

THE IMPACT OF THE NEW DEAL ON THE CITY
OF TULSA, OKLAHOMA: HOW
SIGNIFICANT WAS IT?

By

TIMOTHY A. POSEY

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Oklahoma State University

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Thesis Approved:

WR Biles

Thesis Advisor,

Stephen J. Hill

Ronald A. Nelson

Thomas C. Collins

Dean of the Graduate College

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This work I dedicate to my father, George Posey.

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INTRODUCTION

The 1930s were a time of depression, unemployment, and economic hardship, and one of the most difficult periods Americans have faced in the twentieth century. The nation's cities found it particularly difficult to deal with the consequences of the Great Depression, as they were not equipped with the financial resources needed to overcome the problems they faced. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, while officials were able to make preparations that eased the initial impact of the downturn, they soon realized that they were incapable of providing the necessary relief for the people who lived there. When Franklin D. Roosevelt offered his plan for a New Deal in 1932, Tulsans, like residents of many cities in the United States, decided to give him the opportunity and helped elect him as their president.

While they did not support all of the programs that Roosevelt and the Congress developed for the nation's recovery, Tulsans were satisfied enough to help return him to the presidency, as well as to re-elect their Democratic congressman, senators, and mayor, throughout the decade. During this period, the federal government designed several New Deal programs, which were expected to reduce the economic problems and to return the country to prosperity. What did these programs mean for the city of Tulsa? Even more important, did they have a positive, significant impact on the city's economic situation, or were they hopelessly inadequate to help Tulsa return to its

previously rich and prosperous position?

Current historical scholarship provides a growing number of studies that attempt to deal with these questions for other urban areas in the country. As historians attempt to measure the successes and limitations of New Deal policies in specific geographic regions, as well as on definable groups within society, it better enables them to determine how the actions of the 1930s have led to the development of society as it exists today. Rather than accepting the New Deal as either a total success or a complete failure for reversing the economic trends of the thirties, scholars find the significance of the impact of the New Deal in what it contributed to the formation of the social, political, and economic structures in which people live their present-day lives. Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine the experiences that occurred during the decade of the 1930s, and especially those that affected federal and municipal relationships.

Historians initially concentrated their attention on northern cities, largely because of their size and number and because of the magnitude in which they were affected by the depression. Charles H. Trout chose to examine Boston, Massachusetts, where he focused on the impact of the New Deal's programs on the economy, political traditions, and social life of that metropolis. There he found that the policies conceived in Washington were not so radical or profound as most scholars had believed. What resulted were federal programs that were altered by municipal officials, under the influence of a strong Democratic political machine, who changed them so that they more closely conformed to their own needs.¹

Boston was made up of many different ethnic groups and it had a sizeable contingent of union laborers. New Deal programs initially brought substantial benefits to these people, especially through the Public Works Administration (PWA) and the Civil Works Administration (CWA). Nevertheless, leaders were able to manipulate federal funding so that they could provide relief to the groups that would most positively reinforce their own power. Ethnic rivalries also influenced the amount of funding the city received, often in a negative way. For these reasons, Boston was never able to return to its pre-depression condition. Trout ultimately concludes that the New Deal accomplished as much as anyone could have reasonably expected, but that deeply encrusted local habits forced limitations on New Deal goals and expectations.²

In an analysis of the effects of Roosevelt's programs on Baltimore, Maryland, Jo Ann Argersinger determines that the New Deal failed to solve the problem of unemployment, but that this was partially due to the fact that, as in other cities, programs and policies were not as fully implemented as they were originally meant to be. She emphasized the conservative application of the New Deal in Baltimore, which was conditioned by traditional states-rights concerns, a conservative Democratic party, racial and ethnic rivalries, a disdain for public relief, and a persistent belief that all forms of public relief should be temporary in nature.³

While the New Deal had success in certain areas, such as in the establishment of public housing and the reorganization of much of that city's government, it also faced local opposition that limited the

effectiveness of its programs and minimized its efforts to get the public to give more substantial support to the unemployed. New Deal programs led private agencies to become more concerned with the welfare of the people, but did little to change attitudes relating to state sovereignty and local prerogative. Argersinger concludes that the final result for Baltimore was a mixture of old formulas of city leaders with newer federal solutions, which led to a program of social welfare that pointed at once to the possibilities and limitations of the New Deal for that city.⁴

Bruce Stave's findings for Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania also support the argument that the New Deal was not revolutionary, but rather had certain successes and shortcomings. He determines that Pittsburgh entered the 1930s as a city in economic and environmental decay and political stagnation, and that it departed the decade in largely the same condition. Within this context, however, a good deal of change did occur. Democratic leaders in the steel city were able to replace a firmly entrenched Republican machine with one of their own. They began to use relief programs such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) for their own political purposes, by eliminating any of its workers who did not support their party. Although the mayor was a Democrat, he did not support New Deal programs and effectively worked to keep funds away from the city. A large federal housing complex was eventually built, but was disproportionately filled with black residents, a situation that would be repeated in housing projects across the nation.⁵

A positive benefit of the New Deal came with the establishment of a public housing authority, and the city's cooperation with it, which

served as a prime example of the increasing federal-urban relationship that developed across the nation during the decade.⁶ It also brought to the city much needed smoke control, urban renewal, and improved highways. But in terms of social change, Stave concludes that advancements were limited, basically because this was a program geared at reforming a system rather than changing it.⁷

In some cities, the New Deal was much more successful. According to Lyle W. Dorsett, a great marriage existed between the leader of Kansas City's political machine, Tom Pendergast, and the Roosevelt government. Pendergast, an extremely powerful political boss, was able to maintain a very large contingent of loyal voters for the president. In exchange, the people of his city were rewarded with several extensive relief projects. The New Deal built most of the Kansas City skyline, including the city hall municipal auditorium, courthouse, police station, and many other buildings. It also employed many jobless people to do the work. Unlike eastern cities, whose infrastructures were already in place before 1930, Kansas City was able to create a beautiful business district of superior quality, and one that was almost completely free to its citizens. Blacks also received better treatment, as the discrimination involved in relief projects in other places did not exist in Kansas City.⁸

Dorsett points out, however, that although the New Deal had a great impact on this large urban region, its leaders also had an impact on the New Deal. Had Roosevelt not received the support and loyalty of the political machine there, it is unlikely that he would have been as generous. At the same time, a citizen who did not support Pendergast

could count on being left out of the benefits he was able to receive. Still, the impact of the New Deal on Kansas City was significant in many positive ways, often much more so than in other places.⁹

Roger Biles, observing that historians have largely concentrated on northern cities while ignoring the New Deal's impact on southern ones, chose to examine Memphis, Tennessee, to see what the results of Roosevelt's programs were there. His study is a response to those who viewed the federal government's policies as having had the unintended long-term effect of undermining traditional patterns in the South, and laying the foundation of additional change there in the future.¹⁰ He was interested in determining whether there was any basis for these claims.

Biles examined the effects that New Deal policies had on Mayor Edward H. Crump's domination of Memphis's Democratic political machine, on that city's traditional racial practices, and on the existence and status of labor unions there. He found that the New Deal did not drastically alter life in Memphis, that its programs fell far short of restoring prosperity, that unemployment was still a serious problem, and that traditional norms regarding the social and cultural ordering of the city were not significantly altered.¹¹ Memphis's Crump was successful at using the New Deal to cement his traditional goals into place, meaning that the legacy of Roosevelt's programs there was characterized by continuity rather than change.¹² In a more recent study, Biles examined the effects of the New Deal on the southern cities of New Orleans, Houston, Atlanta, Dallas, Birmingham, and again Memphis, and concludes with the same thesis of continuity for those

places as well.¹³

As these studies indicate, Roosevelt's New Deal, while often considered revolutionary in theory, was usually limited to an important degree in actuality, at least as far as its applications in many of the nation's largest cities are concerned. The federal government's policy of dictating only what amounts of money were to be spent in these places, and not the specific manner in which the dollars were to be used, often left the discretion of these decisions to municipal leaders and to the political considerations that they faced. At the same time, support for the president himself was generally at a very high level throughout the decade of the 1930s, and at its end, new, closer relationships did exist between municipal governments and the federal government that were a direct result of federal policies intended to bring an end to the depression. Roosevelt's goal was not to take over the control and operation of the machinery of the cities, but was a more conservative attempt to provide resources that might allow their citizens to help reach their own successful response to the hard times. Ultimately, New Deal programs did not reach this goal themselves, as it was the preparation for World War II that brought the nation and its urban regions back to pre-depression prosperity. The New Deal, therefore, was a changing, often contradictory plan that did offer valuable help, but also faced insurmountable limitations.

These previous studies provide a framework and a setting for this analysis of the impact and significance of the New Deal on the city of Tulsa, Oklahoma. While not as broad in scope or detail as these other studies, it will still contribute to the greater understanding of how

large municipalities used the federal government to help get through the Great Depression. Before such an examination can begin, however, it would be helpful to consider other accounts of what the decade of the 1930s was like for both the state of Oklahoma and for the city of Tulsa.

Keith L. Bryant, Jr., provides one of the clearest, although certainly not one of the most positive, appraisals of Oklahoma and the New Deal. He found that the Dust Bowl's effect on agriculture and the depression's negative impact on the oil industry were too much to overcome even under the best circumstances. What existed in Oklahoma was far from the best of circumstances, especially in relation to state politics. William Murray, governor from 1931 to 1935, developed an almost psychotic hatred for Roosevelt, and E.W. Marland, who succeeded Murray, could not overcome his poor leadership abilities in his attempt to bring the New Deal to Oklahoma. Both individuals contributed to the state's negligible recovery.¹⁴

While he was able to raise some money for Oklahoma's relief, Murray's efforts were not enough, and when federal funds arrived, he abused them for political purposes to such an extent that control of these finances was taken over by a federal agency. In the meantime, many unsuccessful farmers were forced to head to California as poor "Okies," while the state's other industries were also unable to recover. Unemployment continued to rise, and relief programs for the state were entirely inadequate, except for a strong Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The gubernatorial election of 1938 brought the inauguration of conservative anti-New Dealer Leon Phillips, who

tried to obstruct federal programs, especially the Grand River Dam project. Ultimately, according to Bryant, while support for Roosevelt remained high, there was no revolution or significant upheaval in Oklahoma as a consequence of the federal response.¹⁵

Political ineptitude, in fact, seems to be the consensus of most historians who have looked at Oklahoma during the depression era. In a book by James Scales and Danney Goble, and in a compilation edited by LeRoy Fischer, the stories of "Alfalfa Bill" Murray's shenanigans and Marland's deficiencies, followed by Phillip's anti-New Deal regression, are repeated. Scales and Goble discuss the eccentric Murray's attempt at becoming president of the United States, and the ensuing hatred he developed for Roosevelt, which negatively affected Oklahoma's ability to procure relief. Murray did have his moments, however, such as when he declared martial law over 3,106 oil wells in an attempt to get control of the overproduction of petroleum that was causing serious financial problems for his state.¹⁶ The authors also describe the growing importance of the Democratic party throughout Oklahoma during the depression decade, although being a Democrat often did not mean being a Roosevelt supporter.

In Fischer's book, Michael Everman discusses how Marland, once a great oil man from Ponca City who had since lost his fortune, attempted to bring the New Deal to Oklahoma early in 1935. Immediately it became clear, however, that he would not be as successful with his state program as Roosevelt had been with the national one. Marland found it necessary to raise large sums of money through taxes, something the legislature was unwilling to help him with.¹⁷ While his motives were

not selfish in nature, Marland was often criticized for using taxation to help achieve his economic recovery goals.¹⁸

Sara Bernson explains that these high taxes were what Leon Phillips wanted to fight once he became governor in 1939. Bernson writes that for two years Phillips battled against Roosevelt and the New Deal. He was one of the few Oklahoma Democrats at the 1940 National Convention who did not back efforts to elect Roosevelt to a third term.¹⁹ The Oklahoma governor resented interference by Washington with his state's sovereignty and tried to reverse these developments.²⁰ Conservative politics, states' rights, and small government were the hallmarks of what Phillips hoped to achieve.

Aside from these political analyses of the state during the depression, one study that specifically deals with New Deal programs in Oklahoma is Tanya Davis's analysis of work relief for women. She concentrates on how these work relief programs began, what they offered, and what women gained from them. Davis covers these projects for counties throughout Oklahoma, especially as they related to women's sewing rooms. She concludes that this program, under both the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and the WPA, reinforced the existing definitions of male and female roles, but that it also gave women a chance to be community builders. They were unable to establish real economic changes for themselves, but women became prepared to continue working during World War II. New Deal provisions for women overall were quite limited, but Davis still believes that they had a definite, positive impact.²¹

How does the experience of Tulsa relate to the findings of these

other studies? There have been a small number of authors who have written about Tulsa's situation during the depression. In a project funded by the city's chamber of commerce during the early 1970s, William Butler wrote a general history of Tulsa in which he included a brief discussion explaining that it was affected negatively by the depression, especially with regard to the oil industry. Even so, building there continued. Municipal funds combined with WPA grants helped to construct a railroad station and two high schools. The author believed that the biggest event of the decade was the Mid-Continent oil strike of 1938. While Butler's coverage is important, it is very general and says little about the political and social concerns faced by the town's people.²²

Although his emphasis is on the early years of the depression, before the election of Roosevelt and the implementation of New Deal policies, Bobby Thomas Quinten has written a comprehensive, excellent account of the social impact of the Great Depression on Tulsa. He gives a well researched portrayal of the efforts of Tulsans to provide relief for themselves during the difficult winter of 1929-30. He also discusses the often positive attempts of city officials to coordinate both private and public relief efforts and the early impact of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) on the metropolis. Quinten's interests lie in the social impact of the depression on religion, family, and education. While he does not attempt to draw any significant conclusions from his study, this work is still a very valuable contribution to the understanding of what it was like to have been a Tulsan during the difficult early years of the 1930s.

Glen Roberson has produced an extensive history of the city of Tulsa that covers the time from its settlement in the nineteenth century until the late 1970s. He includes a chapter on Tulsa during the depression in which he explains the early plans devised by the town's leaders, who were trying to cope with the problems they faced. Roberson also gives brief explanations of what some of Roosevelt's New Deal programs did to improve conditions. The author argues that while federal help was appreciated, it often was not enough, especially during the relapse that occurred in 1937 when the president began to eliminate aid throughout the nation. He found that a movement to expand the aviation industry in the city was a critical factor in helping it overcome its financial problems.²³

Each of these books contributes to this present study by providing information on state and municipal conditions that existed during the Great Depression. With such a background in place, this analysis of the significance of New Deal programs on Tulsa will provide another case study to scholarship focused on the impact of federal policies in the 1930s on urban areas. By examining newspaper articles, summaries of Tulsa Chamber of Commerce records, archival materials of local and state politicians, city records, census materials, and other pertinent sources of evidence, it will be possible to show that Tulsa, while not being affected as critically as many other American cities by the depression, still faced difficult economic times during the 1930s. The New Deal provided a certain level of relief, but was insufficient for bringing this urban region back to its pre-depression financial level.

This does not mean, however, that the New Deal did not leave its

mark on Tulsa. As in cities such as Baltimore, Boston, and Memphis, local considerations in Tulsa affected how federal dollars were spent, although unlike some of those places, a true political machine was not in control of municipal operations. Tulsa often showed vision and leadership in being able to overcome problems it faced, such as those that resulted from an ineffective state government. Therefore, in a way that also affected other urban centers, this city was able to establish a new relationship with the federal government that had not existed before. In the future, Tulsa would turn directly to Washington for services that it could obtain from the nation's capital. Ultimately, it required a reliance on World War II spending to bring the city back to a strong economic position. The war was important for rejuvenating a stagnant oil industry and for building a large aviation program. While the New Deal did not end the economic problems for Tulsa, it did help change this southwestern metropolis into something different than it had been before the Great Depression.

