23 It was the solicitor of the Department of Agriculture, however, who saved the day. He ruled that all projects be sold to benefit families whenever possible, since this was the original intention of FSA funding and projects.24

254
For the most part we can only speculate about members' reaction to news of the liquidation. Community Manager George Harmount was one exception. He issued a ten page letter of his personal comments regarding the project's history and its upcoming sale. He wrote with passionate loyalty and pride, as shown in excerpts here:

This edict of Congress came as a surprise to the members of this Association, as they had given their best efforts during the past year to live up to the Farm Plan of Operation and the Budget which they all had helped in planning and drawing up. They all felt for the first time since the organization of the Project, they were attaining the goals they had set for themselves. To have Congress order all projects of this nature liquidated without recourse and without regard to whether or not they were attaining the objectives for which they were set up, seemed to them the height of unfairness and a breach of contract.

The Association took over this property, which was then made up of four old run down plantations, poor drainage, insufficient cane, potato or vegetable quotas to economically operate the project in 1939, and for the last five years, at great sacrifice to themselves, fought their way upwards, overcoming handicaps of floods, freezes, droughts, crop deseases [sic], failures and faulty farm planning forced upon them. Each year they have overcome some of these handicaps; each year the land and drainage has been improved by proper study of the drainage and needs of the land by rotation and soil improvement . . . . Each year they have improved their farming practices and farm planning, ever working for the best farm program that would work in with sugar cane as a base crop. This last year they felt they had worked out a plan of operation, that if followed each year and improved as time showed the need for improvement, would fulfill the needs of a well balanced program using cane as a base crop . . . .

It has taken five years to get the farming operations of the Association into a well defined program . . . by proper crop rotation, plowing under legumens, improved pasture for cattle and hogs . . . but not the least, but the most important of all, by the members themselves, who had found themselves, realizing for the first time by planning their own farm operations and working out their own budget and refusing to change it in any way, that this was their farm, their business and that by working together they could make it go and show a profit like the other plantations in this vicinity who had looked at the project with scorn, and a relief agency.

In a way I am glad they will now be in a position to own their own farms, their own homes and their own farming operations, but I am still more pleased to realize that as a cooperative they were able to show they were
as efficient as a corporation, were able to run their own business and make a profit as well and that if they had been allowed to continue they would soon have been out of debt and able to make something for themselves besides day wages, also that I had a part in this work.25

The document was signed G. S. Harmount, Community Manager — boldly and with a flourish.

Emotions aside, the government and the community now faced the job of liquidating the project, or as the board more tactfully expressed it, “converting the Project from a Cooperative to a Farm Ownership.”26 In mid-1943 the board discussed a prototypical farm to be carved out of the project. Fifty to sixty acres would provide for a husband and wife: thirty-five acres for crops and fifteen to twenty for pasture. Ideally, sugarcane would take up 40% of the crop acreage. Variations in land quality and fluctuations in cane prices would alter this model, and larger families could purchase larger farms.27 Other sources suggest that the farm purchases ranged from sixty to just over one hundred acres.28 Conrad LeBlanc told historian Louis Rodriguez an acre went for $48.00, and that families could buy 17 to 25 acres of swamp or woodland in addition to their cropland and pasturage.29 The government figured the average cost of a subdivided Terrebonne farm at $4,312.00.30 The buyers made payments over forty years. Although at Terrebonne and elsewhere, they originally were asked to make forty equal installments, the government actually allowed them to follow a variable payment plan, paying more in flush years and less in lean.31 Though the payments sometimes seemed impossible at the time, in retrospect, many residents agree they were a bargain and a “good deal.”
In March of 1945 the U. S. government formally cancelled its long-term lease with Terrebonne Association, Incorporated, making the cancellation retroactive to December 31, 1944. The project was over; the projects — as locals call them today — began. But the resettlement’s last year was one of transition. Prior to final sales, it leased individual farm units, for 50 cents on the ton of cane sold and $2.50 on the acre of other crops. Because of dwindling membership and vacant units, it could also begin selling off bits and pieces of the association’s property, literally dismantling. By the end of 1944, seventeen houses had been sold, presumably moved away since no land accompanied them. They went for $300 to $400 dollars. Buyers also carted off barns, chicken houses, cisterns, and even privies, paying sums of nearly $200 for the larger structures, to $12.00 for an outhouse. Over the objections of members — who had to await official cancellation of the lease to purchase farm units — the government sold Waubun plantation home and a large tract of land around it. The Carolina Biological Supply Company purchased the property, and today Waubun Lab still operates on the site, though the original plantation home no longer stands.

Along with the farmsteads, the board hoped to sell much of its livestock, tools, and machinery to TAI members. In fact, it stated that priority for farmstead sales would be given to those members wishing to purchase such items who also had the greatest number of manhours working on the project. Not absolute priority, however. Since the projects had already been criticized as financial sink-holes, the government could not sell them at cut-rate prices, good intentions notwithstanding. It sold the properties at fair market value — effectively disqualifying some of their own community members as buyers. The government also sought buyers with more assets than debts, with the
same effect. As early as September 1943, for instance, the FSA had already considered how many Terrebonne Farms residents would be qualified to buy units. A government document classified 15 of 49 current families as eligible for purchase; another 18 it deemed would be eligible within three years. It classified sixteen community families as ineligible to purchase the farm land they had worked and lived on.

