Great Depression in Arkansas lesson plan

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“Dear Governor Parnell, We haven’t anything to eat”
Poverty and Early Aid Efforts during the Great Depression in Arkansas

Social Studies – 8-12 (U.S. History, Arkansas History, World History, Civics, etc.); English Language Arts; Economics; Geography; Earth Science; Visual Art

This unit explores the effects of the Great Depression in Arkansas through the use of primary and secondary sources. Students will read letters written to Arkansas Governor Harvey Parnell asking for help in 1930 and 1931 and his responses, along with a newspaper article about conditions at the time. A map of Red Cross relief efforts the U.S. in 1930 illustrates the great efforts and needs in Arkansas. Photographs taken in Arkansas during the 1930s allow students to view and analyze the effects of the Great Depression through images. Descriptions of how people bettered their situations in the 1930s can be analyzed and compared to contemporary situations. A list of various activities related to original primary and secondary resources allows teacher the flexibility to choose parts of this lesson plan to use and adapt to various types of students.

Essential Question:
How did the Great Depression affect people living in Arkansas?

Common Core State Standards:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1-2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

C3 Frameworks:
D2.Civ.6.6-8; D2.Civ.14.6-8; D2.Civ.14.9-12; D2.Eco.1.6-8; D2.Eco.1.9-12; D2.Eco.12.6-8; D2.His.1.6-8; D2.His.1.9-12

Possible literature resources related to the lesson plan:
Tobacco Road by Erskine Caldwell (1932); Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck (1937); The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck (1939); Cannery Row by John Steinbeck (1945); To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee (1960); I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou (1969); Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor (1976); Born in the Delta: Reflections on the Making of a Southern White Sensibility by Margaret Jones Bolsterl (1991); Children of the Dust Bowl by Jerry Stanley's (1992), A Place Called Grinnel Flat: An Arkansas Boyhood in the Great
Great Depression in Arkansas lesson plan, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.


**RESOURCES ON THE GREAT DEPRESSION**

(Attached at the end of this document and/or available online)

Letter from Mrs. W. T. Gammel of El Dorado to Governor Harvey Parnell, January 12, 1931, Harvey Parnell Papers Supplement, Arkansas State Archives.  
[https://digitalheritage.arkansas.gov/lesson-plans-supplemental-materials-great-depression/1/](https://digitalheritage.arkansas.gov/lesson-plans-supplemental-materials-great-depression/1/)

Letter from George Welch to Governor Harvey Parnell, January 10, 1931, and response, January 15, 1931, Harvey Parnell Papers Supplement, Arkansas State Archives.  
[https://digitalheritage.arkansas.gov/lesson-plans-supplemental-materials-great-depression/7/](https://digitalheritage.arkansas.gov/lesson-plans-supplemental-materials-great-depression/7/)  

Western Union Telegram from John Buxton, County Chairman, Drouth Relief Committee, Lepanto, Arkansas, to Governor Harvey Parnell, December 19, 1930, and response, December 20, 1930, Harvey Parnell Papers Supplement, Arkansas State Archives.  

“Relief operations in drought area” map, The Red Cross Courier, January 1, 1931. Harvey Parnell Papers Supplement, Arkansas State Archives.  


*Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation News*, June 29, 1935, Works Progress Administration (WPA) Collection, Arkansas State Archives.  

Images of Arkansas during the 1930s are also available at the end of this document.

Additional online primary documents related to the Great Depression:

The Great Depression was a devastating time in Arkansas history. When the stock market crash in 1929, Arkansas was already in economic turmoil and was still trying to recover from the Flood of 1927. The droughts in 1930-1931 were the worst in Arkansas in the twentieth century and left many Arkansans without crops or food to feed their families. Those who were able to grow some crops, got little in return as crop prices plummeted. Further natural disasters such as killer tornadoes and the flood of 1937 created more devastation.