ENDNOTES

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SEARCHING FOR A SOLUTION: THE DEPRESSION
IN TULSA BEFORE ROOSEVELT

The city of Tulsa was officially incorporated in 1903, making it a quite young townsite in relation to others throughout the country. This was due mainly to its existence among the last of the American Indian lands. Its history became very important in the early 1900s, when oil was discovered, bringing men from all over with the hope of getting rich. In fact, oil became a central factor for the economy, employment, and growth of Tulsa. Men with great foresight formed the Tulsa Commercial Club in 1905 and travelled throughout the country by railway in order to promote their new discovery. They wanted to bring people, industry, railroads, and money to the town, so that it might be developed into an important, dynamic place.¹

They were highly successful. In 1901 Tulsa was home to about 1,000 people, but by 1930 this figure had skyrocketed to 141,258.² There were two major daily newspapers, an established college, a railway station used by four major lines, a municipal airport, and several skyscrapers.³ While the oil industry dominated the economy, both through extraction and refining, other industries grew here as well. The need for construction was high, both for business and housing, so that the population growth could be more easily managed. In 1929 Tulsa ranked sixty-third in the country in total population, a considerable feat for a place that was only twenty-six years old.⁴

That year marked the last of what had been a period of continual

economic expansion. The chamber of commerce issued a report that discussed the favorable developments that had taken place. The city had increased in inhabitants by 15,000 more than the figure for 1928, and business and industry grew by a corresponding amount in practically every field. The student body at the University of Tulsa had increased from 150 to 1500 during the period 1920 to 1929. An ambitious city bond issue program was developed with the purpose of building a second bridge over the Arkansas River, providing another link between Tulsa and its oil fields. The program also proposed the widening of the original bridge, as well as appropriating approximately \$2,000,000 for capital improvements within the city proper. In 1929 alone there were twenty-two new industries started in Tulsa with new capital of \$1,662,000, while at the same time, eighteen of the home industries had engaged in material expansion at an investment of more than \$1,000,000.⁵

Growth could be seen in other areas as well. From 1925 to 1929, school attendance grew from 22,806 to 34,664, while the number of telephones installed in homes rose from 27,430 to 41,269. While the value of building permits issued decreased from \$10,075,971 in 1925 to \$7,615,474 in 1926, it then doubled to \$14,840,474 in 1927, while dropping to a still impressive \$12,132,090 two years later. The amount of bank debits grew to slightly less than two billion dollars, up from about \$1.275 billion just four years earlier. The period 1925 to 1930 saw a rise in property assessments from \$105,775,796 to \$149,769,145, an increase of 42 percent.⁶ While other cities in the nation were also experiencing at least moderate growth during the 1920s, these figures

for Tulsa were still quite impressive.

The political structure of Tulsa at that time was based on the mayor-commission form of government, with each member being elected as an at-large candidate. From the time that the city charter became official, there existed a tense rivalry between the Democratic and Republican parties. The Democrats accused their opponents of being puppets of the money interests, including the railroads, insurance companies, and other large businesses. At the same time, the Republicans argued that their rivals were interested in forming unscrupulous political machines, such as those like Tammany Hall, and running government for the sole purpose of furthering their own concerns.⁷

In reality, neither party was able to dominate city politics throughout the early 1900s, although the Democrats did have the edge in number of years that either of them was in control. In the constant attempts to bring business and people to the city, both parties were strong and worked together quite well. By doing so, they had the ability to solve many problems, such as providing a good water system and figuring out ways to build other municipal projects required to support a growing population and industrial base. The city government, chamber of commerce, and oil leaders continually managed to boost and expand the petroleum industry, which was central to Tulsa's financial position at that time.

In terms of political operations, however, neither party was particularly strong, often working at odds with each other and finding it difficult to gain the support of the people.⁸ One of the reasons

for this was the continual shifting of political preferences of a body of constituents that never remained the same for any length of time. Because of the nature of the development of Tulsa, often based on periods of boom for the oil industry, there was a continual influx of settlers from many different parts of the country, who came with different political backgrounds. This often meant that the leadership of both parties usually had difficulty in locating a solid base of support.⁹ Therefore, creating a clear municipal policy was not always an easy thing to do.

One of the consequences of this situation was that officials were often unable, if not also unwilling, to deal with the main problem of the city - the growth of violence and lawlessness. Many felt that if Tulsa was to hold the oil industry, it would be against their better interests to close the saloons and brothels that many of the oil workers liked to frequent. Because they spent long periods of time away from loved ones back at home, these men, free of many social restrictions, chose to ease their tensions and frustrations by spending time at these places. This situation, when combined with the absence of any effective temperance movement, left officials few options but to allow such actions to continue.¹⁰

This same lack of political authority also allowed an unusual racial situation to develop. Blacks came to Tulsa for the same reasons that whites did - because of the chance to obtain wealth and opportunity. These blacks, however, did not engage in the drilling or refining of petroleum or even act as laborers in the oil fields. Instead, their opportunities lay almost exclusively in the service and

domestic industries, as servants to the growing number of rich whites in their homes or in other domestic businesses. They were totally excluded from the profits that resulted from oil.¹¹

This did not mean that blacks were unable to make decent livings. Because of all of the money in Tulsa that was associated with the petroleum industry, these domestic jobs obtained by blacks brought quite high pay relative to the same opportunities in other states. Also, they experienced a new freedom from the oppressive economy of the old South.¹² Tulsa was inhabited by a different group of people than those who settled in other southern states. The discovery of oil brought mostly people whose geographic origins were in the Midwest and whose social roots were solidly middle class. Approximately one-half of the men who held positions of leadership in the chamber of commerce and city government had left families in Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. They changed the cultural life of the city until it no longer resembled other population centers of the American Southwest. These people also brought with them racial attitudes associated with the North, which were laced with strict ideas about segregation, but did not include provisions for the total subjugation of blacks that existed in much of the South. It was in this atmosphere that the Tulsa black person was allowed to prosper economically.¹³

Within this context, however, blacks in the city still faced important problems. Just because they were allowed to become economically successful did not mean they were allowed to participate with whites in any capacity. In fact, outside of their domestic occupations, blacks were usually unknown to whites in Tulsa. While the

racial relationship was unlike that of any other southern city, it was not a harmonious one either. The city was not old enough to have in place traditional racial relationships. The two races came together here for the sole common purpose of material profit. Other than that, they were totally separate. While segregation was enforced by city ordinance, this probably was not necessary to keep the two groups apart from each other. According to Francis Burke, a student of sociology in the 1930s:

The Negro was known as the servant in the [white] household who prepared the meals, washed the linens, and dusted the furniture, who arrived at seven o'clock in the morning and left at eight at night, who resided somewhere in or near Tulsa with others of his race, who was a happy-go-lucky person who worked long and well.¹⁴

This relationship, while not based on racial hatred, also did not allow whites and blacks to be conscious of the social relations of community growth. It meant that during the early years of the depression, neither was aware of, cared about, or tried to do anything about the problems each other faced. It also meant that within the relative lawlessness of the period, an explosion could take place at any time, as it did during the race riot of 1921. It also meant that the two races found it difficult to work together during hard times, such as those that came as a result of the depression. Until inclusion of the blacks in urban relief was mandated by New Deal programs, the two groups continued to live in Tulsa in ignorance of each other.

All of these factors help describe what Tulsa was like when its citizens elected Herbert Hoover in 1928. While they also chose Democrats for city offices, Tulsans were excited about Hoover's progressive platform, and gave him better than a two to one majority

over Al Smith. The city's people had a background that proved to them that hard work and thrift would bring success, much as it had for the earliest settlers of the town. They wanted to continue to increase what they already had and to replace the goals they had achieved with newer, more ambitious ones. The continual expansion of business and growing industry all were signs of success when the depression came in 1929.

The principal problem that Tulsa faced was its reliance mainly on one industry, that of oil. While others had been established and continued to grow, ultimately they were connected to oil in some way. During the 1920s, profits from petroleum and everything associated with it far exceeded losses, and as companies such as the Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association, the Natural Gasoline Association of America, and the American Association of Petroleum engineers moved their home offices to the city, Tulsa became internationally famous as the oil capital of the world.¹⁵

As this industry prospered, it created investment capital for others as well. Therefore, at times when the oil market slowed down, unskilled and semi-skilled laborers associated with it were able to find alternative employment within these other job opportunities. By transferring back and forth among these growing industries as they had their boom periods, many workers were able to maintain their membership in the active labor force of the city.¹⁶

The problems occurred when large numbers of unemployed workers, specifically those who were involved in stagnating rural agricultural areas, were attracted to Tulsa's industrial job market. Labor soon

outstripped the number of available jobs, climaxing in 1929 when the stock market crashed.¹⁷ At the same time, overproduction in the oil industry resulted in lower prices, lower demand, and fewer available jobs. Other industries that depended on oil for their own growth no longer were able to expand as they had. The result was a collapse in Tulsa's economy.

For the city, the effects of the depression were not felt substantially until the winter of 1930-31. By the end of 1930, the figure for Tulsa's regular unemployed was 4,317, or about 7.5 percent of the total labor population.¹⁸ By that time the impact began to be realized fully, and public and private organizations were scrambling for a solution. Mayor George Watkins quickly became convinced of the severity of the problem. In early November 1930, he requested that Harry Rogers, a local banker, head a mayor's committee on unemployment. This idea was based on a suggestion made by President Hoover's Committee of Employment, which suggested that the local committee should be staffed with representatives of labor and industry, as well as with public officials and local administrators. It advocated a plan whereby all possible Tulsa employers would agree that no reductions in the wage scale or the number of persons employed would take place in their establishments except for reasons of inefficiency.¹⁹

Several employers participated in the plan, but ultimately they could not keep enough employees on hand to make the program successful. The Tulsa Community Fund, which had been established in 1924 and served to help coordinate several relief agencies for the county, was quickly losing the fight to help all of the unemployed individuals who sought

relief from it. On January 9, 1931, it ran out of money.²⁰ Quickly, the emergency was getting out of hand, and developing a plan that would work was becoming much more difficult.

A series of conferences ensued that included city officials and other interested citizens in an effort to find some way of solving the problems of the city's unemployed. They developed a plan in which \$10,000 would be made available to put 550 unemployed Tulsans to work on public works projects. At that time it was believed that a make-work project would be more beneficial than would direct assistance through the dole. Tulsans who had been able to keep their jobs were asked to help fund the plan by authorizing their employers to deduct a minimum of fifty cents per week from their salaries, which would then be matched by their companies. The money would then be used to pay the workers three dollars per day for three days a week on a make-work project. This low wage was agreed upon so that the program would not compete with private industry and would help keep the "undeserving" poor from being drawn to the offer. Additionally, the funds were to be issued as scrip, or special credit slips, and could only be exchanged for goods available at a special commissary.²¹

Ignoring complaints from labor groups and small businesses that did not like the new system of unemployment relief, the program went ahead. Initially, response by employers and their workers who funded the program was good, as enough money was raised to provide for approximately 5,000 unemployed Tulsans and their families. The mayor's conference figured that twelve weeks should be long enough for the plan to do some good. The biggest concern officials and citizens had was

that migrants from other cities would come in and try to be included. They felt that only Tulsa residents should be allowed to participate and ordered police to drive all transients out of town, and to make all Mexicans provide naturalization papers before they could receive jobs. Mayor Watkins and his people were fierce in enforcing the guidelines, as they even refused to yield to state labor officials who wanted an end to this policy which they considered unfair for certain deserving recipients.²²

Tulsa's insistence that it help only its own citizens continued to bring it criticism for the rest of the winter of 1931. When Governor William Murray ordered the establishment of state soup kitchens in the city, opposition quickly developed. Private philanthropic agencies maintained that the poor should be aided not in promiscuous masses at public distributing points, but by visits to their homes. City officials also did not approve of the plan, for their previous reason that it would draw undesirable persons to the city to share funds designated for the unemployed. When large numbers of families and their children wandered into Tulsa looking for shelter, officials were reluctant to provide them with any help, while in Oklahoma City, a temporary village for non-resident families offered those people basic services and a public school. Private agencies such as the Salvation Army were left to deal with this group in Tulsa, although in certain cases public officials did help the children.²³

When springtime came and the initial crisis had subsided, the Mayor's Committee on Unemployment relaxed its efforts. It ended its successful make-work program prematurely, however, and provided

insufficient means of helping the unemployed during the summer. City officials persisted in concluding that the bad times had ended. They had implemented a successful plan during the winter, but a continued effort would be necessary for future problems.

What kind of help was the Tulsa black family able to procure during this period of hardship? Until federal agencies were established under the New Deal, blacks were not included in service programs, except for a very small number who received some material relief. There were several reasons for black exclusion from the white programs. First, the strict segregation of the races in Tulsa resulted in a lack of understanding of common interests. The white community did not have a conscious realization of the problems, or even the presence of the minority group, and therefore made no provisions for it. Second, no organizations ever existed in Tulsa to interpret the needs of the black population to the white community, and blacks were never employed in social welfare units until federal agencies were put into place. Finally, the attitude of the white population acted as a deterrent to the development of adequate social services. White opinion seemed to be that the black person should be only a servant at all times and that he would be a good servant only as long as he was in economic need. Furthermore, many whites believed that blacks were capable of performing only the most menial tasks and, therefore, could not benefit from any type of welfare services.²⁴ Separated almost completely from the white world, Tulsa's blacks had to turn to each other for help until New Deal programs would provide some assistance once it was established.

While the city's minorities tried to find solutions to their problems, its white population also had to figure out what it was going to do about its own growing relief situation. The Family Welfare Society, a private agency of the Community Fund, wanted to turn back over to the county a large portion of the relief cases it had agreed to accept during the difficult winter that had just passed. The Tulsa County Commissioners reluctantly accepted responsibility for the care of about 2,500 needy families and immediately attempted to drop any cases they felt no longer warranted help. Essentially they were adopting the city's earlier opinion that relief was not necessary during the summer months, and so the first step they took was to drop all 130 widows who were on the charity rolls.²⁵

This policy created several problems. These and many other cases, after trying to get assistance from the county, returned to the Family Welfare Society, which was a private social service organization. The agency through which the county distributed its funds was a semi-public one called the County Humane Society, and many poor recipients who had been used to the Welfare Society's professional atmosphere now complained to its social workers that they could no longer get help. In response to this criticism, the Humane Society claimed that the Welfare Society had refused to make its records available, making it necessary for the county to perform its own investigations of worthy recipients. The executive secretary of the social service organization denied this accusation, explaining that her records were at the complete disposal of county workers, adding that not one request had been made for them.²⁶

Ultimately, the county commissioners admitted that they were unable to handle the cases that had been turned back to them. They asked the Community Fund, the organization to which the Welfare Society belonged, to take back the 2,500 cases that it had originally cared for during the previous winter. The Community Fund agreed, but only if demands of the Welfare Society were met. These demands included that they would have control over deciding how money would be dispersed to the unemployed and that the county had to provide a monthly budget showing how much it would be able to contribute. A new organization, the County Welfare Department, was created by the Community Fund to handle the large number of charity cases. While there appeared to be a solution, problems continued into the future over how much money the county would be expected to contribute for its part in relieving the poor people for whom it was financially responsible.²⁷

Facing problems such as this, it soon became clear to the officials of Tulsa that a plan was necessary in order to make public relief operate much more smoothly and efficiently. They observed that the Community Fund, the County Humane Society, the city, and several other separate organizations were considering many different relief projects. They decided that it would be highly beneficial for these activities to be supervised and coordinated in order to facilitate fund raising and to prevent waste through duplication of effort.²⁸

Chamber of commerce officials established a fact-finding committee whose purpose was to determine the best possible way to accomplish this goal. Its members looked to see what other cities were doing, paying particularly close attention to Oklahoma City. A program had been

designed there by Charles C. Day, who advised the group to create one agency responsible for clearing all relief activities by private charities, churches, and governmental departments. The fact-finding committee responded by issuing a questionnaire to all city agencies doing charity work and learned that the success or failure of a relief program in Tulsa depended on how cooperative the federal, state, county, and city administrations were. To ensure such cooperation, it recommended that city officials establish a Central Committee of Five to direct and oversee county agencies and programs so that duplication of effort could be eliminated.²⁹