And yet, according to George Harmount, after the sale was announced, some “old members not wishing to avail themselves of the opportunity of farm membership, withdrew until the membership was reduced to about thirty-five members.” Perhaps these families knew or were told the purchase was beyond their means, or perhaps some preferred the security of a known arrangement over an unknown risk. While Mr. and Mrs. Henry Blanchard, for example, decided to purchase TAI property, his brother and fellow resident stated he would definitely rather “work out” than buy a farmstead.

Thus, by June of 1945, 52 of 55 subdivided Terrebonne farmsteads had sold, but only twenty of the buyers were Terrebonne Farms members.

What did Mrs. Augustin Rodrigue remember about purchasing their farm? “We signed papers. We signed papers. We signed papers!” Buying a farm from the government, it turned out, would have many similarities to renting from it: paperwork, advice, cooperation, and hard work. The FSA, and after 1946 the Farmers Home Administration, still attached advice and supervision to the loans that buyers made to purchase their farms. Mrs. Henry Blanchard, explains, for instance, that the government required buyers like her and her husband to run their properties as full time farms for several years, without taking major outside employment.
We had to live on this land and show that we could live, that we made enough money to support our family and ourselves and pay off our note, which wasn't too big but even that small amount was impossible. A lot of them gave up and left. They just strictly sold it or let the government take it back over and let somebody else come in.\textsuperscript{43}

According to Mrs. Blanchard, the government also suggested different farming enterprises to help the families find an economic niche for themselves, but the "transition from plantation to individual farmers was rough."\textsuperscript{44} She and her husband borrowed more money, bought more pasture, and went into cattle raising. The Brunets also borrowed money to try dairying, though "that failed, too" from lack of land. Potatoes were not much better. Mr. Brunet remembered:

\begin{quote}
You'd dig 'em, and then you couldn't even pay your tractor fuel. That's how bad it was. One year one of my sisters came to dig, and asked "How you come out, Louis?" We came out $5.30 behind. I remember that well! That was a HARD life.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

Mrs. Rodrigue and her husband shied from more loans, but they did go into truck farming. She remembers the long drives to the New Orleans French Market which began at two in the morning.\textsuperscript{46}

Families also continued to work their cane, often with equipment they had purchased from TAI, either individually or cooperatively among two or more families. Conrad LeBlanc and his brother-in-law went in together to buy a tractor, as did Mr. Blanchard and his brother. The Brunets also had a share in a tractor, but "it didn't work out."\textsuperscript{47} Naturally, families often wanted equipment at the same time, and those with more acreage wanted to use it more often. Still, at harvest time, small groups of men would sometimes get together to cut and haul cane, a reminder of the gang labor of earlier days.
Families stood a better chance of hanging onto their farms, once they could add outside employment to their already full workload. Augustine Rodrigue began hauling cane for other farmers, eventually working with five trailers. Louis Brunet drove trucks, did carpentry, and worked for oil exploration companies, and his wife Irma eventually became a teacher. Henry Blanchard “worked out” for other cane farmers, operated cranes, and worked in shipbuilding. He sometimes joked that “he couldn't wait to go to work on Monday so he could rest” from weekend farming. Beady Roddy worked as head janitor at the Schriever school until he was seventy. His wife remembers that despite long, hard days, her husband’s answer was always, “I want to finish.”

Two other resources also helped families stay on their places. Some families sold portions of their land in order to better pay off the remainder. Many benefited from a hidden resource: oil and gas. Several producing fields were located within ten miles of the community, and in 1940, a New Orleans businessman had made an application for an oil and gas lease on the project, which he listed as a second or third rate prospect. The Department of Agriculture's Solicitor, however, had ruled against leasing the rights, since royalties would have legally returned into the general government treasury, without benefitting the resettlement or its members. Conrad LeBlanc told an interviewer that the government retained 75% of the mineral rights once the project was broken up, but that owners were eventually allowed to buy the rights. The Henry Blanchard family received about $1000.00 for three years in the late 1940's from their rights, helping them pay off their farm in thirteen years. Other families made good money from their leases right up to the oil bust in the 1980's. Sugarcane continued to provide as well, though the pendulum swung once more for the
family-size farm. Many small landowners such as those on former project lands rent out their land to larger, consolidated farms today.\(^{52}\)

Much less cane grows on the TAI lands, though, which have sprouted with more and more homes and buildings (but fewer fences). Remaining project homes are barely recognizable. Mrs. Augustin Rodrigue remembered that families were required to keep their houses basically intact until they finished paying them off, but many went to town with alterations afterwards.\(^{53}\) And, of course, families modernized their homes as city amenities extended their direction. Mrs. Henry Blanchard kept records of exactly when her family received their utilities: electricity (1948), butane gas (1952), and a water line (1957).\(^{54}\) Additions, sidings, trim, trees, shrubs, and flowers all disguise the project homes’ origins and, along with cars and trucks and television antennas, match them to the houses alongside. In some cases, the next-door neighbors are children of the original members. More often they are relative latecomers.