Early recovery efforts by Governor Harvey Parnell focused on other organizations, like the Red Cross, providing aid. Governor Parnell suggested that self-help and private charities would bring economic recovery. President Herbert Hoover tried to address the Great Depression through some public works projects such as the Hoover Dam, tariffs and increases in taxes. Hoover believed in limited roles for government and worried that excessive federal intervention posed a threat to capitalism and individualism, thus little Federal help for those that suffered came during his administration. The Depression worsened and more and more Arkansans fell into despair. By the time President Hoover and Governor Parnell left office in 1933, nearly forty percent of the Arkansas’s labor force was unemployed.

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office and soon brought forth New Deal domestic policies to help Americans find jobs and improve the economy. As the federal government increased spending and programs to help the needy, Governor Junius Futrell (1933-1937) made major cuts to state government. While the Arkansas state government offered few relief programs beyond tax relief, the federal government efforts helped many Arkansans through such programs as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

To learn more about the Great Depression, read the following Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture articles:

Early Twentieth Century, 1901 through 1940
www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=403

Drought of 1930–1931
www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=4344
Great Depression in Arkansas lesson plan, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Works Progress Administration (WPA)
www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=2284

Harvey Parnell (1880–1936)
www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=117

Junius Marion Futrell (1870–1955)
www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=105

**Activities**

**Activity 1. Analyze letters requesting help during the Great Depression in Arkansas and write your own letters**

1. Have students read the letters written to Governor Harvey Parnell (on pages 9-16) and letters written by children to Eleanor Roosevelt in *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression* by Robert Cohen (see some online at newdeal.feri.org/classrm/classdmr.htm)
2. Ask students to analyze the articles using the Document Analysis Worksheets produced by the National Archives available at www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/
3. Have students imagine himself or herself as a person from this time period. Have students ask for help from a Governor, First Lady, President or someone else they think could help them. Students will need to explain their situation in the form of a letter, email, video, or oral presentation as a person in the 1930s. They should explain the difficulties they are having and how they would like help.

**Activity 2. Examining what life was like during the Great Depression**

1. Read the documents and photographs attached to this lesson plan.
2. Ask students to think what life was like during the Great Depression and report on it in a format of the choosing: a diary entry, a letter to someone, an oral report/first person interpretation, a paper, a blog, a video, a newspaper article, a piece of artwork, etc.

**Activity 3. Create “Found Poetry” about the Great Depression**

1. Found poetry is a type of poetry created by taking words, phrases, and sometimes whole passages from other sources and reframing them as poetry by making changes in spacing and lines, or by adding or deleting text, thus imparting new meaning. Talk with the students about “Found Poetry” and give an example (see examples and further information through the Found Poetry with Primary Sources: The Great Depression, Lesson Plan from the Library of Congress http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/poetry/procedure.html).
2. Have students select material rich with descriptions from readings, such as the letters written to Governor Harvey Parnell (on pages 9-16); *Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation News* (on pages 19-21); the article “Sad Conditions in Rural Districts: Red Cross Worker Says Few Realize Plight of Country People”(on page 18); letters written by children to *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression* by Robert Cohen (2002) (see some letters online at newdeal.feri.org/classrm/classdmr.htm); and /or *American Life Histories; Manuscripts from the Federal Writer’s Project* ([http://www.loc.gov/collection/federal-writers-project/about-this-collection/](http://www.loc.gov/collection/federal-writers-project/about-this-collection/)).

3. The teacher can either select a piece for the whole class to work on or have students work on them on their own or in groups.

4. The students will compose a “Found Poetry” piece based on the selected passage.

5. The final poems can be written on paper and handed in or presented orally. The poems can be compiled into a class booklet.

6. The poems can lead to further discussion about the Great Depression.

**Activity 4. Finding a way to survive**

1. Have students read *Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation News*, June 29, 1935 (on pages 19-21 of this document).

2. Ask students to identify ways that Arkansans tried to survive and better their situations during the Great Depression (i.e. plant gardens, make clothing out of flour sacks, canning, barter, etc.)