The chamber of commerce took the advice of the fact-finding group and established a Central Emergency Committee of Five. Noting that this was strictly an emergency measure, the chamber's leaders explained that in normal times, such an organization would be unnecessary, because the several agencies for relief and social welfare would be able to function and grow with the support of the general public. "But when the ship runs into a storm the captain takes the bridge," its leaders wrote, "and the crew implicitly and unquestioningly obeys until the emergency is passed."³⁰

The chamber then chose the members of the committee, who included Tulsans H.O. McClure, president of the Tulsa Industrial Finance Corporation and representative of the chamber of commerce; Harry Schwartz, president of the Tulsa Labor Council and a representative of the Tulsa County Commissioners; Ernest Cornelius, president of the Oklahoma Steel Castings Company who came from the Community Fund; Major John Leavell, president of the Leavell Coal Company and delegate of the

city administration; and municipal Judge G. Edward Warren, an at-large member chosen by the other four.³¹

This committee did not carry on the actual work of employment or of charitable agencies, but assured that there would be complete coordination and absence of duplication of relief, either through work or through charity. Within these guidelines, it would have complete authority over the major groups involved - namely the county, the Community Fund, a state-county committee, and a city committee. It would also have access to records handled by the Social Service Exchange and the Unemployment Registration Office. As a general rule, charity would be confined to aged or infirm men, to women and children without means of support, and to destitute families without adult male members. Applicants would be expected to show that they were genuinely in need.³²

Due to public protests, one of the initial concerns of this group was to try to bring an end to panhandling in Tulsa. It established a community rooming house to care for transients and set up an overnight home for African-American men, one of the more substantial acts designed to help blacks in the city.³³ The committee then asked Tulsa's leaders and citizens for proposals that would provide revenue for a relief program. Several members of the community advanced their suggestions. Michael Hale, a Tulsa hardware dealer, proposed a plan whereby the city would lay out \$40,000 to purchase food at wholesale prices. The committee would oversee distribution of the food, which would be enough to provide for 2,500 families. It could be obtained through the Federal Farm Board, which would help improve the condition

of the local farmers.³⁴

Another idea was a "grain plan," which suggested that the city purchase wheat from farmers in western Oklahoma, grind it into flour at local mills, and sell it at a central commissary at a nominal price. Tulsa cattleman Arthur F. Antle developed the "Antle Plan," in which the city would develop a cooperative farm where unemployed men could work to provide food for their families. Even Mayor Watkins came up with an idea that would finance a make-work program using taxes that the Supreme Court of Oklahoma had invalidated in 1929, because they had been collected illegally. The sum, totalling \$900,000, still had not been returned to the citizenry, and Watkins proposed that instead of offering a reimbursement, a portion totalling about \$250,000 could be used to hire unemployed people to construct a reservoir in Mohawk Park. His plan seemed sensible, but it drew attack. Many people who had invested a large sum of their own dollars to get the money back did not want to lose this sacrifice, especially to those who had contributed nothing but still stood to receive a refund. Also, others believed that they should have their portion of the illegal tax returned to them, from which they could then contribute to the poor what they could afford.³⁵

The Committee of Five ultimately decided on a system of make-work for Tulsa. Its subcommittee on make-work asked the County Excise Board for a readjustment of the city water department's budget for permanent improvements. By doing so, \$10,000 could be raised for the work project. The committee then decided to go ahead with a plan to have the unemployed build an additional reservoir at Mohawk Park. They saw

a genuine need for the reservoir, which was expected to provide a volume of water storage sufficient to tide the city over a maximum period of high consumption in time of drought.³⁶

The emergency committee also approved the provision for a commissary, such as the one that had been operated the year before. When possible, locally produced goods would be sold there, so that a market would be available for producers whose sales had dropped. The minimum stock required for a balanced diet would be carried and would be based on a ration plan developed by committee member John Leavell, who used the meal system eaten by his regiment in World War I as a model. The commissary was therefore able to provide food and clothing at the lowest possible cost. The average expense of a weekly food ration was forty-two cents, and each meal contained 2800 calories, a diet judged sufficient for the average unemployed worker.³⁷

The Tulsa commissary attracted national and international attention, as letters were received from several states, and from as far away as Africa, asking for information on how it worked. Leavell was even called to Pennsylvania to describe to that state's legislature how the program operated. In fact, the period from late 1931 to early 1932 marked the high point of relief administration in Tulsa. The Committee of Five coordinated both private and public relief agencies, forced county commissioners to provide public funds, and to set up a commissary program that received broad attention. Unfortunately, all of these accomplishments still were not enough to keep up with the growing unemployment and economic problems. The city of Tulsa had shown leadership and ability in helping its citizens, but could not

find enough money to continue the program. By late spring of 1932, the money was gone, and the Committee of Five disbanded.³⁸

Despite all of the problems Tulsa faced in its fight against the depression, a report released by the research department of the city's First National Bank and Trust Company found that in comparison with other urban regions, Tulsa was in a better position psychologically and economically to meet the continuing struggle brought by the poor financial situation. The study, based chiefly on official records of the United States Department of Commerce, provided an extensive amount of information. It found that 42 percent of Tulsa's families owned their own homes, a figure that was higher for that time than several large cities, including Philadelphia, Detroit, Dallas, Chicago, and New York.³⁹ It also reported that the per capita deposits in banks for Tulsans equalled \$746, a figure that was higher than St. Louis' \$742, Houston's \$552, Memphis' \$386, and the figure for fourteen other places from all across the United States.⁴⁰

The investigation was full of similar statistics showing Tulsa's relatively good standing in the areas of auto ownership, rate of population growth, proportion of tax payers, factory payroll, and industrial production. The city repeatedly outperformed other metropolitan regions, such as Pittsburgh, Kansas City, Boston, San Antonio, and Oklahoma City, in these and many other categories, according to the analysis. Although growth had declined in recent years, authors of the twenty-nine page study believed that, financially, socially, and economically, Tulsa had weathered the extended business depression quite heroically to that point.⁴¹ This

survey indicates that before the economic decline, Tulsa had built a strong enough base through oil, other industries, and its general wealth to absorb the initial brunt of the depression more satisfactorily than other cities could.

Still, municipal officials found it necessary to seek aid from the federal government through President Hoover's Reconstruction Finance Corporation. The winter of 1932 was especially difficult, and by February of that year, a central file held the names of 11,675 people who were seeking relief.⁴² With this figure continually growing, authorities contacted the RFC in hopes of selling to that agency at least a part of \$1,300,000 worth of bonds remaining from a 1930 referendum. The regional representative of the RFC, Robert W. Kelso, seemed uninterested, however, so Tulsa's first experience at attempting to obtain federal help was not successful.⁴³

Next, city commissioners turned to the state, requesting an allocation of \$500,000 for Tulsa County from relief funds that Oklahoma had received from the RFC. This avenue brought more positive results, as Governor Murray made \$146,000 available from the federal agency.⁴⁴ Knowing that the money would have to be paid back, the Tulsa Tribune advised that a carefully designed program should be formulated for use of the loan, one that would provide the greatest number of work days for the unemployed, but one that would also be of the greatest benefit to the city and that might help pay itself off in future years.⁴⁵

This suggestion seems to have been heeded. The first make-work project begun with RFC funds was the construction of an additional lake in Mohawk Park, which would be available for fishing and other public

uses. Also, a boathouse was to be built there, which would open the new sport of boating to Tulsans.⁴⁶ Members of a management committee pushed for the construction of a new golf course, and work on clearing timber for it soon followed.⁴⁷ Initial funds were provided for the employment of 250 men for forty days. Shifts would be alternated every three days, so that each man on the job would receive a minimum of \$7.20 for three eight-hour days each week.⁴⁸

Other projects soon were approved. E.B. Howard, the governor's representative for the RFC program in Tulsa County, announced plans for county road work, which included forty sub-projects, timber clearing, and grading on school property between Tulsa and nearby Bixby. Widows and women supporting families obtained employment in a Red Cross sewing room.⁴⁹ By November 17, more than 1,000 unemployed people, of whom about 100 were women, had received jobs with the make-work projects. While most of them worked at Mohawk Park, work sites were soon scattered throughout Tulsa County.⁵⁰

The RFC program helped many needy persons, especially those who had not worked for several months. Unfortunately, it was too little, as Hunt estimated unemployment registration for the county to be around 13,000.⁵¹ At about the same time, the Community Fund was fighting a losing battle to reach a goal of \$548,908.60, an amount its managers determined was necessary to finance relief and charity work adequately during the next year. Fund leaders pleaded for aid, explaining that they had records of 20,000 people who needed help, the great majority of whom they claimed were sincere, law-abiding, deserving citizens. On October 22 they had received only \$225,019.71, a figure far less than

half of the amount for which they had asked.⁵² Two days later the Community Fund ended its effort, having collected pledges totalling \$257,583.34. While they had received a significant amount of contributions during that two day period, it still was not projected to be nearly enough.⁵³ Facing the prospect of another very difficult winter, anxious Tulsans turned again to the federal government, only this time they sought hope from Franklin D. Roosevelt and his promise of a New Deal.

The city's residents had supported Herbert Hoover in 1928, but now saw Roosevelt as their only savior, as did much of the rest of the country. Previously in April 1932, they had replaced George Watkins as mayor with Herman Newblock, a Democrat who had held that office before. Tulsa, which was located in Oklahoma's first congressional district, had chosen Democrat Wesley Disney in 1930 to serve in Congress. He was now running for re-election, as was Senator Elmer Thomas, a man who had served the state either as congressman or in the senate since 1923. These were the choices for the city in November 1932.

The Tribune reported the day before the election that Tulsa was excitedly tense on the eve of voting day, and it predicted large crowds, as the event was seen as a major one for the year.⁵⁴ Based on the figures of precincts that had reported before noon on election day, it appeared that Hoover had the edge.⁵⁵ Soon, however, it became clear that Roosevelt would be victorious, as would Disney and Thomas. Official returns showed 35,330 votes in Tulsa County for the new president, a significant majority over the 25,541 who voted for Hoover. Wesley Disney defeated his Republican opponent Frank Frantz by a vote

of 33,867 to 22,618. Thomas defeated his opponent, Wirt Franklin, by more than 6,500 votes.⁵⁶ In fact, in what the Associated Press called a political precedent for Oklahoma, the state elected Democrats for president, for all nine of its congressmen, and for its U.S. Senator.⁵⁷ Tulsans had made it clear that they hoped its leaders in the Democratic party would help improve conditions.

The city of Tulsa had been founded by people who believed that hard work and thrift were the keys to success. They had shown that they were interested in government interference in their affairs only when emergencies existed. It was also true, however, that when times were as desperate as they were during the Great Depression, the city was willing to look to other places for help. While acceptance of funds from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation was not proof that Tulsans had given up their principles of unfettered capitalism, their new choice for president indicates that at least in the early 1930s, they were willing to accept government aid. Congressman Disney and Senator Thomas had stated during their campaigns that they would stand behind Roosevelt, and their elections further indicate Tulsans' initial willingness to give the New Deal a chance. Due to the difficult times, they felt they had no other choice.

ENDNOTES

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THE NEW DEAL FROM 1932-1934: WERE PROMISES
OF RELIEF THE ANSWER FOR TULSA?

In March 1933, Tulsans listened as Franklin Roosevelt gave his inaugural address. The depression had made many of them tired and unhappy, and they hoped that the new president would be able to help. When he took office, he immediately began formulating the alphabet programs that would be placed in action in what was known as the "hundred days." The residents and the municipal government anticipated the benefits that the programs might provide for the city.

Roosevelt's first action was to declare a bank holiday on March 6, 1933. Tulsans were not surprised, because five days earlier on March 1, Governor Murray had already issued a proclamation closing all of Oklahoma's banks.¹ After the president made his announcement, Tulsa business houses opened a scrip bank in order to handle payrolls and to facilitate general commerce. Persons and businesses wishing to be involved in the program could purchase the scrip at a cost of \$101 for each \$100 worth, the extra dollar being used to pay for printing expenses.² While it took a couple of days to get the program operating smoothly, it then became quite satisfactory for those who participated in it.

Tulsans seemed to deal with the bank holiday rather well, even at times finding humor in their situation. The Tulsa Tribune reported that an oil millionaire, whose home and furnishings were worth half a million dollars, found himself with \$1.20 in his pocket. Mayor

Newblock admitted that he was better off than most; he had twelve dollars. When asked what he would ask his congregation to put in the Sunday plate, a Tulsa pastor chuckled and said that he would let them come free this Sunday.³ While the holiday did hurt some businesses, most Tulsans seemed to find a certain amount of relief and satisfaction in the president's proclamation.

Tulsa's citizens were able to use credit memos for groceries and necessities, and its gas company decided not to turn off anyone's service for non-payment until the situation was back to normal.⁴ This happened on March 14, when the city's banks reopened ahead of schedule to busy lobbies. Bankers generally reported that the ratio of deposits to withdrawals was about nine to one or better. By the end of the day, deposits exceeded withdrawals by over \$5,000,000, a figure that was certainly gratifying to officials. The executive vice president of the First National Bank said that "the reopening will have a good psychological effect on business in general. The holiday has cleared the atmosphere in the banking world."⁵

The next day, all of Tulsa county's banks reopened. Only two faced certain restrictions, but those were only temporary precautions.⁶ At the time, Tulsans strongly supported the president, giving him credit for the favorable banking situation. The Tulsa Tribune, which had not always supported Roosevelt before his election, announced the return of a bristling public confidence. It believed that the American people were now in charge, confident that the "new pilot, President Roosevelt," would continue to steer Americans "straight up the channel."⁷

When the new president was elected in November 1932, one of the biggest economic problems for Tulsa, and for the entire state as well, was the situation of the oil industry. Overproduction was the primary reason for this, as proration statutes that had been formulated in 1915 were basically unenforceable. Also, as new fields were opening up, producers were unwilling to limit the amount of petroleum they could take from the ground. It soon became clear that the problem was aggravated by the large oil producing companies, at the expense of the smaller independents, because by depressing the price of crude, those larger companies could eliminate competition from smaller ones. By doing so, they would be able to form monopolies. Governor Murray had recognized this process, and on August 4, 1931, he issued an executive order declaring martial law, and called out the national guard to close down 3,106 prorated oil wells in the state.⁸

Early in 1933, Senator Elmer Thomas of Oklahoma called for a senate investigation that would determine whether proration laws had been violated in the southwest. Executives of the Champlin Oil and Refining Company, who had already admitted their involvement in overproduction violations, stated that major oil companies could violate the current proration codes with impunity. They provided copies of production reports showing that at least thirteen companies had removed amounts of oil in excess of the allowable in Oklahoma, thereby contributing to the current industry crisis.⁹ Charles C. Peppers, confidential agent of the Champlin group, stated that the entire proration setup was slowly choking Oklahoma's oil wealth and that "the so-called oil ring even goes so far as to control the

government itself."¹⁰ It was becoming evident that if the oil industry was to be saved, new, enforceable laws would be necessary.