The “back of Schriever” is really the back of Thibodaux these days. It is a busy place, in its own right and with lots of through traffic. “Seems like everybody in Houma works in Thibodaux, and everybody in Thibodaux works in Houma,” explain former members Dorothy Smith and Larue LeBlanc. Leonard Chauvin agrees, “Back in those days you only saw the people around here. Nowadays you have to see them in the supermarkets in Houma and Thibodaux.” It is a far cry from community sing-alongs on the project. Ironically, only in recent years did the area name two of the streets “Main Project Road” and “Back Project Road.” The project residents called its roads by the plantations: Magnolia, Julia, St. George. The government planners called them A

261
through E. Leonard Chauvin has mixed feelings about the commemorative street
names, because, as he says, “We’ve come a long way since the projects.”

Notes

1 Minutes, 23 March 1943.
2 Minutes, 22 December 1942.
4 Minutes, 22 December 1942.
5 Minutes, 19 January 1943.
6 Minutes, 27 October 1942.
7 Minutes, 28 September 1942.
8 Minutes, 29 January 1943.
9 ibid.
10 ibid.
11 ibid.
13 Hearings before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations,
United States Senate, 77th Congress, 2nd Session (1942), H. R. 6709.
14 ibid.
15 Minutes, 27 March 1944.
16 “Comments by the Community Manager in the 1943 Financial Statement and
Operations of Terrebonne Association, Inc.;” Box 280; RCA 35-54; RG 96.
17 Annual Budget 1942; Box 279, File 5; RCA 35-54; RG 96.
18 Houma Courier, 19 June 1970.
19 Senate Hearings.

262
20 Hearings before the Select Committee of the House Committee on Agriculture, to Investigate the Activities of the Farm Security Administration, 78th Congress, 1st Session, pursuant to a resolution on 18 March 1943; p. 964. Report of the Administrator of the Farm Security Administration 1944-45. (Washington, United States Department of Agriculture, 1945).

21 Minutes, 17 May 1943.

22 Brunet, interview.

23 A. D. Stewart to Frank Hancock, 19 June 1944; Box 279, File 10; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

24 Conkin, p. 228.

25 "Comments by the Community Manager."

26 Minutes, 15 June 1943.

27 ibid.


29 Rodriguez, p. 275.

30 Holley, “Two Louisiana Projects,” p. 162.


32 Annual financial report of TAI, year ending 15 March 1945; Box 278, File 3 C81, Reports; RCA 35-54; RG 96.

33 “Agreement for Cancellation of Lease and Voluntary Liquidation of Mortgaged Chattels,” Box 278, File 3 C81, Reports; RCA 35-54; RG 96.


35 Carolina Biological Supply Co., letter, n.d.; Box 279, File 8; RCA 35-54; RG 96. A. D. Stewart to Frank Hancock, 19 December 1944; Box 279, File 10; RG 96.

36 Minutes, 15 December 1943.

37 Conkin, pp. 229-30.
38 “Project Data In Re: Sale of MA Projects,” Box 28, File MA-240 General; GC 35-42; RG 96.

39 “Comments by the Community Manager.”

40 Blanchard, interview.


42 Rodrigue, interview.

43 Brunet, interview.

44 Brunet, interview.

45 Blanchard, interview.

46 Brunet, interview.

47 Rodrigue, interview.


49 Rodrigue, Brunet, Blanchard, Roddy; interviews.

50 Martin G. White, memo; Box 391, File AD-06-22-12-300; PR 35-40; RG 96. Application for oil and gas lease by Walter P. Bauer of New Orleans, 8 October 1940; Box 391, File 300; PR 35-40; RG 96.

51 Rodriguez, p. 275.

52 Blanchard, Smith/Leblanc, Blanchard, Duet; interviews.

53 Rodrigue, interview.

54 Blanchard, Smith/Leblanc, Chauvin; interviews.
Chapter 11 Conclusion

The Terrebonne project defies easy evaluation. Ambiguity marked it from the very beginning. Neither planners nor members could ever say, definitively, what it was. The government alternately referred to it as cooperative farms, or a cooperative plantation. Some members recall it as a plantation, others a variation of “forty-acres and a mule,” and still others as a government farm. The landscape and buildings suggested both plantation and farm community. It did not even have a single name: at various times, it went by TAI, Terrebonne Farms, the Schriever resettlement, back of Schriever, the project, the projects, and perhaps least endearingly, RR-LA-12.

Events at TAI seemed to point to both the past and the future. On one side, the old traditions of the land itself seemed so indelible that they bled through the new plans momentarily written across them. After a brief fling with beets and Easter lilies, sugarcane and corn once again covered much of the land, a riding boss (otherwise known as a “foreman selected by community members”) watched over the workers, and a plantation bell rang the work hours. On the other side of things, old Betsy and Beulah and the other mules gradually gave way to tractors, and harvesters began replacing “hands.” More importantly, by 1942 it seemed as if remaining project members were gradually taking the reins of the cooperative in their own hands and becoming their own bosses. Perhaps all they needed then was time enough to get in the black, and to share in the dividends which would change their status from day-wage laborers to profit-sharing renters and eventual owners.