3. Ask students to think of ways that they could get their needed supplies if they had little money in present day. Ask them to think about the following questions:
   a. What things could they make or grow themselves?
   b. Where could they grow crops and raise animals?
   c. What resources are out there to help people?
   d. What food could they cook at home instead of buying from a restaurant or pre-packaged?
   e. What ways could they recycle items so that they would not have to buy new things?
   f. Would they move or stay where they are? Where would they go and why?

4. Have students explain ways that people have dealt or could deal with limited resources and have them present this in a format of their choosing, such as: a diary entry, a letter to someone, a paper, an oral report/first person interpretation, a blog, a video, a newspaper article, a piece of artwork about the person’s life, etc.

**Activity 5. Compare the Great Depression with other recessions in the United States**

1. Have students discuss and compare what life was like during the Great Depression and other recessions in U.S. or world history. See a list of recessions in the U.S. at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_recessions_in_the_United_States](en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_recessions_in_the_United_States)
2. Have students interview family members, people in their community, and/or people in retirement communities about their experiences during the Great Depression or other economic recessions, such as the Great Recession of 2007-2009 or the 1973-1975 Recession.

3. Have students present their findings in a format of their choosing, such as: a diary entry, a letter to someone, a paper, an oral report/first person interpretation, a blog, a video, graphs, a newspaper article, oral histories, a piece of artwork about the person’s life, etc.

**Activity 6. Analyze photographs taken during the Great Depression**

1. View the selected images of Arkansas in the 1930s on pages 22-27. View more images at:
   a. The Library of Congress: [www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=arkansas%201930-1940](www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=arkansas%201930-1940)
   b. Arkansas State Archives online catalog, click on “Online Catalog” at [www.archives.com/documenting/photographs/default.aspx](www.archives.com/documenting/photographs/default.aspx) then search under “Wilson Farm”

2. Select images for the students to analyze either individually or as a group.

3. Each student or group will examine a chosen photograph and develop a list of observations that connect to the Great Depression. These observations are neither correct nor incorrect, so each group/individual simply needs to list what he or she observes. You may consider using the Photograph Analysis Worksheet produced by the National Archives available at [www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/](www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/)

4. Each student or group will present its findings to the rest of the class and share the observations and connections made to the unit from the photograph.

5. The teacher can also lead a discussion to connecting the images to what was happening during the Great Depression.

**Activity 7. Photograph your community**

1. View the selected images of Arkansas in the 1930s on pages 22-27. View more images at:
   a. The Library of Congress: [www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=arkansas%201930-1940](www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=arkansas%201930-1940)
   b. Arkansas State Archives online catalog, click on “Online Catalog” at [www.archives.com/documenting/photographs/default.aspx](www.archives.com/documenting/photographs/default.aspx) then search under “Wilson Farm”

2. Discuss with students how images are valuable in documenting an era and a place.
3. Have students take photographs of their own community and share them with the class. Ask them why they chose these images and what it tells about their community.
4. Consider bringing the photos of various students together as an exhibit, PowerPoint presentation, Pinterest page, Facebook page, or another format.

Activity 8: Do a “Word Splash” with the Great Depression words provided on page 7 and found in the attached documents

1. Do a “Word Splash” as a pre-lesson activity where the students are given words related to the lesson and asked to discuss how the words might be related to the topic. After the lesson is finished, then the students are asked to pull words out of a text that might be significant to the lesson. The students will then explain why they chose the words they chose. For more information visit [http://www.teachhub.com/classroom-games-how-use-word-splash](http://www.teachhub.com/classroom-games-how-use-word-splash) or [www.education.nh.gov/spotlight/ccss/documents/wordsplash.pdf](http://www.education.nh.gov/spotlight/ccss/documents/wordsplash.pdf)