This proved to be difficult, however. Under an initial plan by Governor Murray, his cousin, Colonel Cicero Murray, would act as an enforcement umpire, a position he had held previously. His appointment to this office came as a result of the wishes of special oil well operators, a situation that brought criticism from within the Oklahoma Senate, especially when \$168,000 suspiciously appeared in his bank account.¹¹ The state senate finally passed a resolution that eliminated all provisions that might give the governor power over oil proration machinery. The bill also provided drastic penalties for producing more oil than was allowed, for failing to make reports on production and pipeline runs, and for making false reports.¹² Governor Murray eventually signed this bill, which also provided for a large enforcement group under the direction of the corporation commission, and supported a tax to pay for it.¹³

The passage of this law, however, still was not enough to cure the oil industry. At the same time the law was being debated in Oklahoma City, many of the nation's leading oil company executives were meeting with Mid-Continent producers in Tulsa. There they decided that in order for the industry to get back on its feet, the price of oil must be increased to one dollar per barrel, approximately seventy cents higher than it was at that time. For this to happen, supply could no longer be greater than demand, which they figured to be at about 2,000,000 barrels per day nationally. At the time of their meeting in March 1933, supply was at 4,000,000 barrels per day, or approximately

twice what was needed. To get this figure down to an acceptable level, each oil producing state would have to agree to a maximum amount of prorated oil production, and then to comply with that figure. While some of the officials supported this discussion, others, such as Tulsa oil man Harry Sinclair, were more pessimistic, believing that compliance and enforcement would be difficult.¹⁴

The answer, they decided, was to turn to the federal government and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes. In late March, three committees representing the governors of the oil producing states, the oil and gas associations representing independent producers of oil and gas in the United States, and the major oil and gas producing and importing companies met together and recommended to Ickes a program that they thought would meet the existing emergency in the oil industry. Their program provided many specific recommendations, including giving President Roosevelt the power to force governors of oil states to close flush pools within their states, to make them adopt conservancy statutes if they did not already have them, and to have Congress pass a law prohibiting the transportation of oil in interstate and foreign commerce.¹⁵

The group also wanted the president and the national government to impose competitive tariffs on foreign oil, to delay drilling on public lands, and to force producing states to limit production of crude oil to the requirements of market demand. They introduced the decision arrived at in the Tulsa conference, whereby national output would be limited to 2,000,000 barrels per day, of which Oklahoma would be allowed 417,690. The representatives of these committees then provided

results of the vote for endorsement of this proposal. Seventeen of the twenty independent and corporate petroleum associations, including those from Oklahoma, voted in favor of this proposal for national regulation.¹⁶

President Roosevelt supported the proposal, stating that "Government ought to have the right . . . after surveying and planning for an industry to prevent, with the assistance of the overwhelming majority of that industry, unfair practice, and to enforce this agreement by the authority of government."¹⁷ He decided, however, not to include many of the provisions of the proposal in his national recovery-public works bill in June. Continued enforcement problems and inconsistencies in the federal government's actions with regard to the oil industry meant that a solution would still be difficult to find.

Roosevelt was less cautious in his attempts to provide help for the unemployed and their families who were suffering due to the depression. One of the first relief agencies he created was the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), which called for \$500,000,000 for federal grants to states. He appointed Harry Hopkins, who had run a similar agency for the president during his term as governor of New York, as its administrator. During its early period in existence, many Oklahomans, especially those in counties such as Tulsa, profited little from the FERA because its funds for the state were controlled by Governor Murray. He was able to obstruct the manner in which the money was distributed, and this hurt regions that he considered unfriendly.¹⁸ Still, Tulsa was able to obtain approximately \$680,000 from the FERA, as well as from other public state and local

funds, from July to December 1933.¹⁹

Realizing that the inability to create new jobs was impeding economic recovery, Hopkins and his assistant, Aubrey Williams, decided to implement a temporary program through the fall and winter of 1933-1934, which would employ about four million jobless people for that period. Known as the Civil Works Administration (CWA), the program worked alongside the FERA, and was to exist until the more extensive Works Progress Administration (WPA) could begin operation the next spring.²⁰ Due to the problems that the FERA administration was having with Governor Murray and his handling of relief funds, Hopkins decided to name another individual, Carl Giles of Norman, to head the CWA for the state.²¹ This made Oklahoma's civil works administrative system rather unusual, because in most states, governors oversaw the regular federal relief organizations and would also be in control of this newer one. One thing that Hopkins had insisted on was that politics would not be a factor in CWA dealings, and Giles guaranteed that there would be no politics in his organization.

The program came to Tulsa in mid-November, producing a mixture of benefit and confusion. Initially, the city was excited about having the chance to put a large number of its unemployed to work at the expense of the federal government. Jobless people were to receive jobs as quickly as possible, and arrangements were made to transfer several thousand men and women from Governor Murray's federal relief administration payroll to the new civil works set-up. Giles appointed W.H. Elliot as Tulsa County CWA administrator, and his job was to implement the program according to the rules set down by the federal

government.

Because Roosevelt had ordered that half of the workers would come from the U.S. Unemployment Office and the other half from the federal relief administration payroll, Elliot decided that until new CWA projects were devised, those workers already on make-work projects in Tulsa would continue on them. They would begin receiving the new CWA wages, which were forty cents per hour for unskilled labor and one dollar an hour for skilled labor, for a total of thirty hours per week. Previously under the original make-work programs, workers could only make \$10.80 each month, so the new wages were significantly higher.²²

Problems began after Hopkins told CWA administrators to get as many people employed under the program as quickly as possible. Elliot had already transferred around 8,000 men who had been on the make-work payroll to the CWA payroll, under the assumption that there would be plenty of money for Tulsa County to pay them. At the same time, he had registered several thousand self-sustaining unemployed on the CWA rolls, so that he would be in compliance with the rule requiring that the total number of men receiving jobs was to be divided equally between those previously on make-work jobs and those considered self-sustaining unemployed. It had been estimated that the number of people in this latter group could reach 10,000 men and women.²³

Tulsa officials then learned the news that the total amount allotted to the county was \$895,000, a figure that would employ approximately half of those who were expected to register. Elliot quickly suspended the work that had already been going on in order to try to deal with this situation. To reduce the number of people who

had already signed up, he ordered that only those who could provide their own transportation could get work and that only able-bodied men should receive employment, while all others should go to the federal-state relief office to get help. Having determined that some people had actually quit their real jobs believing that they could get higher wages with the CWA, Elliot ordered that those who had done so would be denied work. Also, only the breadwinner of the family should register, as he found that in some instances entire families were signing up.²⁴

This did not solve the problems, however, especially when Elliot and other officials learned that no more than 5,900 people were to be given CWA jobs.²⁵ He had already allowed 8,000 of the old make-work employees to keep those jobs under the CWA, a figure that exceeded the limit by 2,100. Compounding this situation was the fact that one-half of the 5,900 had to come from the rolls of the self-sustaining unemployed, who had continually been signing up. Elliot immediately removed 2,100 aged and disabled men who had been part of the make-work crews and told them that they should go to the Community Fund building for assistance. Many formed an angry crowd, however, shouting threats and causing problems that led the police to detain four of them.²⁶

The situation continued to deteriorate. By the third week of the existence of the CWA in Tulsa, approximately 14,000 Tulsans who needed jobs could not get any because of the 5,900-person limit. Of these, a large group were World War I veterans, who were supposed to have a first chance at CWA employment but did not, because Elliot had already given all of the jobs to the make-workers. There was also a group composed of the "self-sustaining" unemployed who were mandated by

Roosevelt to get one half of the available jobs but did not for the same reason as the veterans. A third group was made up of about 2,500 women, none of whom had received a job as yet with the CWA, even though a certain number of them were supposed to.²⁷ A fourth group would immediately follow and was composed of able-bodied men who had been receiving aid from the FERA, but were eliminated from its lists on December 11 in order to make room for the veterans, aged, and disabled men who could not get jobs with the CWA.²⁸ This was clearly a low point for relief administration for Tulsa.

Soon, however, action was taken to improve these conditions. R.L. Webb, manager of the federal-state CWA office, began investigating the names on the make-work list of workers, in a rather successful effort to remove as many as possible who did not meet stern eligibility tests. Also, the FERA opened sewing rooms, which employed 1,000 women by December 19.²⁹ Gradually, more men from the list of self-sustaining unemployed were able to obtain work with the CWA. This was because the Tulsa organization was allowing a number of jobs in excess of the 5,900 with which it had been provided by the state office. By the end of 1933, a total of 6,850 people were working daily at a payroll of \$81,000 dollars per week.³⁰ They worked on many different jobs, including a reservoir at Mohawk Park, scattered county school jobs, street car railway removals, paving repairs, and drainage ditches. Additionally, 1,350 women had jobs in sewing rooms under the FERA, 350 of whom were blacks working on the north side of town.³¹

The new year brought both good and bad news. The CWA job quota had increased to 7,500 for Tulsa County, but no more FERA funds were

available for sewing rooms.³² The year also brought a new county administrator, as W.H. Elliot was replaced with Stoner McLelland, who had previously been check distribution officer. Giles made the change for reasons of insubordination by Elliot, who did not want to follow a national policy geared toward substantial building, but rather one that emphasized make-work projects. McLelland, who was known as a builder, quickly organized the county's program along military lines, so that it might run more efficiently.³³

Near the end of January, the CWA in Tulsa began winding down, in preparation for the new WPA program that was to begin that spring. On January 25, its quota was reduced to 7,091, with the great majority of the reductions occurring among black workers.³⁴ New projects continued to be approved, but the number of layoffs increased as well. One month later, the number of workers was reduced to 5,875.³⁵ Gradually this amount diminished, until the CWA program disappeared from Tulsa on March 30. By its end, forty-three jobs had been completed, including some major ones such as the reservoir at Mohawk Park, a city hall renovation project, and work on the Petroleum Exposition buildings at the fairgrounds. Since the start of the CWA in November 1933, estimates showed that Tulsa County had received a total of \$1,500,000, of which \$1,250,000 went to provide jobs for the unemployed.³⁶ After a rough start, the CWA made an impact on Tulsa in its short period of existence.

When the CWA ended in March, most of its operations were taken over by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Although the FERA had been in existence since May 1933, the majority of its work in

Oklahoma until now had been carried by the CWA. By late winter 1934, tensions between Hopkins and Murray had risen so high that the federal administrator felt compelled to place all FERA funds in the hands of state administrator Giles, who had already controlled those designated for the CWA.³⁷

The FERA accomplished a significant amount of work in Tulsa from March of 1934 until its end in 1935, although the funds available were not what they had been under the CWA. During the four months it existed, it had provided for Tulsa approximately \$1,500,000, while the FERA would contribute around \$1,000,000 from April to December of 1934 for the county.³⁸ Initially, it put men back to work on jobs that were not completed under the CWA, such as on a minor league baseball park and on a fire station. Under new regulations, only the persons destitute from unemployment and who had at least three dependents would be given work relief. The local community was supposed to take care of disabled persons, and state sources, which were still controlled by Murray, were also expected to be available. Pay initially ranged from \$7.75 to \$40 per week, according to the budget needs of the worker's household.³⁹

W.C. Weir replaced McLelland as county FERA administrator after McLelland, who had been in charge since the CWA closed, resigned in April. One of Weir's first duties under state administrator Giles was to post notices in relief headquarters, ordering that every employee keep free from any "taint or suspicion" of political activity. County officials were instructed to report immediately any complaints pertaining to political coercion or suspicion of unfair tactics

indulged in by any political subdivision of government, so far as the relief program was concerned. The penalty for such activities was immediate dismissal from work.⁴⁰ While certain corrupt actions probably still occurred anyway, it was clear that open political influences did not exist in Tulsa, as they did in many other American cities.

The FERA provided funds for many worthwhile jobs for the city. In June approximately \$3,000 was set aside to rehabilitate the health of 100 malnourished Tulsa children.⁴¹ Another summer project was a city-wide program of supervised recreation in the public parks. While it only employed 36 women, this program served thousands of adults and young people.⁴² There were also provisions for more traditional FERA projects, such as building roads, bridges, and drainage ditches. In late July, the Tulsa county FERA reached a peak in food distribution, having given out nearly a half of a million pounds of flour, lard, pork, and cereals in only three and one-half months.⁴³

Other more substantial projects received funding as well. FERA workers built a small airport in Tulsa at a total cost of \$7,343, \$6,084 of which went towards payroll costs.⁴⁴ The first of seven meat canning operations in Oklahoma was opened in Tulsa in August 1934. From then until December, 11,575 men and 4,484 women filled 1,925,660 cans with beef, and earned a total of \$163,151. The Tulsa factory was the most productive of the seven in the state.⁴⁵ The city's visiting housekeeper plan, which even caught the attention of President Roosevelt, provided jobs for women to look after and assist Tulsa's elderly population. When speaking to a group in another location, the

president referred to it, saying, "The women of Tulsa, through the visiting housekeepers, are actually reaching the people who are in need and teaching them how to utilize the materials they have in their homes. These are the people the government is actually trying to do something for."⁴⁶

In September, Harry Hopkins called on fourteen states, one of which was Oklahoma, to share an increased portion of the charity burden. Officials in Tulsa decided to place a question before the people calling for the passage of a \$100,000 bond issue, which would be used to contribute to federal funds designed for charity.⁴⁷ This brought an opportunity to determine whether Tulsans were prepared to help in the relief effort, or whether they were content to rely solely on federal funds for assistance. The issue was divided into two separate votes, one of which called for \$25,000 and the second for \$75,000. On the first, the vote was 10,375 to 8,797 in favor, while the larger sum passed by a vote of 9,871 to 8,657.⁴⁸ While the results were close, the vote showed that Tulsans were willing to contribute to the New Deal, at least early in its existence.

The FERA in Tulsa accomplished many things in 1934. It gave help to many people and families who needed it. At the same time, it faced limits as well. Carl Giles explained that, according to the way budgets were set, a laborer might only be able to work from two to five days per month, depending on his need and his level of skill. This did not allow him to reach his maximum efficiency or to acquire a familiarity or an interest in the work he was doing.⁴⁹ Also, as has been mentioned, the total funds available to Tulsa were not enough to

provide truly adequate relief. The state government was supposed to contribute to each county, but in Oklahoma this meant dealing with Governor Murray. He only gave money to counties that were of political benefit to him. Since there was open animosity between Murray and the people of Tulsa, the city was left with nothing. Local funds donated in the amount of almost \$287,000 did help, but because of the nature of the depression in 1934, more was needed.⁵⁰

Following the implementation of the FERA, Roosevelt's next step was to try to stimulate the economy by attempting to forge a new, positive relationship between government and business. His plan for this relationship was developed as the National Industrial Recovery Act, which Congress passed on May 14, 1933. Title I of this act suspended antitrust laws so that industrial codes regulating production, prices, and trade practices could operate. It also included a section guaranteeing labor representation in the workplace, as well as collective bargaining. Title II included provisions for allocating 3.3 billion dollars for the Public Works Administration, which would also help the economy and unemployment by creating resources for large public building projects.⁵¹ President Roosevelt placed responsibility for Title I with Oklahoman Hugh Johnson, who wanted to establish a partnership among industry, retailers, and the public by instituting minimum wages and hours for labor, while at the same time convincing the public to do business only with those retailers who conformed to the program. While the NRA proved ultimately to be a failure, Tulsans were quite enthusiastic about it early in its existence.