But of course time ran out. The shortness of TAI’s lifespan also makes evaluation difficult, since in some ways it was unfinished business. It was meant to last
nearly a century; it jolted along a scant five years. Generations were meant to grow up in a tight-knit community imbued with an “esprit de cooperation” as well as the Cajun coup de main; the majority of members left. Those who toughed it out were willing to develop the cooperative farm as their home, but the government canceled their lease in what George Harmount called “the height of unfairness and a breach of contract.” Unfortunately, Congress did not have the same conviction as the member who always said of his own work, “I want to finish.”

Perhaps because of its very ambiguity, and despite its brief duration, the project still begs evaluation. One question frequently asked of it, and of other resettlements and New Deal programs in general, is whether they were essentially conservative or liberal in their philosophy. The question usually produces a resounding — “Both.” Louis Rodriguez, for example, titled his 1967 article, “The Terrebonne Project: Ideological Revolution or Economic Expediency?” In his last line he asserts that “economic expediency, rather than basic ideological changes” led to the project’s creation, but he earlier notes that the project shared traits with “kibbutzim, socialism or communism” and was “a pronounced break with the concept of free enterprise.”1 Similarly, in his article “Two Louisiana Projects,” Donald Holley variously refers to TAI as both a collective farm and a cooperative plantation. He concludes that “the community program was perhaps a radical means to achieve a conservative and traditional goal.”2

Writers who have looked more broadly at the resettlement program have weighed in on the conservative side. In his history of the entire resettlement experiment, Paul Conkin discusses the liberal beliefs of many resettlement officials, but he concludes that in their back-to-the-land inspiration, the programs were largely
"romantic . . . basically conservative or even reactionary."³ Author Diane Ghirardo takes a step back in order to look at simultaneous resettlement programs on both sides of the Atlantic in her book Building New Communities: New Deal America and Fascist Italy. Comparing the two country’s resettlements, she too concludes that both were “profoundly reactionary” in their emphasis on community and family values, their reinforcement of traditional roles of home and work for women and men, and their ultimate preservation of capitalism.⁴ In his book, At Odds with Progress, Bret Wallach places New Deal resettlements and their land use programs in the broader picture of the environmental conservation movement, and suggests that the they were one of many expressions of a deep disenchantment with progress and the modern world.⁵

Such a view takes us back to the ideas of regionalism and its agrarian aspects. It also brings us back to viewing resettlements, not only on a political (conservative-liberal) yardstick, but as part of wider sentiments and trends, even perhaps, as symbols or metaphors for those trends. If poetry or symbolism seems wildly out of place in a study of government programs, remember that the FSA and Will Alexander deemed garden fences, closets, canning jars, and pressure cookers alike as “homely symbols” of the organization, visible signs of order, progress, and plenty.

Another metaphor the FSA frequently invoked was that of roots or rootedness. In fact, the 1930’s (far more than the 1970’s) was a decade of “roots” — from the hero of Elma Godchaux’s novel clinging to his plantation with “stubborn roots,” to the poet Carl Sandburg’s ecstatic reminder that “the people will live on . . . and go back to the nourishing earth for rootholds.”⁶ The FSA said that it helped families “put down new...
roots” or “strengthen their roots in American agriculture,”7 and the Terrebonne project was a good example of their efforts to create that sense of permanency.

Social worker Mary Mims wrote that “human beings are like plants; they grow by sending their roots deep into their own native soil.”8 Even as they proposed something new, a cooperative corporation, the FSA had looked for “native” settlers, French Catholic families with sugarcane experience. They had planned a community that would most benefit, not these original settlers, but their future grandchildren, who could presumably become owners of the terre bonne, literally “good earth,” when the ninety-nine year lease expired. The houses were built to last, too, with perhaps a few too many fences, but as Will Alexander noted, fences made things permanent and fixed. Even the planting of trees and shrubs that Mrs. Lina so enthusiastically encouraged might be seen as a way of helping the families put down roots — feel a connection with their new homes. Of course, for many families TAI was an unsatisfactory and temporary home, but some found the foothold they were looking for. When asked why she and her husband stayed despite difficult circumstances, Mrs. Henry Blanchard replied, “Where go? We were stubborn.”

Geographer Michael Steiner has interpreted this longing for rootedness and American regionalism as a “vital countercurrent” to the mainstream of American life in the 1930’s (which, after all, was also the decade of streamlined automobiles and skyscrapers and the great “World of Tomorrow” World’s Fair.)9 Similarly, the RA and FSA have been described as countercurrents to the policies of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, which often displaced tenants and favored land owners.10 As Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace wrote in his 1938 book, Paths to Progress, the
"significance of the present moment in American history" was a rare awareness of looking backwards and forwards at the same time.\textsuperscript{11}

If the FSA and resettlements, however, had been mere back-currents driven by nostalgia, they would have been counterproductive. Rexford Tugwell had predicted such an outcome, as the RA became the FSA, with its greater emphasis on security and small farm ownership; he had feared it would create little better than a "contented and scattered peasantry" in rural America.\textsuperscript{12} But Tugwell also underestimated the forward momentum which the agency retained. In a sense, the FSA had its own, smaller countercurrent to its emphasis on stability and permanence. It also had a pragmatic emphasis on progress and education. If "roots" symbolizes the first, perhaps "road" best expresses the latter.