**Great Depression Vocabulary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bankruptcy</th>
<th>Great Depression</th>
<th>Red Cross</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Tuesday</td>
<td>Herbert Hoover</td>
<td>Franklin D. Roosevelt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drought/Drouth</td>
<td>New Deal</td>
<td>Sharecropper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dust Bowl</td>
<td>Public Works</td>
<td>Works Progress Administration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bankruptcy** - financial failure caused by a company’s inability to pay its debts

**Black Tuesday** - October 29, 1929; the day the stock market crashed. Lead to the Panic of 1929.

**Drought/Drouth** - a long period of time during which there is very little or no rain

**Dust Bowl** - region of the Great Plains that experienced a drought in 1930 lasting for a decade, leaving many farmers without work or substantial wages

**Great Depression** - the economic crisis beginning with the stock market crash in 1929 and continuing through the 1930s
Herbert Hoover – President of the United States when the stock market crashed & caused the Great Depression

New Deal - the historic period (1933-1940) in the U.S. during which President Franklin Roosevelt’s economic policies were implemented designed to bring an end the depression

Public Works - Projects such as building hospitals, roads, and schools to create jobs

Red Cross - An international organization that cares for the wounded, sick, and homeless in wartime, according to the terms of the Geneva Convention of 1864, and now also during and following natural disasters.

Franklin D. Roosevelt - President of the United States during the Great Depression and for most of World War II, his New Deal programs are credited with helping to pull the United States out of depression

Sharecropper - a tenant farmer who pays as rent a share of the crop.

Works Progress Administration/Work Projects Administration (WPA) – the former federal agency (1935–43) under U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal that provided jobs for unemployed people in the United States during the Great Depression and was responsible for building various infrastructure projects across the United States

Other Resources on the Great Depression

Hard Times: Arkansas Depression Era Photos, Old State House Museum Virtual Exhibit

American Life Histories; Manuscripts from the Federal Writer’s Project
www.loc.gov/collection/federal-writers-project/about-this-collection/

Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives
www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsa/

New Deal Network - http://newdeal.feri.org/index.htm

www.nytimes.com/2011/01/23/weekinreview/23davey.html?_r=0


“Early Twentieth Century, 1901 through 1940,” Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=403


Teaching with Documents: The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945), National Archives www.archives.gov/education/lessons/depression-wwii.html

The 1930s, PBS - www.pbs.org/wgbh/americangreatexperience/collections/1930s/


The Great Depression Curriculum, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis https://www.stlouisfed.org/education/the-great-depression


The Great Depression and Children's Books - www.carolhurst.com/subjects/ushistory/depression.html

“Mr. Christmas: Miracles Do Happen” movie by Beth Brickell - Movie set in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, in 1941, about young father struggling to make ends meet on a Depression-era salary who can't afford to buy his 5-year-old daughter what she's expecting Santa Claus to bring her for Christmas. Check your local library for a copy.
Great Depression in Arkansas lesson plan, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.

A program on two photography projects by government workers documenting Arkansas "mountaineers" during the Great Depression, by University of Arkansas professor of journalism Patsy Watkins. Recorded April 17, 2013. www.youtube.com/watch?v=yn9RYtsSWYM

**Letter from Mrs. W. T. Gammel of El Dorado to Governor Harvey Parnell, January 12, 1931, Harvey Parnell Papers Supplement, Arkansas State Archives**

El Dorado, Ark.

Jan. 12, 1931

Governor Parnell,

I am writing to you because we haven’t anything to eat. You are putting out money to feed the people that are in need. I went this morning to get help and I was turned down. I don’t know why – only this – the Salvation Army captain’s wife is mad at me, and she told the investigating committee something and then they would not help me, and we need help if any one ever did. My husband has not had any work since the 15th of Nov. he was working for the state highway dept. and we have 7 children and no income at all and all there is in our house to eat just now is a little flour and we haven’t had anything to eat but bread for several days. We are willing for our case to be investigated, but they won’t ask any one but the Salvation Army. Now will they take my word, please help us some way, I live on south end of Tex Ave.