The blue eagle emblem was the symbol of compliance with the NRA codes, and when they arrived at the Tulsa post office on July 29, seventy employers signed up for theirs within the first two hours. Larger businesses that did so included the Tulsa County Druggists Association, which included 200 members, as well as sixty furniture dealers, representing about thirty stores. People who represented very large trade associations, such as restaurant employees, barbers and beauty operators, and tire dealers, quickly organized meetings and attempted to devise ways in which their groups could devise wage and hour schedules that would comply with the act.⁵²

Tulsans continued to show their enthusiasm for the NRA. By early August, the city led Oklahoma in voluntary observance of the blue eagle standard of higher wages, shorter hours, and increased employment. This standing was based on 2,328 pledges, affecting 20,525 workers, which exceeded Oklahoma City's figures of 1,837 pledges affecting 13,729 employees.⁵³ These results came amid the first charges of abuse of the NRA codes in Tulsa, as six firms that had signed compliance agreements were accused of violating wage and hour provisions. Officials regarded these accusations as questionable, however, because they had been made by discharged employees.⁵⁴

In an effort to make consumers aware of what the NRA was supposed to do for them, General Johnson instituted a "Buy Now" plan in order to get people into the stores. A reporter went to Froug's, a large Tulsa department store, to find out how it was working. Manager M.E. Froug said that "This is by far the best business day we have had in many months. The store has been full all day. [People are] not just

looking, but buying."⁵⁵

Although continual problems existed in the oil industry nationally over forming a wage and hour code, many Tulsans involved in this business claimed that the NRA was of great benefit. While the matter of settling the oil code was of some concern, owners of one related Tulsa business stated that they had still been able to hire thirty new employees. At an oil well supply firm, when a reporter asked an employee for concrete evidence that the NRA was working, he replied, "I am the evidence. This is my second day. I was laid off for two and one-half years."⁵⁶

While these were positive stories, there were also other people who were not satisfied. The president of a Tulsa food supply company stated that the NRA was the worst thing that had ever happened. He had taken on twenty-two new employees and increased his payrolls \$1,200 per month, but costs for his supplies had gone up, while the price of his product had decreased. He complained that his company was nowhere big enough to dictate prices.⁵⁷ In fact, this problem was shared by many smaller businessmen who tried to comply fully with the codes, but were in danger of failing while they waited for fulfillment of promises that the economy was going to improve.⁵⁸

Overall, the NRA continued to receive support. The chamber of commerce, decided to stage a special celebration for it which would include a parade.⁵⁹ They invited Hugh Johnson's mother, an Oklahoma resident, to be parade leader and speaker.⁶⁰ After it ended the Tulsa Tribune called it a "pageant of progress" and predicted that prosperity was just around the corner. The newspaper estimated that 100,000

people attended, there to see Mrs. Johnson, "mother of . . . the nation's No. 2 man."⁶¹ Later in November, General Johnson came to Tulsa, where he gave examples of what the NRA had done for Oklahoma.⁶²

At the end of 1933 enthusiasm for the NRA began to subside, as some of its inherent problems began to surface. Namely, there was agitation within labor. While reports are not as extensive as they were for cities such as Baltimore, labor unrest did occur. Initially it was minor, such as when the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor issued a protest to Johnson over wages for mine workers.⁶³ Then in December 1933, angry bus drivers voted to go on strike. They were upset because while their pay remained the same, their hours were drastically cut from 70 to 48 per week. Because of this, 140 of them walked off the job.⁶⁴

Other people complained because prices did not increase as they were supposed to. By the middle of June, criticism was leveled at General Johnson, because of his bullying attitude, and because he had succeeded not in joining labor and industry together but in dividing them. Tribune editors proposed that a limited number of master codes be substituted for the hundreds of rules and regulations, "worked out by General Johnson and his codemakers for control of all the petty details of American business."⁶⁵ These responses are similar to those found throughout the nation.⁶⁶ It appeared that the NRA might not be the answer to Tulsa's economic recovery, although like many other New Deal programs, it did provide some relief.

The National Industrial Recovery Act also included a section designated as "Title II: Public Works and Construction Projects."

Headed by Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, it appropriated 3.3 billion dollars for the Public Works Administration.⁶⁷ Its purpose was to spend this money, either as direct grants or on a basis of percentage contributions to states and municipal localities, in order to put unemployed people to work on small and large construction projects. The PWA was hampered by Ickes's caution in distributing the funds, which, when combined with the "offensive" nature of Oklahoma's state politics, meant that Tulsans could not plan from benefiting from it very much. Out of all of the New Deal programs formulated during Roosevelt's first one hundred days, the PWA had the least to offer Tulsa during the period lasting until the end of 1934. After that, tireless campaigning by Congressman Disney and Senator Thomas offered Tulsa and its surrounding region hope for major flood control and power projects. Even then, however, positive results were achieved slowly.

Initial reports, however, were quite hopeful that the state would benefit from the PWA. When its creation was announced, leaders figured that the state's share of the 3.3 billion dollar appropriation would be from 25 to 40 million dollars. Plans for flood control and power plants on the Arkansas and Red Rivers had already been discussed, and officials determined that 15 to 30 million dollars could be set aside for them. The other 10 million dollars would be used for road and highway construction.⁶⁸ The Arkansas River project would have been of significant benefit for Tulsa and northeastern Oklahoma, because it would solve serious flooding problems for the region, as well as put thousands of unemployed people to work. Tulsa's officials went to work immediately trying to develop a plan that would be acceptable to the

PWA.⁶⁹ At the same time, county commissioners submitted twelve highway and bridge projects for construction.⁷⁰

By September 1933, however, the state had only received \$9,216,798 of the \$3.3 billion available, all of which was to be used for roads. One reason for this was because state statutes and constitutional restrictions made it difficult for cities, counties, school districts, and the state itself to contract debts with which to match federal public works funds, and officials did not seem willing to overstep these provisions. Murray was blamed for making it difficult to borrow money that could be used to match the funds. He also balked at suggestions by lawyers to have the government build public structures, let the cities lease them, and then pay for them out of city taxes, making it needless for them to issue bonds. Murray referred to this plan as an "evasion of the constitution."⁷¹

Meanwhile, committees were being formed and plans were being laid out for possible river projects throughout the state. The center for the Arkansas flood control project was located in Tulsa. As its members submitted proposals to Washington and received no response, Senator Thomas voiced his disgust. In what he termed "dilly-dallying" by the Public Works Administration in allocating the funds, he threatened that Congress would take over the job of disbursing them. Referring to the various dam projects for his state, Thomas said, "If we don't get action by the time Congress convenes, we are going to Congress with the projects and I believe we will get action."⁷² A subsequent study showed that while \$365,512,808 had been set aside nationally by November for flood control, Oklahoma had received none.⁷³

In Tulsa, the first significant PWA appropriation did not come until January 1934. The city received \$47,000 for the widening of the West Eleventh street bridge, which crossed the Arkansas River. The amount represented the government's 30 percent donation to the project; the city would provide the remaining 70 percent from city bonds. Tulsa officials had forwarded applications for PWA grants totalling 1.3 million dollars, which would have been used for other streets, bridges, and high schools, but they had received little consideration. The state highway commission had received some blame for using politics in dispensing the money, but Tulsa was also hurt due to its inability to raise more matching funds because of its high level of outstanding debt warrants.⁷⁴

For whatever reasons they were not receiving any money, Tulsans were still displeased. By November 1934, approximately \$2.4 million had actually been sent to Oklahoma by the PWA.⁷⁵ Tulsa still had only one grant for \$47,000, which helped employ 150 men to help widen the bridge. The Tulsa Tribune figured that had the funds been distributed according to population, the city should have received \$4.4 million of the entire \$3.3 billion the PWA had.⁷⁶ City residents did not understand why they were being excluded.

As for the river projects, plans had been submitted and resubmitted to Washington, sometimes receiving the attention of the president, but usually simply dying or being vetoed by some congressional committee. Efforts by Senator Thomas, Congressman Disney, and the Arkansas Basin Commission, headquartered in Tulsa, continued anyway. Finally, in late December 1934, the United States

Army Engineering Corps approved a \$34 million plan for the Arkansas Valley; it included plans for a navigable channel from the Mississippi River to Tulsa, five irrigation projects, and the construction of levees from the mouth of the Arkansas to Tulsa, and along the Grand and Illinois Rivers. Approval by the army engineers was a significant step, but the ultimate decision would still be left up to congress and the president.⁷⁷

While other New Deal programs had been useful to Tulsa by the end of 1934, the PWA had not. Project approvals of every type encountered problems due to the city's inability to provide matching funds, the state government's refusal to help. The city was supported by the strong efforts of Thomas and Disney in Congress, who at that time were both ardent New Dealers. For immediate relief, however, Tulsa would have to look somewhere other than the PWA.

Realizing that the depression was difficult for home owners, Roosevelt sent legislation to Congress that addressed the problem of home mortgage foreclosures. The result was the Home Owners Loan Corporation, which would refinance these mortgages by establishing the federal government as a second source of credit.⁷⁸ Tulsans would have three chances to obtain aid from this program. They could persuade whoever held their mortgage to exchange it for HOLC bonds, whose maximum interest rate of 4 percent would be guaranteed by the government. They could also appeal for a cash loan from the HOLC, which would be limited to 50 percent of the appraised value of their property. Or, if homeowners were unable to take either of these options, they could take a cash advance not to exceed 40 percent of the

value of their property and repay it with interest at 6 percent.⁷⁹ Tulsa was successful in a battle with Oklahoma City over which city was to be the location for the HOLC state offices, essentially because Disney, who supported the Tulsa center, was able to outlast Senator Gore, the capital's sponsor, in a tough fight.⁸⁰ This office handled the majority of eastern Oklahoma's mortgage refinancing until the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) was established in 1934.

One way to measure the impact of Roosevelt and the New Deal on Tulsa is by looking at the results of the city and state elections of 1934. The race for mayor and other municipal posts were held in April, with state and congressional primaries in early June and their runoffs in November. By examining their outcomes, it is possible to determine more clearly how important Tulsans considered the president's policies to be.

One of the first developments in the mayoral elections occurred in the fall of 1933, when incumbent Herman Newblock announced that he would not be running to retain the office. Having served a total of four terms as mayor, plus several other local posts, he would eventually decide to run for congressman of the first district against Wesley Disney.⁸¹ The Democratic nomination for the office of mayor was taken by prominent druggist Dr. T.A. Penny. He was joined by Democratic candidates running for positions of fire and police, finance, street, water commissioners, and auditor. Republican John M. Goldsberry opposed him and also supported a slate of Republican candidates for commissioners.⁸²

Penny promised to bring as much of the New Deal as he could to

Tulsa, and this pledge helped him to victory in the election.⁸³ The city's other Democrats were also successful, and Tulsa's "New Deal" administration was installed in office on May 7, 1934. At that time, the mayor repeated his campaign pledge that his group was interested in bringing to the city new development and programs in line with the thought of the national administration.⁸⁴ Tulsa, which never had developed definable political voting trends, elected a mayor who did have important local goals, but who also was a follower of the popular national agenda.

There were several Democratic candidates for governor who figured they had a good chance of winning the primary and getting into the general election. They included Tom Anglin, who was Murray's choice to replace him as governor; J. Berry King, an attorney and fierce anti-Murrayite; E.W. Marland, a Ponca City oil man who had previously served as U.S. Congressman; and Jack Walton, who had been Oklahoma's governor in the 1920s but had been impeached. Other hopefuls included Cyrus Avery, Tulsa Chamber of Commerce president, and R.L. Davidson, a former state senator. On the Republican side, William Pine was the most likely nominee, but at that time, the consensus was that the Democrats had the best chance of winning, and that race received the most attention.⁸⁵

The majority of Tulsans threw their support behind King, mainly for two reasons. First, King received the support of the city's oil men, who felt he had promised the most support for their industry. They openly attacked Murray and his candidate, because they blamed the governor's political tactics for the problems their business was

facing. In fact, this leads to the second reason most of the city's people supported King. There was a true hatred for Murray in Tulsa, and its people found promise in King, whose attacks on Anglin, the governor's candidate, were relentless. This case also provides an example of how politics in Oklahoma in general tended to be based on personalities, rather than on substance.⁸⁶ King faced problems, however, in raising campaign funds, and in June, a close race was expected between him and Walton for the second primary opening. Anglin was predicted to get the first opening.⁸⁷

The principal primary candidates for the first congressional district, which included Tulsa, were incumbent Wesley Disney and former mayor Herman Newblock. Disney was a Roosevelt supporter who had worked very hard to get as much New Deal support for Oklahoma as he could. His main focus had been getting approval for PWA projects, specifically one for Arkansas River flood control and another huge one for a power plant on the Grand River.⁸⁸ Disney was opposed by Newblock, who had the support of the utility interests, who were heavily against plans for a Grand River power authority.⁸⁹

Many Oklahomans were surprised when E.W. Marland emerged victoriously from the primaries. He had run on a platform that was almost exclusively related to the New Deal. It had outlined a 14-point "New Deal for Oklahoma," which sought many of the same aims for the state as Roosevelt's did for the country. These aims included setting up committees that would address Oklahoma's agricultural and industrial problems, and planning for a meeting between Marland and the president in order to push demands for an expenditure of \$30,000,000 or more on

public works for the state, which would take the unemployed off charity rolls.⁹⁰

Marland received almost 157,000 votes, beating second place Anglin, who received approximately 101,000.⁹¹ Although he had earned a spot in the general election, Anglin decided he could not win and withdrew, leaving victorious Republican William Pine as Marland's last challenge. In Tulsa, hatred for Murray and fear of an Anglin victory led voters to support King with 14,083 votes, placing Marland next with 4,999. Realizing what Disney had been doing for them in Washington, Tulsans chose him overwhelmingly over their own four-term mayor by a count of 14,238 to 2,664. Calling it one of the hardest elections they had ever worked, Tulsa County tabulators labored for 51 hours, counting a record 31,576 votes.⁹²

Although Pine campaigned hard for the governor's seat, Marland defeated him in the general election quite handily. In fact, in an election that provided Roosevelt the most thorough party support in history, not only did Oklahoma elect a full Democratic slate to Congress, but Tulsa also chose an all-Democratic county commission for the first time ever.⁹³ Having removed the threat of Murray in the primary, Tulsans threw their support behind Marland in the general election, giving him 5,000 more votes than Pine. They also helped Disney defeat his opponent, Republican Robert Kellough, by a vote of 24,742 to 13,737.⁹⁴ This Democratic rout by Tulsans is evidence that two years into his presidency, Roosevelt had managed to retain the popularity he had in 1932.

What did all of this New Deal activity ultimately mean for Tulsans

during its first two years? Did it mean economic recovery? What did the city's residents think about President Roosevelt and his programs? Overall, the results for Tulsa were mixed. A return to pre-depression prosperity clearly did not happen, as most economic indicators showed that recovery would be slow and difficult. At the same time, certain bright spots did exist, and it appeared that Tulsans were willing to keep trying.

The year 1933 was truly difficult for the city, and it ended up being the worst twelve months of the entire depression. Along with trying to deal with relieving the unemployed, city officials found it nearly impossible to find the finances with which to run everyday municipal operations. In March, 12 of the 27 departments of the city government under the general fund faced shortages in their budgets. This was not because they had overspent, but because anticipated revenues fell short, making it impossible to pay expenses.⁹⁵ To deal with the problem, officials were forced to dismiss city employees to make up the difference.⁹⁶ By May, with only two months left in the fiscal year, revenue-collecting problems meant that the city had spent \$485,457 more than it had received. The deficit was so high that when asked to cash city warrants to provide necessary funds, Tulsa bankers refused, feeling that to do so would have been too risky.⁹⁷ Departments had no choice but to continue dismissing employees and to delay the issuance of payroll checks to others.

To prepare for similar problems that might come for the next fiscal year, which began on July 1, the city commission trimmed almost \$163,000 from what the city budget had been the previous year, or about

9.3 percent.⁹⁸ By September, however, it became clear that this still would not be nearly enough, as the county excise board indicated that a substantial 20 to 25 percent additional cut would be necessary.⁹⁹ As commissioners and department heads scrambled in search of ways to make the cuts, Tulsa County found itself defaulting on bond payments for the first time in its history.¹⁰⁰

Tulsa was compelled to take drastic action to rectify the problem. The city chose to dismiss 40 additional employees in December, with at least 36 more to follow. Municipal leaders also decided to close various white and negro hospitals and charity health clinics, meaning the additional release of all their employees. They even chose to close the city hall elevators, eliminating their operators and other building superintendents. Free events at the convention center were also eliminated, which had drawn a total of 230,500 people the previous year.¹⁰¹ These were very serious problems, and they compounded the unemployment and negative growth situations in ways that the New Deal could not begin to erase.