FSA head Will Alexander was fond of quoting a line from Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle: "Any road, even this little path by my back gate, will lead to the end of the world if one follows it."\textsuperscript{13} It is easy to imagine Alexander (who liked to picture the little details of canning jars and pressure cookers) imagining the many fence gates in projects and farms across the nation, and the shell or gravel or dirt roads just outside them which connected the farm family to the larger world.

True, the nature of resettlements set them somewhat apart from the larger community, and also true that the Terrebonne project was literally separated by a long walk from most anywhere else. But the government tried to bridge this divide. At TAI, for instance, it encouraged: registration to vote, participation in local social activities, purchase of radios and newspaper and magazine subscriptions, travel to fairs and
conferences, and presentations and lectures about current events. These things were
what the FSA liked to call "the gates of opportunity" for rural families.

Just as such "gates" connected the somewhat isolated project to the larger world,
the project's educational and welfare activities would be the bridge between supervision
and self-sufficiency. Home "visits," pledges of cooperation, guided meetings, and
other aspects of supervision were surely chafing, yet, theoretically, they were only
temporary. At Terrebonne and other resettlements, however, literacy classes or
vocational training or inoculations were meant to produce a "Made-Over Man" (or
woman or child) with a better future on the project or away.

Just as the FSA's emphasis on "roots" and place echoed regionalism's agrarian
sentiment, its emphasis on "road" — education and progress — drew upon
regionalism's pragmatic heritage. The FSA handbook even quoted pragmatist John
Dewey in a reminder that "the ultimate problem of production is the production of
human beings." 14 Here, too, are the elements of anthropogeography: the complex,
interconnected whole of humans and their activities and the places they inhabit.

When Leonard Chauvin said in 1996 that "We've come a long way since the
projects," he expressed something of both themes, roots and road, as well as a certain
ambivalence about the Terrebonne resettlement. Like "conservative or liberal,"
"success or failure" is another judgment frequently made about the resettlement
program. At the level of a single community, however, such a judgment is intensely
personal, perhaps best left to those who actually took part in the project.

Even among those members who stayed for the duration, feelings are mixed,
perhaps because it was such a struggle. Mrs. Henry Blanchard says that even on the
project, “we lived poorly and did without.” “We could’ve all stayed at the project level, but we didn’t. We worked up.” But she adds, “It was a good start.” Mr. and Mrs. Brunet remember the advantages of an “orchard, and a chicken yard next, a shed . . . an area where you could keep your garden. We raised hogs for awhile. We had sausage and lard, and you jarred vegetables, and all that, yeah.” “But,” they add, “it didn’t work, no way you could make a living at it. You couldn’t survive.” They did survive, however, and they transformed house to home, and bare ground to a lush, cool yard. Their children live next door. Mr. Charles Duet says, “The thing was not too good, not too good.” He also has a “but.” “But it was the best you could do back then.”

A few offer more unreserved approval. Mrs. Augustin Rodrigue (mother of eighteen) says “The Lord blessed us — thank the Lord we were able to buy this place.” Mrs. Beady Roddy thinks the government ought to have just such another program today. “Plenty more people. . . would like something like this to come up again . . . people have to make a living.” “It was hard in the beginning,” she says simply. But she also describes how her husband last left their home years later, before a final stay in the hospital: “He went out back and stood and stood and looked — he loved this place.” The project had offered an opportunity, a place to get a foothold. As Mr. Harmount wrote when the project was closing, it was “the members themselves, who found themselves,” who made their own successes.

Notes

1 Rodriguez, pp. 276-77.

2 Holley, “Two Louisiana Projects,” p 175.

3 Conkin, p. 327.


7 Gaer, pp. 93-95.

8 Mims, p. 21.

9 Steiner, p. 436.


12 Schlesinger, p. 380.

13 Dykeman, p. 318.


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Appendix A Corporate Charter

United States of America
State of Louisiana

Foy McKeithen
Secretary of State

As Secretary of State, of the State of Louisiana, I do hereby certify that the annexed transcript of

Terrebonne Association, Inc.

Was prepared by and in this office from the record on file, of which purports to be a copy, and that it is full, true and correct.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of my Office to be affixed at the City of Baton Rouge on.

May 15, 1995

Foy McKeithen
Secretary of State
ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION
OF
TERREBONNE ASSOCIATION, INC.