Mrs. W. T. Gammel
Letter from Mrs. W. T. Gammel to Governor Harvey Parnell, January 12, 1931, Harvey Parnell Papers Supplement, Arkansas History Commission.
Letter from George Welch to Governor Harvey Parnell, January 10, 1931, and response, January 15, 1931, Harvey Parnell Papers Supplement, Arkansas State Archives

Marked Tree, Ark.
Jan. 10, 1931

Mr. Harvey Parnell
Gov.
Little Rock, Ark.

[Notation in corner] Douth needs help working for 2.00 per week

Dear Governor
I the undersigned am making application for employment am a gettin in bad condition I made a shair crop and lost bad 35 acres to cotton my landlord wouldn’t allow me to plant any to corn wanted all in cotton and the 35 acres made 6 bales and a rimlet and my land lord tried to put me out of leases wanted the house and is standing empty we have lined up our cumilation of food and haven’t got any clothing I had to moove to town am woorking for the Leevy Bard as dreanage cutting and clearin the banks of ditches and rivers gettin two dollars per week with 5 in family. My age 53 wife 42 boy 16 girl 10 girl 7 all in bad shap for clothes. I got food like this flour for 3 days lard for 3 days no potatoes Irish no meal no meat beans for a week and haven’t got any thing else to go on

and dear Governor I can’t get by on two dollars $2.00 per week. I want woork for me and my boy that is all I want in woork and pay for it if I can get it but I’ve got to have relief in some maner thay won’t let but one of us near the boy woork and can’t get but $2.00 per week when the people ask for ade these people call them out and tell them to woork for it and they won’t give us but $2.00 per week how can we get any thing I am looking to you for adjustment thanking you for all favors Yours I am

Geo. W. Welch
January 15, 1931

Mr. George W. Welch,
Marked Tree, Ark.

Dear Mr. Welch:

Answering your letter of January 10th, please let me suggest that you make formal application to the Red Cross for food allotment. This organization has now entered the State, and will assist to the very best of its ability.

On yesterday a drive was instituted to procure $10,000,000.00 for the drought areas. It now appears that the Federal appropriation bill for $45,000,000.00 will shortly become available. These funds are being used to purchase feed, seed and fertilizer and otherwise finance this year’s crops.

Assuring you of my best efforts in assisting the people all possible, I am

Cordially yours,
Governor.
Dear Governor,

I am writing to request your assistance. The underlined are making an application for employment and getting in bad condition. I made a crop of cotton and lost 35 acres. To cotton, my landlord wouldn't allow me to plant it. I could want all in cotton and the 35 acres. Made 6 bales and a rim of corn. My landlord tried to put me out of the house and is standing empty. We have no food and haven't got any clothing. I had to move to town and am working for the Sley and barn and parsonage, cutting and clearing the brush and fences. Get in two dollars and a half per week with 5 in family.

Marked Tree
10–15–31

George Welch
Marked Tree

Page 1 of 2, Letter from George Welch of Marked Tree to Governor Harvey Parnell, January 10, 1931, Harvey Parnell Papers Supplement, Arkansas State Archives.
My age 53, wife 42, Boy 16, Girl 10, all in bed shop for clothes I got food like this flour for 3 days hard for 3 days no potato dish no meat no meat beans for a week and haven't got my Maing Else to go on

and dear Governor I can't get by am Two Dollars 50 per week not want work for me and my boy that is all I want in work and pay for if I can get it but I'm got to have relief in same manner they won't let none of us near the boy work and can't get but 80c per week when the people ask for the three people call them out and tell them to work for it and they won't give us but $1.50 per week how can we get my Maing Sam Bookin

A year for adjustment Thanking you for all favor have Sam bro Welch

Page 2 of 2, Letter from George Welch of Marked Tree, to Governor Harvey Parnell, January 10, 1931, Harvey Parnell Papers Supplement, Arkansas State Archives.
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Cordially yours,

[Signature]

Governor.
Western Union Telegram from John Buxton, County Chairman, Drouth Relief Committee, Lepanto, Arkansas, to Governor Harvey Parnell, December 19, 1930, Harvey Parnell Papers Supplement, Arkansas State Archives.
December 20, 1930.