There were other bad signs as well. Tulsa's bank statistics had also reached what would be a decade low. Total debits were at \$811,309,083 and bank resources equalled \$81,926,868, down from just over \$120 million in 1931. Total bank clearings were \$205,959,208, which was 18 percent less than what it had been the year before, and significantly below the 1929 amount of \$636,799,097.¹⁰² Net sales for all retail distribution decreased from \$91,653,671 to \$44,690,000. Payroll for this segment of the economy declined from \$12,394,802 to 6,057,000, or approximately half. Its effect on employment patterns

can also be seen as part-time payroll indicates. Total wages for this kind of employment was \$121,239 in 1929, but in 1933, it was \$415,000, which illustrates how many people were forced to accept part-time, rather than full-time jobs during the difficult depression period.¹⁰³

The number of people on relief reached a high point in October 1933. In Tulsa County the figure for this group was 19,180.¹⁰⁴ Of these, 17,658 lived in the city proper and accounted for 5,283 families. While whites accounted for 12,306 individuals, the other 5,252 were black, or roughly 30 percent of the total.¹⁰⁵ Census information for Tulsa in 1930 lists a total population of 141,258, which included 123,896 whites and 15,203 blacks.¹⁰⁶ While these numbers would not have been exact for 1933, they are still useful in determining the percentage of the total population on relief for that year. They show that in October, 12.5 percent of all city residents were on relief. Of these, 9.9 percent of the white population was on relief, while a significant 34.5 percent of the black population was as well. These numbers do indicate that, aside from all the revenue problems Tulsa was facing, its problem with people on relief was not so bad, especially because other cities had one-fourth of their people or more in the same situation. The problem for blacks was severe, however, as its percentage of relief families was consistently higher than those of whites.

In 1934 the situation seems to have improved. Total bank clearings increased to \$263,879,708, higher than they had been since 1931.¹⁰⁷ The number of building permits increased to 970,975, an encouraging 456,893 more than the previous year.¹⁰⁸ Property

assessments also increased over the previous year low, but only by about 1 percent.¹⁰⁹ The city budget for the 1934-35 fiscal year still included many reductions, but was more stable, and commissioners anticipated revenue increases.¹¹⁰ Jobs had been found for 5,567 through public works and private employment, and business and industrial expansion led to high hopes for 1935.¹¹¹

What was the New Deal's impact on all of this activity? Its specific programs varied in impact from very little to an important amount. Tulsa had received \$1,500,000 from the CWA and then close to \$1,000,000 from the FERA. Funds gained from the PWA were disappointingly low. Through the HOLC state office in Tulsa, people began applying for mortgage refinancing in the thousands by the end of 1934. The NRA had helped somewhat but began receiving criticism by the end of that same year. Although Tulsans then might not have realized it, the application of New Deal policies was somewhat more conservative than the president had initially indicated they would be. While providing some relief, certainly much more would be necessary to return the city to its pre-depression prosperity.

At the same time, Roosevelt and the New Deal did have a more positive effect. Tulsans had shown repeatedly that they enthusiastically supported him and many of his programs. They had shown this through their response, particularly to the early NRA and to the FERA. They also believed that a large part of the reason they did not share as equitably in the relief measures was due to an antagonistic state government, which they voted to remove.

The New Deal never received unquestioning support; indeed,

criticism was heard for each program. But this did not keep Tulsans from going to the polls and overwhelmingly electing Democratic municipal, state, and national office holders. Lopsided elections for Disney and Marland represented support for Roosevelt and his ideas, because the individuals Tulsans chose made promises that mirrored the president's own. In a New York Times/Literary Digest poll held in June 1934, which measured approval of the president and his program, the results for Tulsa were 263 for and 101 against.¹¹² Tulsans were willing to allow federal government involvement in their business, something that would continue even after the New Deal period had ended. While there was not a significant economic improvement, Tulsans continued to support the president and the New Deal, because he had tried, and achieved some success, at easing the difficult depression situation.

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THE NEW DEAL FROM 1935-1938: MODEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS
MEET GROWING DISPLEASURE

In 1935 the national administration began new programs that would become known as the Second New Deal. They included a public works program that would operate as the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The president ended the FERA, which had benefited Tulsans with a total of \$2,951,601 during the period it had existed.¹ In 1935 the Supreme Court also declared the NRA unconstitutional, leaving the president to find a new way for business, government, and labor to operate. Tulsans looked for continued benefits from these ideas for the oil industry, and for their own relief from agencies such as the WPA, the PWA, and others that would be created. They found, however, that there would not be much help for them. During the period from 1935 to 1938, discouragement and resentment toward Washington D.C. grew among Tulsans, leaving many to look for other ways to improve their situation.

The condition of the oil industry in Tulsa, and for the entire state as well, improved little during the second half of the 1930s. With the declaration of the NRA's unconstitutionality in 1935, producers were left to try to work among themselves to fix the existing problems. While most oil corporations, independents, and the government agreed that overproduction continued to keep price levels too low, very rarely were they in agreement over what the solution was. Many, including Congressman Disney, believed that self regulation

through compacts was the answer, but it was difficult to get everyone to conform. Even when agreements were reached within Oklahoma, other states would refuse to participate, making the pacts meaningless. Other problems included battles between producers and the state government over taxes on oil. A climax to this disorder came in 1938, when workers of the Mid-Continent Oil Company of Tulsa went on a long, difficult strike. The federal government offered little help in solving these problems, as the oil industry continued to suffer during the depression.

Congressman Disney, realizing that the future of the NRA might be uncertain, began drafting a new bill in February 1935. It did not call for total federal control of the industry, but instead encouraged cooperation between the national government and the oil producing states. Disney proposed that a federal petroleum board of five members, one of whom would be Interior Secretary Ickes, be created to determine the demand for crude oil consumption for the nation and to divide the total equitability among the states. Rather than set production quotas, he would instead set sales quotas, so that companies could produce all of the oil they wanted but sell only amounts that had previously been determined and agreed upon. Moreover, the federal authority would not interfere as long as each state, as a whole, complied with the measures.² The bill also called for heavier taxes on imported oil.³ The measure was supported by Senator Thomas and the Independent Petroleum Association of America, whose President was Tulsan Wirt Franklin, but faced opposition by other independents and large oil companies who did not wish to have any kind of federal

authority at all over oil production. While other bills that were created during this period received varying support from government and the oil interests, no significant legislation dealing with oil production was ever enacted.

Tulsa had for some time been considered oil capital of the world. It was home of the International Petroleum Exposition, which occurred once a year and brought oil executives from all over the world, and it was the headquarters of many large oil corporations and their executives. Therefore, when in 1936, the federal government issued indictments in Madison, Wisconsin, of 23 major oil firms and 58 individuals for violating the Sherman Anti-Trust Law for alleged gasoline price fixing, there was little surprise when many Tulsans were named in the warrants. The Tulsa companies that were listed included the Mid-Continent Petroleum Corporation, Skelly Oil Company, Barnsdall Refining Corporation, and Deep Rock Oil Corporation, as well as their top level executives and shareholders. The defendants were accused specifically of combining and conspiring, beginning in 1935, to raise and fix prices on gasoline sold in interstate commerce, principally in ten middle western states. Other Oklahoma companies from Bartlesville, Ponca City, and Blackwell were also indicted.⁴

The accused, as well as the Tulsa Tribune, responded to the charges by saying that they were simply doing what had been the expected practice under the old NRA codes to maintain prices. By fixing prices, they had been able to bring order to the industry.⁵ The Tribune stated that while the leaders of the oil industry had proved that they were better equipped to bring back prosperity than the

politicians in Washington, those same New Dealers were instead displeased because the oil leaders did not wait until President Roosevelt could be re-elected in order to revive the NRA and set up a federal bureau to run the petroleum business. The newspaper also felt that those indictments were indirectly aimed at Republican presidential candidate Alf Landon, who was an oil man himself. While the oil executives had been working to fix their industry, the government instead was trying to thwart their progress by bringing these charges.⁶

These arguments proved to be unsuccessful, however, when seventeen months later, jurors found thirty of the men and sixteen of the companies guilty of violating the Sherman Anti-Trust Laws. Many from Tulsa were included under the guilty verdict, including the Barnsdall Refining Company, the Mid-Continent Oil Corporation, and the Skelly Oil Company, as well as the executives associated with them.⁷ Former NRA director General Hugh Johnson stated his belief that the men were not guilty, because given the difficulties faced by the oil industry at that time, they were compelled to operate under the tenets of the first Roosevelt recovery program. Therefore, the verdict was regrettable and a contradiction of what the president had said was imperative to the recovery of the industry and the nation.⁸ Whether or not the oil men and companies had actually participated in illegal price-fixing practices, this well-publicized case offered further opportunities for criticism of Roosevelt and his plans for a national recovery.

Other situations developed within the Tulsa petroleum industry. In April 1937, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) began organizing oil workers throughout the entire state.⁹ Tulsa was

designated a key city, as the union group began calling for a closed shop within the industry there.¹⁰ Eventually, the movement spread to the city's building and steel trades as well, as parades were formed in order to encourage support. This union existence led to unrest, as oil companies began experiencing additional difficulties in 1938.

The problems began in May of that year, when a declining demand for crude oil and excessive stocks of gasoline led the Sinclair Company to close plants in five cities, one of which was Sand Springs, a Tulsa suburb.¹¹ In October the shutdown of a plant in nearby Barnsdall led to the release of 225 more oil workers.¹² Then late in the year, CIO employees of the Mid-Continent Oil Company, who had for six months been demanding the establishment of arbitration machinery for labor disputes, higher wages, and a more codified security system, considered the possibility of going on strike. They made the decision on December 22, when workers walked off the job.¹³

In what would be one of the longest strikes of the decade, approximately 500 union members initially began picketing the refinery, as well as several Mid-Continent filling stations throughout the city.¹⁴ Many reports of violence surfaced, as men who did not wish to join the strike were forced to wade across the Arkansas River to join their fellow workers inside.¹⁵ By Christmas Day of 1938, Governor Ernest Marland declared martial law and sent national guard troops to disperse picketers. Guardsmen had the strikers move approximately two blocks away, where they resumed their activities.¹⁶

Two days later, a conference between officials of the Mid-Continent Petroleum Corporation and an officer of the Oil Workers

International Union had been arranged by a representative of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in order to discuss the situation.¹⁷ The meeting was the first of several that would occur over the next sixty-five weeks. The length of the strike is an indication of the serious situation faced by the oil industry in Tulsa and the rest of the country as a result of the depression, overproduction, and an inability by anyone in government or business to find a solution to the problem acceptable to everyone concerned. Even as late as 1938, President Roosevelt, other New Dealers, state and local officials, and oil leaders were unable to restore the industry to what it had been before the depression.

The New Deal was not totally to blame, because the situation was beyond what the federal government could have done to help anyway, and had been since the late 1920s. The New Deal's attitude toward business and labor did create an environment in which a strike could achieve a greater level of success than previously, as was evidenced in the automobile and steel industries.¹⁸ The oil industry as a whole would continue to suffer, however, until it was needed in the mobilization for World War II.

In other areas such as work relief, the New Deal continued to have some success in Tulsa. Realizing that organizations such as the FERA were not solving the problems of the economy, Roosevelt decided that a new plan was necessary. He figured that a new form of relief that attempted to secure work for the unemployed would be better than to have the federal government issue a cash dole. In 1935 he and his advisors decided to implement such a program, and that year, Congress

passed the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act, which provided an initial outlay of \$4.8 billion for federal works projects. This money would be used for the Works Progress Administration and, under the direction of Harry Hopkins, would be spent by giving the unemployed a security wage for the construction of mostly small scale projects.¹⁹

The administrator for the WPA in Oklahoma was W.S. Key. The state was divided into districts, each with its own WPA director, and for the Tulsa district, it was former chamber of commerce president Cyrus Avery. He began by outlining the principal policies of the program, which included that eligible men would work five and one-half days a week, not to exceed 140 hours per month; that wages would range from \$35 per month for unskilled workers to \$75 for those considered skilled; and that once a person had been on a WPA construction program for at least 30 days, he would not be able to return to the direct relief rolls. Until new WPA projects were approved, workers would finish OERA projects that had previously been started.²⁰

Following procedures that were similar to those of the PWA, Tulsa officials began submitting project applications to the district office. It would then either approve or reject the project and would send approved ones on to the state office. By August 1935, the district office had accepted fifteen work plans and was waiting on further word from the next level.²¹ Good news came in September when the state learned that it would receive \$50 million for WPA projects, \$11 million of which would be used for road building. Members of the Tulsa district thought this was a good development, because Avery and many members of his office staff were experienced in road construction work

from former service on the state highway commission.²² By mid-October, Tulsa County had received approval by the national administration for ten projects, which called for an expenditure of \$164,000 and gave work to 1,133 employees.²³

Already discouraged by the lack of progress made in Tulsa by the PWA, chamber of commerce officials were quick to blame the WPA for not giving the city the attention they thought it deserved. They stated that while they did not favor all of the government spending that was going on, that if it going to occur anyway, Tulsa should expend every effort for the next year to share in it, because the city would have to help pay the bill. The chamber director suggested that one way to focus on the lack of attention Tulsa was receiving would be to begin an advertising campaign comparing it to other cities and showing that it was not getting its proportionate share.²⁴

Apparently having learned of this proposal, Cyrus Avery came to a chamber meeting in November 1935 and responded to these ideas. He explained that since June of that year, the WPA, in conjunction with other local organizations, had under operation 38 separate projects in Tulsa County, employing approximately 5,000 workers, at a cost of \$879,061. Of this amount, \$319,629 went toward needed sewer projects and \$25,000 toward farm-to-market roads. In addition, a sewing room program for the relief of distressed women was spending \$115,268 in the county and employing 966 females. The amount of \$198,053 went toward a drainage and malaria control program, while \$308,000 was allocated for levee improvement on the Arkansas River between Tulsa and Sand Springs, a project that the chamber of commerce had wanted for many years.²⁵

These facts, plus promises for future plans, helped show the chamber that much indeed was being done for the city.

Once the WPA in Tulsa became organized, it provided many benefits. After solving early problems concerning check distribution and availability of tools and supplies, the WPA was able to employ many men and women, particularly on road projects. The program went through various periods of expansion and reduction, which tended to make it difficult for people who at any time might suddenly be released. Projects continually received approval, however, offering employment to people in the city in varying degrees throughout the rest of the decade.

Avery continued as head of the WPA district that included Tulsa until June 1937, when W.E. Wood replaced him amid allegations that the director had used WPA labor to construct a pond on his Nowata county farm. During his tenure, Avery expended \$5.5 million for the entire district, which had gone for roads, schools, city buildings, flood control, and numerous other projects. Wood, his replacement, had been administrator for Oklahoma WPA district number three at Okmulgee.²⁶

One of the biggest obstacles Tulsa faced in getting WPA money was its continued inability or unwillingness to raise matching funds.²⁷ This situation was similar to the one the city had faced when trying to obtain PWA funds from the federal government. The chamber of commerce formed a committee in an attempt to find a solution to the problem. It looked at the possibilities of holding elections in order to vote for the bonds necessary to match government WPA funds.²⁸ Committee members had limited success, however, because city charter restrictions

continued to limit the amount of bond indebtedness that was allowed. Tulsa did not want to violate these provisions, so it was unable to sponsor any large-scale construction projects.

Tulsa was still able to achieve positive results from the smaller projects it received. From May 1, 1935 to May 1, 1936, the city engineer's office spent \$2,606,495 on the construction of sewers and road paving.²⁹ By the end of the 1937 fiscal year, the WPA provided an additional \$1,109,302 for this type of construction.³⁰ Workers were also involved in the removal of approximately 100,000 feet of street-car tracks, and expenditures for schools exceeded \$44,000.³¹ Women continued to participate in sewing rooms and nurseries within the city. Although it did not provide as many employment opportunities, the Federal Music Project in Tulsa was quite successful while it lasted. It gave a total of 84 concerts to a total audience of 63,000 persons.³² The Federal Writers' Project contributed to the American Guide Series by writing Tulsa: A Guide to the Oil Capital. Although these and other projects in the city did not solve the unemployment problem, the WPA was one of the more beneficial New Deal programs for Tulsa.

