Immediately after his inauguration in 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt made addressing and relieving the Depression that was gripping the nation a top priority of his administration. To combat the banking crisis, the rampant unemployment, the destitution of the farmers, and the existing inadequate regulations in industry and labor, he pushed through Congress a new program known as the “New Deal.” Through a remarkable series of legislative initiatives, many social and economic reforms were introduced and programs were established that rescued the hungry and gave work to thousands of unemployed people. The New Deal programs achieved with remarkable speed the implementation of measures to fight poverty, to counter unemployment with work, and to provide a social safety net for the old and disabled. Best known among these are the Works Projects Administration (WPA) and the Social Security Act. This was the first time that the federal government assumed some obligations for the destitute, a responsibility which before was left on local governments and charities. At the same time, the New Deal programs offered an unprecedented opportunity for rebuilding and modernizing the country and renewing the infrastructure of America. These programs restored confidence to Americans and established the foundations of the modern welfare state in the United States.

SELECTED BOOKS


SELECTED ARTICLES


COLLECTIONS

Life Histories, 1936–1941. Miscellaneous Reels 1846–1853 (Accession 36002): <http://eagle.vsla.edu/wpa/virtua-basic.html>. Approximately 1,350 life histories, social-ethnic studies, and youth studies, more than 50 interviews with former slaves, and a small number of folklore studies comprise the WPA Life Histories, available through the Library of Virginia’s website. Designed by the Virginia Writers’ Project to gather information about the experiences of individuals during the Depression, many interviews also captured recollections from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The life histories document family life, health conditions, employment and educational opportunities (or lack thereof), gender roles, and religious beliefs, as well as economic and social conditions in Virginia in the 1930s. The narratives provide a remarkable snapshot of the lives of ordinary people coping with extraordinary times.


In 1933, the National Park Service established the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) to provide work to architects, draftsmen and photographers left jobless by the Great Depression. The program is still active today and continues to collect drawings, photographs and descriptions of buildings, documenting the rich and diverse architectural heritage of the nation. The National Park Service administers this program, but the collection is housed at the Library of Congress. The microfiche collection at the Library of Virginia covers material received by the Library of Congress up to the end of 1979 for the state of Virginia.
The Virginia Historical Inventory, established by the Virginia Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration (WPA), is a collection of photographs, maps, and detailed reports documenting many 18th- and 19th- century buildings in communities across Virginia. WPA workers in the 1930s described, assessed, and photographed early structures (many of which do not survive today), creating a unique record of Virginia's past. The collection consists of more than 19,300 survey reports, more than 6,200 photographs, and 103 annotated county and city maps. Field workers prepared survey reports on each structure, with details taken from onsite investigation, research in court records and other local resources, and interviews with county residents. There are also reports on cemeteries, antiques, historical events, and personages, as well as transcriptions of Bible records, land grants, wills, deeds, diaries, and correspondence. The Library of Virginia offers a searchable database of this project on its Web site that includes digital images of pictures, maps, and survey reports.

Other Virginia Writers' Project materials are available only in the Archives Research Room, where special rules governing use and reproduction apply. These include historical files, arranged by locality; radio plays; clippings files; and research for a planned—but unpublished—statewide biographical dictionary, including biographies of governors.

A survey of architecture of projects constructed by federal and other governmental bodies between the years 1933 and 1939. These works were sponsored by the Public Works Administration, which was headed by Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior. The survey was compiled by C. W. Short and R. Stanley Brown and was deposited in the Library of Congress on March 1940, by John M. Carmody, Administrator of the Federal Works Agency.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

The following titles reproduce the texts of oral history interviews and traditional Virginia folklore collected by WPA Virginia Writers Project staff members during the 1930s. They offer a unique opportunity to read the actual words of ordinary persons who lived in Virginia during that time. Many of them described their involvement in such New Deal projects as the Civilian Conservation Corps.


WEBSITES

America from the Great Depression to World War II (Library of Congress)
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/fsowhome.html

American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936–1940 (Library of Congress)
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/wpaintro/wpahome.html
American Studies @ UVA: 1930s Project (University of Virginia)
http://xroads.virginia.edu/~1930s/front.html

By the People for the People. Posters from the WPA 1936–1943 (Library of Congress)
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/wpaposters/wpahome.html

Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) 1933–1942

Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni Web Site
http://www.cccalumni.org/index.html

Electrification (University of Virginia)

James F. Justin Civilian Conservation Corps Museum
http://members.aol.com/famjustin/ccchis.html

New Deal and the Arts: Oral History Interviews Conducted by the Archives of American Art, 1963–1965
(Smithsonian: Archives of American Art)
http://artarchives.si.edu/oralhist/transnda.htm

A New Deal for the Arts (National Archives)
http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/new_deal_for_the_arts/index.html

New Deal Network (Columbia University)
http://newdeal.feri.org/

The Real Deal: The Battle to Define FDR’s Social Programs (University of Virginia)
http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/volpe/newdeal/intro.html

Shenandoah National Park (University of Virginia)

WPA Life Histories, Virginia Interviews (Library of Virginia)
http://eagle.vsla.edu/wpa/

WPA New Deal Art During the Depression
http://www.wpamurals.com/

http://www.dcr.state.va.us/parks/cccmus.htm

Mary Dessypris
Jennifer Davis McDaid
Archival and Information Services Division
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