Mr. John Buxton,
County Chairman,
Drouth Relief Committee,
Lepanto, Ark.

Dear Mr. Buxton:

I appreciate very kindly the motive which prompted your telegram of December 19th.

The situation is fully understood and every effort is being made to obtain relief. It now appears that some actual relief will soon be forthcoming through Congress, but it is my understanding that the item of food has been stricken from the bill. It is also my information that the American Red Cross will soon have additional funds for disbursement and I presume they will be used to procure food.

It is to be hoped that by formal application to the Federal government that a loan of ten million dollars will be acted upon favorably in order to provide work incident to constructing roads which are not a part of the State Highway system.

I have devoted my very best energies and efforts towards procuring relief and you may assure your people that this matter will receive at all times priority over everything else.

Cordially yours,

Governor.
Great Depression in Arkansas lesson plan, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Arkansas Gazette, January 9, 1931, p. 2

SAD CONDITIONS IN RURAL DISTRICTS
Red Cross Worker Says Few Realize
Plight of Country People

Special to the Gazette

Forrest City, Jan. 8 – Barefooted and without
decent clothes, no meal in the meal box, no
flour in the bin; ragged children crying from
hunger and cold; living for two and three
weeks on hard corn bread made from meal
and water, without salt and baking powder;
houses destitute; a few dirty rags for bed
clothes; no soap; nothing but hunger and
starvation and misery.

“That,” said Carl R. Myers, field worker in
charge of the Red Cross relief work here, “is a
typical case, I have been to these people’s
homes, in making the survey of St. Francis,
Cross and Crittenden counties, and these
conditions exist in hundreds of homes.
Pathetic beyond words is the utterly stoical
manner in which they accept their fate, as if
they were going to be electrocuted.”

“I served in Russia when the refugees were
crying, “Bread! Bread!” and in China following
the terrible earthquake, but neither of these
can equal the situation here. It is the most
serious condition I have ever known, far worse
than the Mississippi flood, one of the world’s
great disasters.

“Unlike a spectacular flood or cyclone or
earthquake, starvation has crept up so slowly
that people are unaware of the dire need and
destitution. Even the people in Forrest City
do not realize it – even the merchants who fill
Red Cross orders have no conception of
conditions. The fact that people have no food
and no clothing has been suppressed, it has
been kept down to prevent ‘depression.’

“By thousands these people come to the Red
Cross centers – all sizes, all kinds, all ages. Day
after day they plod back, hoping to get food.
Because of the lack of funds, only scant food is
given out – merely enough to keep ‘body and
soul together.’

“A conservative estimate,” said Myers, “is
that we will have to take care of 4,000 families
in St. Francis county, approximating 20,000
people. We can’t go out with an appeal as we
did with the flood of 1927 because of the
depression over the whole country, and our
small reserve may be depleted. This is a
distinctly different situation with a magnitude
far in excess of anything we have ever known.”
SAD CONDITIONS IN RURAL DISTRICTS

Red Cross Worker Says Few Realize Plight of Country People.

Special to the Gazette.

Forrest City, Jan 8.—Barefooted and without decent clothes, no meal in the meat box; no flour in the bin; ragged children, crying from hunger and cold; living for two and three weeks on hard corn bread made from meal and water, without salt, and baking powder; houses destitute; a few dirty rags for bed clothes; no soap; nothing but hunger and starvation and misery.

"That," said Carl R. Myers, field worker in charge of the Red Cross relief work here, "is a typical case. I have been to these people’s homes, in making the survey of St. Francis, Cross, and Crittenden counties. And these conditions exist in hundreds of homes. Pathetic beyond words is the utter and stoical manner in which they accept their fate, as if they were going to be electrocuted."