While the WPA was experiencing some success, Tulsans hoped to get greater help from the PWA than they had previously. This program had been woefully inadequate during its first two years, and leaders attempted to bring more benefits from it by 1938. These efforts continued to bring the same disappointing results until 1937, when hard work by Congressman Disney secured a huge \$20,000,000 appropriation for an extensive hydro-electric power plant to be built on the Grand River. This project also included provisions for flood control in the region

and benefited many other Oklahoma counties and certain border states, as well as the city and county of Tulsa. The attainment of this broad project, however, introduced new problems, especially political ones, that would ultimately contribute to the decline of support for the New Deal in the region.

One of the first proposals for PWA grants in 1935 called for slum clearance removal in Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and Enid, which would then be followed by low cost housing construction. This work called for an appropriation of \$4,000,000, but was immediately opposed by Governor Marland. He preferred to implement his own ideas for subsistence homesteads, under which he claimed twice as many families could benefit than under the PWA plan. Marland also stated that property owners in Oklahoma City had complained that the proposed program would destroy rental values on lower class homes. He feared that federally controlled housing would become a political football and that "once you get those people in a building, you would never be able to get them out."³³

At the same time, the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce showed considerable interest in low cost housing for both whites and blacks in the city. It was also planning ways in which to improve houses that already existed but that were in poor repair.³⁴ At that time, the area in which the low cost housing could be built was occupied by an incinerator, and chamber members began planning its removal and replacement in another location with a new reduction plant.³⁵

Removal of the incinerator became one of three projects that the city council planned to vote funds for under a bond issue. The other

two included an Arkansas River sewage collection and disposal plant and a railroad underpass, both of which were considered very necessary. The commission had to work fast, because in order to receive matching PWA grants, the work had to begin by December 15, which was only three months away. Bond indebtedness for the city under the issues would total \$825,000.³⁶

Soon, however, it became clear that the results for Tulsa under the PWA would be very similar to what they had been previously. In late September, Senator Thomas received word from Washington that while Oklahoma City had been included in the administration's housing program, Tulsa and Enid had not.³⁷ Having learned that these actions had occurred, Russell Rhodes, manager of the chamber of commerce, wrote a letter explaining to Thomas that while Tulsa paid heavy taxes to the federal government and to the state, not a single significant project had been built there by the PWA. A tone of disapproval was clear in the letter, as Rhodes asked Thomas to please do what he could to have the low cost housing project reviewed.³⁸ Thomas then wrote to Jed Johnson, another United States Congressman from Oklahoma, asking him to explain to Secretary Ickes that a great deal of political support for the administration could be lost in the Tulsa area if this project was not approved.³⁹ Johnson was not successful, and Tulsa's poor failed to benefit from low cost housing.

Other projects requested by Tulsa also were rejected, including the removal of the incinerator, which was no longer necessary because of the cancellation of the housing plans, as well as the Arkansas River sewage plant and the railroad underpass. Also, there was no hope of

getting any PWA assistance for the construction of two greatly needed high schools, for which applications had previously been made. This was because construction could not begin on them by the December 15 deadline, which was required for approval. In 1935 Tulsa received a single grant of \$12,892 for the completion of a road as its part of the \$4.8 billion relief fund.⁴⁰

The Tribune believed that Tulsa's failure to obtain funds for all of these projects was a result both of Washington politics and public lethargy. It said that money was obviously going to places that were of greater political necessity to the administration, but also that a lack of coordination among various local groups in submitting projects contributed to the inability to obtain any. It called for stronger leadership in getting what Tulsa deserved.⁴¹

Officials tried once again in 1936 to obtain PWA grants for two high schools, a small one on the west side of the city and a larger one on the east. The PWA responded as it had many times previously by alternating between interest in and resistance to the application. Tulsans had voted to sell \$1.7 million worth of bonds to fund their required 55 percent of the cost of the schools and expected a grant of \$600,000 to \$1.3 million from the federal agency.⁴² In October the city received \$350,000 to assist in the building of the smaller school, which was the first sizable grant to Tulsa County by the PWA.⁴³ The Tribune attributed this development to the fact that it was an election year, and the date of that event was quickly approaching.⁴⁴

By the spring of 1937, when it appeared that no more money was pending from the agency for the larger school, the school board was

forced to consider an additional five-mill levy for its construction. It approved the levy, which totalled approximately \$484,000 and was added to \$700,000 that remained from the bond issue from the previous spring. Less than one month later, President Roosevelt approved a PWA grant of \$632,091 for the new high school. While the funds were appreciated, it left officials with the difficult problem of deciding what to do with the now unnecessary money that had been obtained from the additional construction levy.⁴⁵

These problems and projects of the PWA for Tulsa were important, but the most significant undertaking that related to this federal agency in northeastern Oklahoma involved flood control, power development, and navigation on the Arkansas River and its tributaries, specifically the Grand River. From the early 1930s until the end of the decade, officials of Tulsa, Vinita, other interested cities and towns, Congressman Disney, and Senator Thomas all worked to obtain the massive federal project for the region. The most recent activity had come as a result of the 1934 Corps of Engineers' survey of the area in order to determine whether such projects would be possible. While flood control, power plant construction, and navigation had formerly been treated as separate issues, they now had come together under one plan, albeit one that changed often. As it usually had taken months for other smaller projects to be acted upon, one as vast as this had been under consideration for a couple of years. In 1935 it was clear that much more time would be necessary before this project could become a reality.

While flood control initially received the most attention, its

importance by 1935 was being overshadowed by the possibilities of hydro-electric power from the Grand River. The revival of interest in this project came from a favorable rating given to it by a Mississippi Valley committee and Corps of Engineer army reports. The project appeared to be in line with President Roosevelt's plans for rural electrification, as it would provide electricity for farms as well as cities. Farmers were unable to pay the high rates charged by private utility companies and would greatly benefit from lower rates that the new plant would provide.⁴⁶ Also, because the PWA application asked for \$16,000,000, the possibilities for providing thousands of jobs for a long period of time added an even greater impetus for its approval.

The Grand River hydro-electric project first had to receive approval from the Oklahoma legislature before it could receive consideration in Washington. This occurred on April 24, 1935, but Representative Glade Kirkpatrick of Tulsa attached an amendment stating that power from the plant could be sold only at wholesale rates.⁴⁷ Kirkpatrick was a supporter of the private utility interests who wanted to kill the project and knew that by adding such an amendment, there was a chance that the proposal might not be considered favorably by President Roosevelt. He was correct. In September the PWA gave its clearance to the project, amid battles between Ickes and Hopkins over whether relief money should be spent for large-scale construction or for smaller building projects.⁴⁸ When Disney took the application to the president for final approval, however, Roosevelt refused, because under the Kirkpatrick amendment, the only way that anyone who wanted electricity from the plant could get it would be to build his own power

lines and connect them himself. This was unacceptable to the president, who told Disney that the amendment must be removed.⁴⁹

This condition was met, but not until after the state primary elections in the summer of 1936. In the meantime, Disney and the people of Northeastern Oklahoma had to endure additional surveys of the project site by army engineers, whose disapproval also could have killed the project's chances. Finally, in February 1937, as a result of a favorable recommendation of the National Resources Committee and new information showing that large amounts of water in addition to power could be sold to oil companies, Disney renewed his drive for action on the project.⁵⁰ Seven months later in September, after seven years of effort by Congressman Disney, President Roosevelt approved a \$20,000,000 allocation for the hydro-electric project. It would operate under the Grand River Power Authority, which had been created by the state legislature in 1935. The plan included provisions for flood control that had been approved by army engineers late in 1934. It was supposed to be a self-liquidating project, which would provide jobs and power throughout the region, including nearby Tulsa.⁵¹

Upon learning that the project was now a reality, Disney responded by saying, "I am elated beyond expression! It has been a long hard pull and I am proud to have been its sponsor."⁵² He believed that in addition to the other benefits it brought, new industries would be attracted to Oklahoma because of the availability of cheaper power. Also, he thought that it would help solve the relief problem in the eastern part of the state.⁵³ It appeared that the New Deal might finally be making a significant impact in the region and on Tulsa.

It soon became clear, however, that new problems would come as a result of the Grand River Dam, especially political ones that would permanently inhibit future progress of the New Deal within the state and the city. With an election year on the horizon, Disney considered using his accomplishments in an effort to win a seat in the United States Senate. Many regional newspapers also recognized this possibility and openly discussed it in their pages. Disney had the support of important organizations such as the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce, which informed him that its members had unanimously voted to commend and congratulate him on his success and accomplishments in securing approval of the power and flood control project.⁵⁴ When Senator Thomas realized that Disney was becoming very popular and that the senate seat that would be available at the next election was his own, he began developing a plan in which he might share in the credit for the dam project.

Jno Logan, a United States Marshal located in Tulsa and close ally of Thomas, started looking for a way in which this could be done. He explained to the senator that Disney should not be getting all of the credit, because Thomas had introduced in the Senate three separate amendments to the Grand River Dam bill, without which the project could not have been approved.⁵⁵ The senator initiated a publicity campaign by explaining this fact to the newspapers. He said that he did not want all of the credit for getting the project for Oklahoma, but that it should be divided between him and Disney.⁵⁶

The political situation became further complicated in the spring of 1938, as a result of the defeat of President Roosevelt's

reorganization bill. The president had viewed reorganization of the executive branch as one of his top priorities, because he thought it would save money and provide better management. Roosevelt was beginning to recognize, however, that his proposals were losing support in Congress, and more evidence of this came as the reorganization bill was defeated.⁵⁷

In the Oklahoma delegation, Senator Thomas voted for the bill, but in a surprising reversal of loyalty, Disney voted against it in the House. He argued on the floor that the bill did not have the support of the people, either rural or urban, because they feared that it might lead to the possibility of an American executive dictatorship. Due to the fact that dictatorships were arising in other countries at that time, passage of the reorganization bill, which contained no provisions for depression relief anyway, would only raise suspicion and be counterproductive.⁵⁸ Disney's claims that there was a lack of support for the bill did have some merit in Tulsa, because both of the city's major papers had printed seething articles rebuking it, the president, and Thomas for voting in its favor.⁵⁹

Speculation abounded about why Disney made his decision. One theory was that he had formed an alliance with Gomer Smith, another congressman from Oklahoma and one who had also voted against the reorganization bill, with the hope that Smith would help him defeat Senator Thomas in the senate race. Another possibility was that Disney realized that he did not have enough political strength to beat Thomas, but instead saw that by supporting Smith for the senatorial seat, he would be able to use that alliance to help him in the House. A third

was that Disney had finally broken with Roosevelt, because he had tired of the attention that Thomas was receiving from the president despite the hard work he himself had consistently done in loyal support of New Deal policies.⁶⁰

Those who had found this third reason most credible had irrefutable proof of it in the summer of 1938, when Roosevelt accompanied Thomas to Oklahoma in a move to help the senator's re-election campaign. One of the stops included a dedication of the Grand River Dam by the president. In a speech at Oklahoma City, he gave full credit for the \$20,000,000 dam to the "persistent efforts of my old friends, Senator Thomas and Senator [Josh] Lee (also of Oklahoma)." This statement occurred as Disney sat and listened on the speaker's platform.⁶¹

Disney's reaction to the speech was one of complete astonishment. He figured that they must be "awfully hard up" in trying to elect Thomas to do such a thing because the only thing he had ever done was to oppose the dam. "The truth of the matter is that I spent seven years working on the dam," he explained, ". . . Senator Thomas introduced the amendment I had prepared in the senate . . . That was all there was to it - I spent seven years working on it and Senator Thomas spent seven seconds."⁶²

The Grand River Dam project was one that involved a great deal of work by many people, and it was very beneficial to those who lived in eastern Oklahoma. For the next few years after its approval, its construction faced many problems because of delays, strikes, and the disapproval of Leon Phillips, who was elected governor in 1938. At the

same time, it endured and exists as a New Deal project that still generates power for the region today. But it also marks a turning point in the political support given to Roosevelt and his policies by what had been a very loyal Congressman Disney. From that point on, he was lukewarm at best toward the president's ideas.

After the dam's dedication many of Roosevelt's constituents in eastern Oklahoma, who felt that their congressman had been cheated out of the credit they believed he deserved, also reversed the support they had given to the president. Support for Roosevelt had already been declining, and this situation not only hurt him, but helped Disney in his election bid against a Thomas supporter in 1938. What might have been an accomplishment that could really have built goodwill for the New Deal in Tulsa and the surrounding region backfired and led to a continuing decline of support for those policies.

Another issue that concerned Tulsans in the 1930s was the plight of the elderly. Answering a general public concern over the condition of this group, who had few chances at securing gainful employment and almost no chance at receiving aid from public or private sources, President Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act in 1935. It provided for a compulsory old-age insurance program funded by employer and employee contributions, as well as a federal-state unemployment compensation program and assistance for mothers of dependent children and the blind.⁶³ This act was immensely popular in Oklahoma, so much so that by 1938 almost 110,000 residents were covered by the program at a cost of \$14,000,000.⁶⁴ This popularity, however, did not keep the Social Security Board from cancelling the program in the state in March

1938, when it found serious abuses, such as how funds were allocated to people who were not qualified to receive them. Whether these abuses were due to ineptitude or fraud, the people of the state and of Tulsa, who had come to rely on this aid, found themselves without it for several months as a result of the state's inability to abide by the act's procedures.

Senator Thomas announced in February that Oklahoma was to be cut off from the grants, because the federal board was not satisfied that the state security apparatus for distribution of the funds was acceptable or that all persons receiving such grants were legally entitled to them. The board believed that possibly up to \$3,000,000 in illegal old age payments had been made. If this amount was correct, perhaps one-half of Oklahoma's future federal grants could be withheld.⁶⁵ The federal board's main criticisms were that the state commission had not delegated full administrative authority to its director, that a merit plan had not been set up for personnel, and that an assistant director, trained in social work, had not been appointed. By October the commission was still squabbling over how to fulfill the second two demands.⁶⁶

Eventually, the commission found solutions to the problems that were acceptable to the Social Security Board, and funds were returned. These problems with the Social Security Act provide further evidence that Oklahomans were unable to take advantage of a New Deal program due to the ineffectiveness of the state leadership to implement it properly. Aside from the problems in 1938, however, the Act proved to be one of the most popular of Roosevelt's programs in Oklahoma. By

1960 the state had the highest per capita welfare expenditure and the highest percentage of a state budget committed to welfare in the nation.⁶⁷ Social security also provides a primary example of how a New Deal program has endured to present times, so much so that people balk at the idea of its elimination. For all of the criticism Roosevelt's ideas received by the end of the 1930s, social security continued to be popular and it remains as a legacy of the former president in Tulsa and throughout the nation.

As in 1934, it is possible to measure the support of President Roosevelt and the New Deal in Tulsa by examining the results of elections in both 1936 and 1938, and especially those for state and federal offices. City elections were less indicative, because aside from listing his accomplishments in bringing WPA money and jobs to Tulsa, Mayor Penny pledged to confuse neither state nor national issues with the problems that faced his city.⁶⁸ The focus of the municipal elections was over who would be the police commissioner, as Penny was easily able to retain his office as mayor in both election years. He did this in 1936 by promising to operate the city on a cash basis, to oppose issuing bonds, to keep public expenditures at a minimum, and to oppose new forms of taxation; and in 1938 by favoring a merit system in civil service for city employees, a new charter for the city, and the establishment of a free venereal disease clinic to be financed by the city.⁶⁹ While Penny said that he opposed issuing bonds, he had supported them many times in the past in order to obtain WPA and PWA money, including the promotion of a \$100,000 bond issue as Tulsa's participation to get more than \$100,000 in WPA and other federal aid.⁷⁰

The presidential and senatorial elections of 1936 help illustrate how Tulsans responded to decisions that related to national and state policies. Their Democratic choices for the senate seat included anti-New Deal incumbent Thomas Gore; freshman Congressman Josh Lee; Gomer Smith, who ran on a Townsendite platform; and Governor Marland, who decided to run for the office half way through his term at the state capital.