ARTICLE I. NAME AND ADDRESS.
That we, the undersigned, citizens of Louisiana, all of whom are engaged in the production of agricultural products, do hereby voluntarily associate ourselves for the purpose of forming a cooperative association without capital stock, pursuant to the provisions of Act No. 40 of 1935 of the Legislature of Louisiana, approved the thirty-first day of June, 1935, under the terms and conditions herein set forth;

ARTICLE II. Name and Address. The name of this Association is Terrebonne Association, Inc. The place where the principal business of the Association will be transacted, which shall be its domicile is at the Terrebonne Project, near Schriever, Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana.

ARTICLE III. Purpose and Powers. The purposes for which this Association is organized, and the nature of the business to be carried on by it are stated and declared to be as follows, to wit: to engage in any activity in connection with the producing, marketing, selling, harvesting, dairying, preserving, drying, processing, canning, packing, milling, ginning, compressing, storing, handling or the utilization of any agricultural products produced by it or produced or delivered to it by its members; or the manufacturing or marketing of the by-products thereof; or in connection with the purchase, hiring or use by it or its members of supplies, machinery or equipment; or the construction or maintenance of houses, barns, sheds, or facilities for its use or the use of its members; or the financing of the above enumerated activities; or in connection with performing or furnishing services of an economic or educational nature to its members. In order to accomplish such purposes, this association shall possess the following powers:

(a) to borrow money and to make advances to its members;
(b) to establish funds in pool for the purposes of indemnifying or replacing damaged, lost, or destroyed livestock or other corporeal or moveable articles pertaining to agriculture belonging to its members;
to act as agent or representative of any member or members, in any of the above-mentioned activities;

to purchase or otherwise acquire, and to hold, own, and exercise all rights of ownership in and to sell, transfer, pledge or guarantee the payment of dividends or interest thereon or the retirement or redemption of shares of the capital stock or bonds of any corporation or association engaged in any related activity, or in the warehousing, handling, or marketing of any of the products handled by this Association;

to become a member or stockholder of any other association organised under the same statute as this association;

to establish reserves and to invest the funds thereof in bonds or such other property as may be provided in the by-laws of this Association;

to purchase or otherwise acquire, or to buy, hold and exercise all privileges of ownership or tenancy over such moveable and immovable property as may be necessary or convenient for the conducting and operating of any of the business of this Association, or incidental thereto;

to provide medical services and benefits for the members of this Association and to families of members of this Association on a fee basis;

to cooperate with any governmental agency or agencies whether national, state, county or municipal, or with any public or private agency whatever in the purchase, construction, equipment, operation, maintenance, or supervision of any undertaking of this Association designed to effectuate the purposes herein set forth;

to engage in the construction, acquisition and operation of electric lines and appurtenances thereof for the distribution of electricity to its members; to purchase, generate or otherwise acquire electricity for such distribution, and to sell or distribute electricity to its members;

to do such and everything necessary, suitable or proper for the accomplishment of any of the purposes or the attainment of any one or more of the objects herein enumerated; or conducive to or expedient for the interest or benefit of this Association; and to conduct accordingly; and in addition, to exercise and possess all powers, rights and privileges necessary or incidental to the purposes for which this Association is organised, or to the activities in which it is or will be engaged; and to do any of such things anywhere.
ARTICLE III. Duration. The term for which this Association is to exist shall be ninety-nine years.

ARTICLE IV. Board of Directors. The affairs of this Association shall be managed and directed by a Board of five directors, a majority of whom shall be elected by the members from their own number. The term of office of each director shall be three years, except that the terms of office of directors selected at and prior to the first annual meeting of this Association shall be such as are provided in the By-laws.

ARTICLE V. Membership. One, but not more than one, member, 21 years of age or over, of each family accepted by the United States for residence at the Terrebonne Project, Louisiana, and who is engaged in the production of agricultural products handled by this association, and who is approved for membership by the Board of Directors, shall be entitled to membership in this Association. Membership in this Association shall be evidenced by a Certificate of Membership, the form of which shall be provided for in the By-laws. Such certificates of membership shall not be assignable or transferable except as provided in the By-Laws.

ARTICLE VI. Capital Stock. No capital stock of any kind whatever shall be issued or caused to be issued by this Association. The property rights and interest of all members in this Association shall be equal except with respect to its net earnings, which shall be distributed as follows:

The net earnings of the Association, after setting aside such reserves as may be required by the By-Laws of the Association, shall be distributed to the members as patronage dividends in proportion to their respective contributions to the Association measured by the number of hours of labor performed by each pursuant to a work agreement entered into with the Association. Dividends may be paid in cash or in certificates of interest which shall have such rights and shall be redeemable only in such manner and at such times as may be provided in the By-Laws.