"I served in Russia when the refugees were crying, "‘Bread! Bread!’ said in China following the terrible earthquake, but neither of these can equal the situation here. It is the most serious condition I have ever known, far worse than the Mississippi flood, one of the world’s great disasters.

"Unlike a spectacular flood or cyclone or earthquake, starvation has crept up so slowly that people are unaware of the dire need and destitution. Even the people in Forrest City do not realize it—even the merchants, who sell Red Cross orders have no conception of conditions. The fact that people have no food and no clothing has been suppressed; it has been kept down to prevent ‘depression.’"

"By thousands these people come to the Red Cross centers—all ages, all kinds, all ages. Day after day they plod back, hoping to get food. Because of the lack of funds, only scant food is given out—merely enough to keep body and soul together."

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Great Depression in Arkansas lesson plan, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.
Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation News, June 29, 1935, Page 2 of 3, Works Progress Administration (WPA) Collection, Arkansas History Commission

THE ENTERPRISE OF COCHRAN FAMILY in Boone County live in a two room house at the foot of a hill where the water can be heard trickling down the slope from a nearby spring. The family is trying hard to hold the title to the little farm and in addition to having a good garden and field crop, Mrs. Cochran has been making pillow cases, sheets, towels, table cloths, and napkins out of feed sacks. She adds to their beauty by putting some little hand work on them. Some pieces she dyes. She made herself a very pretty suit from burlap and dyed it a dark green. It is plain and neat. She dyed a sugar sack a golden brown and made a blouse and now she is making curtains from sacks. White sacks can be obtained at a nearby store for 7 cents each and they are very durable. This is one way to cut the clothing budget.

DEONDRA FAMOUS, JR client’s daughter in Lawrence County is making good as a 4-H clubber. Deondra built the fence around her garden and has a large variety of vegetables growing, including beans, okra, butter-beans, carrots, cucumbers, beets, lettuce, mustard, peppers, spinach and squash. Ten different varieties of flowers add a touch of lively color to the garden. In addition to her garden, Deondra has completed her project in cookery and won first prize in a recent bread baking contest in her local club.

STAFFING WORK WITH THE DOCTOR Fifteen clients in Nevada County are cultivating six acres in cotton for Dr. J. F. Sanders, for which he has agreed to do all the medical practice this year. The Dr. Furnished the seed, land, land, and fertilizer. The clients are to grow and harvest the crop. This takes very little time on the part of any one client and the work is being done under direction of the Rural Supervisor. Dr. Sanders has attended two U.S. cases for these clients and others are expected soon. In addition, the doctor furnishes all the medicine required in treating any cases of sickness that may develop in these fifteen families.

"Ten blades of grass are growing where none grew last year. Are we accomplishing anything?"

TURTLE SOUP NOT A DELICACY TO ARKANSAS COUNTY CLIENTS, they use turtle meat to supplement the regular meal ration on the Sunflower plantation. Turtle soup is one of their regular dishes. Turtle sandwiches were served at a recent club meeting. During the season, when most of the wives are busy picking cotton, they do not have time to build fires and make quick breads. To aid them in preparation of meals, they have been taught to take a supply of bread in advance and to preserve their yeast. They purchased “starters” from the bakery. Since this yeast must be used every day, one woman used it a day each week and passed it on to another who does likewise. In this way they have fresh bread all the time and the expenditure for yeast is small.

HISTORICAL ARKANSAS POST has one of the best canning centers in Arkansas County, built by Alonso Jeffrey, Negro community leader. The building is 16’ by 20’ built by blue print, screened for cross ventilation, papered inside and white-washed outside, one of the most interesting features is a cabinet table 16’ long painted gray. An old-fashioned flower garden has been planted near the building, adding to the attractiveness of the surroundings. There are ten RR clients together with DR clients and non-relief people who are very enthusiastic over the center and the canning now in full blast inside.