If this Association shall own any wasting assets or any assets having a limited life, such as leases for a term of years or patents, it shall have the power to distribute the net profits arising from such assets, without deduction for depreciation or depletion of assets thereby sustained.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edward Connor</td>
<td>123 Main St, Anytown, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Cooper</td>
<td>456 Oak Ave, Anytown, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Smith</td>
<td>789 Pine St, Anytown, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Lee</td>
<td>101 Cedar Ln, Anytown, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith</td>
<td>222 Maple Rd, Anytown, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Doe</td>
<td>333 Elm St, Anytown, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Brown</td>
<td>444 Ash St, Anytown, USA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In witness whereof, we have hereunto signed our names this day of March, 1928.
STATE OF LOUISIANA  
PARISH OF TERREBONNE  
CITY OF HOUSSA  

Personally came and appeared before me the undersigned Notary Public in and for the State, Parish and City aforesaid, therein presently residing, duly appointed and commissioned and qualified, Mr. Joseph Blanland, being one of the signers of the annexed Articles of Association of Terrebonne Association, Inc., and an incorporator thereof, who, being by me duly sworn, acknowledged to me the execution thereof.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official seal this 8th day of November, 1997.

Joseph Blanland  

(SEAL)

My Commission expires:  
Oct. 5th 1994  

Corporation  
32190  

285
### Appendix B Member List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edgar Adams, Jr.</td>
<td>Herbert Guillot</td>
<td>Beady Roddy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederick Adams</td>
<td>Emile Herbert</td>
<td>Joseph Roddy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armand Andra</td>
<td>Neville Himel</td>
<td>Augustin Rodrigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy Badeaux</td>
<td>Albert Hue</td>
<td>Robert Rogers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alvin Barrilleaux</td>
<td>Earl Jacob</td>
<td>Joseph Savoy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Benoit</td>
<td>Bierre Kliebert</td>
<td>Robert Schouest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valcour Benoit</td>
<td>Andrew Landry</td>
<td>Leonney Simmoneaux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rene Bergeron</td>
<td>George Landry</td>
<td>Willie Sonier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiley Bergeron</td>
<td>Jarius Landry</td>
<td>Norman Tenney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emile Blanchard</td>
<td>Clay LeBlanc</td>
<td>Cleferphe Thibodaux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Blanchard</td>
<td>Andrew LeBlanc</td>
<td>Joseph Thibodaux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilbert Blanchard</td>
<td>Conrad LeBlanc, Sr.</td>
<td>Robert Thibodaux, Sr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clay Boudreaux</td>
<td>Harry LeBlanc</td>
<td>Milton Toups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan Boudreaux</td>
<td>Nelson LeBlanc</td>
<td>Ivy Trahan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarence Bourg</td>
<td>Enese LeBoeuf</td>
<td>Harry Usey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcide Brunet</td>
<td>Reola LeBoeuf</td>
<td>Nelson Usey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis Brunet</td>
<td>Troy LeCompte</td>
<td>Oliver Usey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke Callagan</td>
<td>Columbus Ledet</td>
<td>Davis J. Vicknair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis Causey</td>
<td>McLean Ledet</td>
<td>Amilcas Waguespack</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joseph Chauvin</td>
<td>Norman Leonard</td>
<td>Clement Waguespack</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morris Chauvin</td>
<td>Phillip Martin</td>
<td>Fanard Waguespack</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agna Chiasson</td>
<td>A. J. Martinez</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anatole Chiasson</td>
<td>Yves Melancon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris Chiasson</td>
<td>Joachim Morvant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Chiasson</td>
<td>Louis Morvant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sterling Crochet</td>
<td>Clarence Navarre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Clement</td>
<td>Louis Navarre</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ursin Daigle</td>
<td>Leslie Naquin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis Daigle</td>
<td>Oneil Naquin</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Calvin Deroche</td>
<td>Oneil Naquin, Jr.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Louis Duet</td>
<td>Vanny Naquin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallace Dupre</td>
<td>Curtis Olivier</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wickles Dupre</td>
<td>Junius Orcoale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel Este</td>
<td>Maurice Orcoale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John J. Fernandez</td>
<td>Adam Ordoyne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie Frederics, Sr.</td>
<td>Noray Ordoyne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Gagliano</td>
<td>Lynn Ourse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfred Gaudet</td>
<td>William Pelligrin</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Abel Gros</td>
<td>Claude Percie</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alex Gros</td>
<td>Alva Perero</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benny Gros</td>
<td>Charleston Pertuit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwin Guidry</td>
<td>Edmond Pertuit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armand Guidry</td>
<td>Smith Prejeant</td>
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286
Appendix C Home Management Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Qual. Amount (pounds)</th>
<th>Price per 100 lbs.</th>
<th>To be purchased</th>
<th>Cost (pounds)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milk or its equivalent:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole milk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For drinking and cooking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For making butter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For making cheese</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL MILK</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat salt pork, ham</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil, other fats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL FATS</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lean meat, fish, poultry:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken, other fowl</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL MEAT, PORK, POULTRY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eggs, total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flour, cereals:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flour</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cornmeal, G R T Y S</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other cereals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker's bread</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL FLOUR, CEREALS</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cured</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total sugar</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLD LIVER OIL, TOTAL</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessories</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee, tea, cocoa</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baking powder, soda, yeast</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spices, seasoning extracts, sugar, salt</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL ACCESSORIES</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL, COLLECTED APRIL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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### Table A—FOOD—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quality and Class of Food</th>
<th>To be Produced</th>
<th>Plan for Production Fee</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>

#### CANNING BUDGET (Supplement to Table A)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity or Unit</th>
<th>Amount or Unit</th>
<th>Quantity or Unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canned meat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned vegetables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned fruit Juices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried fruits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table C—HOUSEHOLD OPERATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount or Unit</th>
<th>Quantity or Unit</th>
<th>To be Produced</th>
<th>Plan for Production Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Table B—FOOD PRODUCED ON THE FARM FOR USE IN THE HOME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount or Unit</th>
<th>Quality or Unit</th>
<th>Quantity or Unit</th>
<th>Plan for Production Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table D—CLOTHING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items to be Purchased for Certain Year</th>
<th>Number to be Obtained</th>
<th>Apparel Made at Home</th>
<th>Apparel Purchased Ready Made</th>
<th>Gross Total Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>By making at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From regular sources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remanufactured</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Or new</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From abroad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Men and boys:                         |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Overall                               |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Shirts                                |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Underwear                             |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Sleeping garments                     |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Hose                                  |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Trousers                              |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Sweaters, jackets                     |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Hats, caps                            |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Shoes, boots                          |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Gloves, mittens                       |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| **Total**                              |                      |                      |                            |                 |

| Women and girls:                      |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| House dresses, school dresses         |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Aprons                                |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Better dresses                        |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Underwear                             |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Sleeping garments                     |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Hose                                  |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Sweaters, coats                       |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Hats, caps                            |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Shoes, boots                          |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| **Total**                              |                      |                      |                            |                 |

| Infants:                              |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Dress patterns, frocks, etc.          |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| Shoe repairs                          |                      |                      |                            |                 |
| **Total**                              |                      |                      |                            |                 |

**GRAND TOTAL, CLOTHING**                      |                      |                      |                            | 6.58.00          |

Table E—MEDICAL CARE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Amount Annual Year</th>
<th>Amount From Last Year</th>
<th>Current Cost</th>
<th>Estimate Cost Excluding Year</th>
<th>Current Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctor's fees</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentist</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital, nurse</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicines, glasses, other supplies</td>
<td>$5.00</td>
<td>$5.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For cooperative medical services</td>
<td>$25.00</td>
<td>$25.00</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$16.00</td>
<td>$16.00</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Table F—PERSONAL EXPENSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Amount Annual Year</th>
<th>Amount From Last Year</th>
<th>Current Cost</th>
<th>Estimate Cost Excluding Year</th>
<th>Current Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco, all forms</td>
<td>$1.4.00</td>
<td>$1.4.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barter</td>
<td>$1.500</td>
<td>$1.500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet supplies</td>
<td>$1.00</td>
<td>$1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$3.600</td>
<td>$3.600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total**                                | $3.600             | $3.600                |              |                              |              |

289
### Table II—FURNISHINGS AND EQUIPMENT

| Item                                      | Quantity | Disbursed at Home | Item | Quantity | Total Expenditures | Total Cost
|-------------------------------------------|----------|-------------------|-------|----------|--------------------|-------------
| Household Items                           |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Sheets                                    |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Pillowcases                               |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Bath towels                               |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Hand towels                               |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Tablecloths                               |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Napkins                                   |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Blankets                                  |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Comforts, quilts                          |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Mattresses and tucks                      |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Rugs                                      |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Window shades                             |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Curtains                                  |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Laundry tubs                              |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Washboard                                 |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Kitchen utensils                          |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Dishes                                    |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Hair, forks, spoons                       |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Lamps and lusters                         |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Repairs on furniture and equipment       |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Cleaning equipment and supplies           |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Jar (new)                                 |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Tin extra                                 |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Crocks                                    |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Utensils                                  |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Covers, table mats                        |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Paraffin, etc                             |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Dooz, dustpans, mops                      |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Other                                     |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Total                                     |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Capital goods                             |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Steens                                    |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Tables                                    |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Chairs                                    |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Beds                                      |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Sewing machine                            |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Washing machine                           |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Refrigerator                              |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Pressure cooker                           |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Can opener                                |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Total                                     |          |                   |       |          |                    |             
| Grand Total                               |          |                   |       |          |                    |             

*Other than those listed under capital goods below.*

We agree to do our part in carrying out this home plan to the best of our ability:

**Recommended:**

(Signed) [Name]

(Government home supervisor) [Name]

(County E.E. supervisor) [Name]

(County E.E. supervisor) [Name]

(Approved for Resettlement Administration):

(Signed) [Name]

(Dated)

(Dated)

[290]
Vita

Lisa Kay Adam is the daughter of Leonard Adam and the late Maxine C. Adam.

She lived in Bishop, Austin, and Uvalde, Texas, before pursuing her doctorate in the Department of Geography and Anthropology at Louisiana State University. A museum professional, she works as Collection Manager at the Louisiana Arts and Science Center in Baton Rouge. She will receive the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in December 2000.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Lisa Kay Adam

Major Field: Geography

Title of Dissertation: TERREBONNE FARMS, LOUISIANA: AN ANTHROPOGEOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A NEW DEAL RESETTLEMENT

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

May 1, 2000