A REMARKABLE CLIENT RECORD is that of R. S. Long, Nevada County. He obtained 15 pounds of cabbage seed early in the season and planted them in twenty-three cold frames. He grew fine stocky plants and sold enough to pay his account in full to the Rural Corporation and have $166.00 with which to raise his crop. He sold plants direct through local merchants and negotiated with truck drivers to take plants and sell them for him in various parts of the state. In addition to the cabbage plants, he also sold melons and has an excellent crop growing in the field. His garden is one of the best in the county and the present outlook is that he will far exceed his canning budget.

WHITE COUNTY CLIENT MAKES GOOD. Joe A. Crawford is a 1934-35 client. Last year he cleared 8 acres of land for the use of it to make a crop on. He worked for a neighbor to get the use of a team to cultivate his crop. At the end of the year he had paid $17.00 in cash on his account and $72.90 by labor, leaving him owing the Rural Corporation $19.90. During the year he also purchased and paid for a pair of mules. He has 8 acres of corn and six of cotton, all worked out and growing nicely, 4 acres of oats and 1 acre of peanuts. His garden is a model for the community to pattern after, and he is hoping to pay out in full this year. For his rest this year he is to give one bale of cotton for the use of the entire place.

“Authorities at Washington give Arkansas credit for having a most excellent program. In the same breath they say we MUST reduce subsistence budgets. Remember, the average must be reduced for July.”

WHAT CAN A FAMILY ACCOMPLISH? W. Albright, Fulton County client, said last fall:
“It would have been impossible for me to have done any thing for myself and family without help from the Rural Corporation this year. I was out of food and feed and had no credit. Now I have three-hundred quarts of fruit and vegetables at home and have turned in one-hundred and fifty quarts on my loan. I also have enough sorghum, beans, potatoes, and hay for the winter and I will get through some way."

Mr. Albright is a 1933 client. He has cleared and fenced ten acres of land with rails he made himself. This ten acres and 10 additional acres are growing good crops of cotton, corn, peas, peanuts, sorghum, and other feed crops. He has a good garden, fenced with piling, and will fill his canning budget. He has added one room and porch to his house which was built with logs cut from the ten acres he cleared. He has only one horse which he used to drag logs to a near by saw mill where they were sawed into lumber and dragged back by the same horse to cover and floor the house. He left half the lumber to pay for the sawing at the mill. They have set an orchard, shade trees, and planted flowers about the place. This is a family of 5 and they all work. There is no way to keep a family like this from making good—not even the excessive rains appear to dampen their ardor.

CLYDE REESE is a 1934-35 client in Jefferson County. He has progressed from practically nothing to one of the best clients in the county. The family has twenty-four different vegetables growing in the garden, most of which are being eaten or canned now. They have canned more than two-hundred cans of berries, plums and vegetables. The house was one of the poorest and dirtiest in the county. Now it is one of the neatest and cleanest; flowers growing in the yard and in boxes on the porches. Recently a "class meeting" was held at the Reeves house at which the client women were taught how to make sun hats from shucks. Mrs. Reeves served a delicious refreshment of cakes and dewberries. This family has hopes of better days.

“If your story does not appear in this issue send in another making it shorter and snappier next time.”
Great Depression in Arkansas lesson plan, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.

**Selection of Great Depression Era Photos from Arkansas**


Great Depression in Arkansas lesson plan, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.

View additional images of Arkansas in the 1930s at:

Library of Congress: http://www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=arkansas%201930-1940

Arkansas State Archives online catalog, click on “Online Catalog” at http://www.ark-ives.com/documenting/photographs/default.aspx then search under “Wilson Farm”


Photo 1
Great Depression in Arkansas lesson plan, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Photo 2

Photo 3
Great Depression in Arkansas lesson plan, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Photo 4

Photo 5
Great Depression in Arkansas lesson plan, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Photo 6

Photo 7
Great Depression in Arkansas lesson plan, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Photo 8

Photo 9
Great Depression in Arkansas lesson plan, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Photo 10