Lee, who had been elected to the House from the Norman district for the first time just two years before, was an ardent supporter of the New Deal, and his platform included helping farmers earn a higher margin of profit, securing low priced power by such means as the Grand River project, shorter hours and higher wages for workers, and the furthering of other of President Roosevelt's policies. Gore, who had consistently opposed Roosevelt's ideas, called attention to the \$40,000,000 a day cost of government and could see "signs of retrenchment" through the President's budget message.⁷¹ Marland also had been a strong supporter of the New Deal, although his attempts to create one in Oklahoma had been largely unsuccessful. He was interested in reducing interest rates and creating an old age pension system.⁷²

The other important decisions the city faced were in the election of a president and a congressman of the first district. The main aspirants in the Democratic primary for this latter contest included Wesley Disney and A.F. Sweeny. The general consensus was that whoever won in the Democratic primaries in both the senate and congressional races would also win in the general election, because the strength of

the Republican party in Oklahoma had dwindled significantly during the 1930s.

Tulsans showed in the primaries that their support for the New Deal was beginning to waver, because of their selection of Gore, with 8,372 votes, with Smith a close second at 7,662. New Deal advocates Lee and Marland received 5,939 and 5,377 respectively.⁷³ The attitudes of Tulsans were more revealing when looking at the state as a whole, where Lee had come in first with 166,197, leaving Marland and Smith battling for second and Gore coming in a distant fourth with 91,724.⁷⁴ Tulsans continued to be satisfied with the work of Disney, giving him 12,215 votes, a significant margin over Sweeny's second place count of 4,802. Republican senate hopeful Herbert Hyde won his primary with only 2,048 votes, while Disney's November opponent Bailey Bell could muster only a slim 3,176.⁷⁵ In the senate runoff, Lee ultimately faced Marland and defeated him in Tulsa and in the rest of the state.⁷⁶

In the November election, despite tireless campaigning by the Tribune against Roosevelt, the president continued to be very popular in the city and county, even though his policies were not. The president defeated Landon by a vote of 40,995 to 28,294, gaining 59 percent of the total, which represented an actual increase of 1 percent over what he had received in Tulsa in the 1932 election. Tulsans also gave Lee 60 percent of the total for the senate race over Republican Herbert Hyde and three other candidates. Congressman Disney received a majority, garnering 36,180 to Republican Jo Ferguson's 26,912.⁷⁷ While Tulsa and Oklahoma joined forty-six other states in returning a Democratic president and congressional majority, the city also showed

in the senate primary that it would no longer accept fully all that the administration represented.

In 1938 reaction to the race for Oklahoma's governor and the other senate seat held by Elmer Thomas provided further evidence of this growing sentiment. Democratic candidates for governor included former state speaker of the house Leon Phillips; former WPA director and New Deal supporter W.S. Key; three term veteran of the state legislature, Ira Finley; former governor and Roosevelt-hater, William Murray; and Jack Walton, who had previously also served as governor and been impeached.⁷⁸

Murray, Phillips, and Key quickly emerged as the front-runners. Murray's attitude toward the federal government by that time was no secret, as he had opposed Roosevelt and his policies ever since he had run against the president in 1932. The majority of Murray's support came from farmers, who had represented the focus of his constituency ever since he had first run for political office in Oklahoma. Key was strongest in the eastern part of the state and also among those for whom he had provided jobs through the WPA. Although he was a conservative Democrat, Phillips was considered to be a friend of labor and often proclaimed his loyalty to the president and his policies. Still, he had often been critical of Marland's "little New Deal" while speaker of the house. His following came from the state's western counties, but more importantly, the urban centers of Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Shawnee, Okmulgee, and Muskogee.⁷⁹

In what was up to that time one of the closest gubernatorial races ever in Oklahoma, Phillips won the primary with 178,136 votes, with Key

in second with 174,938, and Murray third with 146,534.⁸⁰ In an unusual circumstance for the state, the ultimate decision was probably due to a city, Tulsa, rather than a rural area. In Tulsa, Phillips received 13,701 to Key's 8,720.⁸¹ It appears that the city's residents approved of Phillips's conservative philosophy and his promises to eliminate waste in government and the huge state debt, and to repeal unnecessary taxes.⁸² They also chose a nominee whose eventual support for the New Deal was never more than verbal. Phillips had, according to James Scales and Danney Goble, "a decided hatred of government spending, centralization of power, and political realignment - in sum, everything that the New Deal represented."⁸³

The Democratic candidates for the senate race for 1938 in Oklahoma included incumbent New Dealer Elmer Thomas, Ernest Marland, and Gomer Smith. While Disney had entertained thoughts of running for the seat, he instead chose to try to keep his old place in the House of Representatives when he realized that he did not have enough state-wide support. Thomas, who had received Roosevelt's endorsement, and Marland were both supporters of the president's policies. Smith had been a follower of Francis Townsend and, while considered a radical, received the support of both of Tulsa's major newspapers. While by 1938 both newspapers were considered conservative, they still preferred Smith over the more bitterly despised New Dealers.⁸⁴ The Tribune was particularly disgusted with Thomas, due to his vote in favor of the president's reorganization bill.⁸⁵

The people of Tulsa County apparently agreed with the two publications. While the state gave Thomas 62,000 votes more than

Gomer Smith and approximately 137,000 more than Marland, Tulsa voters gave Smith 14,086, Thomas 10,677, and Marland 4,149.⁸⁶ This senatorial vote indicates that many of the city's residents were losing faith in the president's program. This observation received further confirmation in the general election in November 1938. While Phillips and Disney received their expected majorities in Tulsa County, voters there barely gave Thomas the edge with 16,207 votes, over a count of 16,142 to Republican opponent Harry Glasser.⁸⁷ Thomas won due to the overall state counts, but Tulsans appeared to be looking less toward what the New Deal had to offer and more toward a more conservative alternative.

In the period from 1935 to 1938, the support of Tulsans for the New Deal declined. As early as 1935, members of the chamber of commerce were suggesting that a full page advertisement be run in the newspaper to show that Tulsa was not getting any benefits from governmental programs. This idea came as they learned that no allotment had been made for building two new high schools and also that the city's plans for low-cost housing would not be approved. They wondered why projects totalling \$23,000,000 were approved for Texas within a fifteen-day period, while at the same time, eastern Oklahoma had not received any support in Washington, D.C.⁸⁸ The Tribune repeated its belief regularly that the reason Tulsa was not getting any help from the administration was because the president knew that he had enough votes in the city and in the state to guarantee him the majority there, so he did not waste any relief dollars on that region. Instead, he provided government funds for places in the United States that were

questionable in their support for him, and this was an attempt to "buy" their votes.⁸⁹

While there might be a certain degree of accuracy to these claims, certain problems did exist in Tulsa that contributed to its inability to benefit from New Deal funds. Due to provisions in the city charter that limited the maximum amount of bond indebtedness that was allowed, Tulsa often faced difficulties in providing matching funds that were required by various New Deal agencies. When city officials were able to locate funds for bond issues, they did not have the support of the people. This occurred late in 1938, when the city proposed a massive \$2,153,000 issue, which was to provide funds for extensive street, water, and sewer projects that would also receive help from the PWA and WPA.⁹⁰ The bond issue failed, because people who owed taxes were not allowed to vote, and this significantly limited the voter turnout.⁹¹ Whether for reasons of inability or unwillingness, Tulsa did not create an economic policy that was conducive to getting the attention of the New Dealers in Washington. This situation, when combined with a state government that constantly worked at odds with the federal administration, certainly hindered Tulsa's ability to share in relief programs.

The New Deal continued to be incapable of returning Tulsa, and the nation as a whole, to its pre-depression economic situation. In 1936 the Tribune reported that while Tulsa County had received slightly less than \$28,000,000 from all relief programs to that date, second in the state only to Oklahoma County, there had been no reduction in the number of people receiving relief in comparison to the number for 1933.

In 1933 the newspaper showed that 7,842 persons and families received some kind of aid, but in 1936, 7,891 did as well.⁹² A Works Progress Administration Unemployment Survey for 1937 showed that 7,698 persons were on relief for that year, and this survey did not include people who were getting aid from the HOLC, PWA, and other agencies that the newspaper had included in its calculations.⁹³ The unemployment picture continued to look dim and was not improving noticeably due to the efforts of the New Deal.

At the same time, certain improvements within Tulsa did occur. The city commission never again faced the kind of budgetary problems it had in 1933.⁹⁴ Building permits increased steadily, from \$2,586,354 in 1935 to \$6,015,494 in 1937. During the period from 1935 to 1938, property assessments increased from \$101,238,554 to \$106,232,925.⁹⁵ For the same period, bank debits grew from \$1,229,478,299 to \$1,630,591,444.⁹⁶ These gains were modest and did not reach the levels of 1929, but they showed significant growth over the lows for 1932 and 1933. The increases were probably partially a result of the New Deal, but also occurred in conjunction with the slow, general recovery that was happening in many places throughout the United States.

While the New Deal was less effective for the economic improvement of Tulsa, it still had an important impact. The WPA built many of the city's public roads, sewers, and other structures. The Grand River Dam, while slow in receiving approval, was a huge PWA expenditure and still provides electricity for much of northeastern Oklahoma. Roosevelt's Social Security Act was very popular and also continues to exist in Tulsa and the rest of the country as an even more extensive

program than he originally intended. The city also was turning to the federal government for assistance more often than it ever had before, such as when Mayor Penny asked Roosevelt for \$2,500,000 in relief funds in 1936.⁹⁷ In 1935 Mrs. Agnes Hamilton, case supervisor for the Family Relief and Service Association, explained to city and county officials how depression and government policies were changing social work standards. Rather than dictating ideas and parceling relief out to needy families, social workers were relying more on science and psychology and learning to suggest, rather than dictate, to needy clients. These clients were helped to work out permanent programs of rehabilitation, rather than given temporary relief.⁹⁸ In these ways, the New Deal continued to have an important impact on the city of Tulsa.

The New Deal did not provide greatly needed low-cost housing in the city, however, as it did in other cities. Both blacks and whites who sought such a project were disappointed. Labor problems also continued, such as when an outbreak between the AFL, the CIO, and non-union workers left six business and \$5,500 worth of property destroyed in July 1937.⁹⁹ Then the huge Mid-Continent Oil Strike occurred in 1938 and affected thousands of families.

Support for the president also declined significantly by the end of 1938. When he attempted his court-packing scheme in 1937, a Tribune survey showed that 4,276 Tulsans were opposed to it, while only 390 approved.¹⁰⁰ The Tulsa Bar Association also condemned the plan, when lawyers voted 118 to 15 against it.¹⁰¹ The president lost much support from Congressman Disney when he gave credit for the Grand River Dam to

Senator Thomas. Tulsans showed in elections that they were becoming less interested in New Deal government spending and more concerned with conservative economics. The Tribune, which had long opposed the president, observed that in 1938 the country was, "again, in a hell of a mess," just as it had been in 1933.¹⁰² In order to regain the support of the people of Tulsa, Roosevelt would need a new opportunity. This opportunity came with preparations for World War II.

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THE NEW DEAL IN TULSA: A DEPRESSION SOLUTION?

By the end of the 1930s, the New Deal in Tulsa was in a definite state of decline. The number of people receiving relief and the amount of money spent for projects was continually being reduced. The political attitudes of the state government, the first district's congressman, and the city's population became much less favorable toward President Roosevelt and his policies. The New Deal's ability to return prosperity to Tulsa remained limited. Although at times throughout the decade it had experienced some success, the New Deal was no longer looked upon favorably in the city of Tulsa.

Problems began for the WPA as early as January 1939, when the organization dropped 100 residents from its payrolls. Area supervisor Charles Robertson said that this action was unavoidable, because the city had shown an inability to provide its share of participation funds for a street project upon which the workers had been laboring.¹ Tulsa continued to be unable or unwilling to sponsor future WPA projects, and its inaction led to the elimination of 240 more workers in April and another 300 in May. By that time, the county's total number of people employed by the WPA was 2,291, compared to over 3,000 who had worked in the fall of 1938.²

In June, four WPA officials came to Tulsa to talk with the chamber of commerce. They told the board that the situation in Tulsa County was serious as far as their organization was concerned. Mr. Beverly

Goudilouck, speaker of the group, emphasized that the city must do something in the way of providing bond issues, or else the county would lose the projects it had, and they would go to other counties that had projects ready to start. If Tulsa could not find a way to sponsor more projects, approximately 1,600 relief employees would be discharged by July 15.³ Officials did what they could and while the WPA was never eliminated in 1939, cuts continued to be made. The city never became responsive to the idea of providing more money for WPA projects; in late August 1939, for example, an estimated \$500,000 WPA program for the city was eliminated from its proposed budget.⁴

As Tulsa dealt with those problems, it also tried to look for a solution to the Mid-Continent Oil strike. In January charges were filed against 130 strikers who had participated in various acts of violence, including the dynamiting of company pipelines. When the violence continued, Governor Phillips declared martial law and sent additional National Guard troops to protect the area.⁵ Phillips, who was considered to be a friend of labor, decided to be an arbitrator for talks between the two sides. Then late in January, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which had been created by Roosevelt to participate in solving problems between labor and management, announced that it would hold hearings in Tulsa in an attempt to settle the strike.⁶

Violence continued, however, as acid was thrown into a non-striking worker's home, and four Mid-Continent filling stations were damaged.⁷ Various plans were developed by the NLRB, Governor Phillips, the oil company, and members of the CIO oil workers' union, but none of

them satisfactorily resolved the dispute. One of the key issues was over indictments that had been prepared against strikers who had been involved in the early instances of violence. The workers' union refused to contribute to a settlement until these indictments, then totalling 143, had been withdrawn.⁸ This did not happen and, by the end of 1939, the strike continued. The NLRB acted as administrator and often sided with the strikers, something the federal government would not have done before the New Deal.⁹ The strike was not settled until early in 1940, after more than a year of violence and failed agreements.

The Grand River Dam project, whose approval came after many years of hard work by Tulsa Congressman Wesley Disney, soon faced opposition by Governor Phillips. A fierce believer in state's rights, he assailed the authority of the federal government to take land for the development of the project, as well as for the construction of another dam on the Red River. Senator Thomas warned representatives of the governor that Oklahoma would be in danger of losing every type of federal building project, and other benefits as well, if it insisted on states' rights in connection with the development of the projects.¹⁰

Ignoring these warnings, the governor tried to interfere in the construction of the Grand River Dam whenever he could. In September 1939, he threatened to block construction unless the GRDA agreed to replace state-built roads and bridges that would be destroyed under the building plan.¹¹ In November the PWA told the GRDA to accept this requirement, but ultimately the courts favored the federal government and its authority over the governor.¹² The Grand River Dam was built

and began selling power in 1940.¹³ This episode represents the conservative backlash by the state government against the New Deal and its impact on a massive project for northeastern Oklahoma.

When examining the overall impact of the New Deal on the city of Tulsa, what conclusions can be drawn? Did the city receive any benefits or was the New Deal hopelessly inadequate in its ability to bring relief to Tulsa's depression-weary inhabitants? The final analysis is mixed, because as in many other cities throughout the United States, while Roosevelt's program did provide a measure of help, it did not restore Tulsa to its pre-depression prosperity.

Economically, the New Deal was not successful in providing a stimulus to Tulsa that would return the city to the same financial level that it held in 1929. At the same time, however, the city showed improvement, some of which must be attributed to the president's policies throughout the 1930s decade. The level of wholesale trade for Tulsa dropped from \$102,407,000 in 1929 to \$58,405,000 in 1935. Then by 1939, it had increased back to \$75,410,000.¹⁴ In 1929 the value of products manufactured by Tulsa business was \$26,820,277. This figure dropped to \$10,995,838 in 1933, but by 1939 it had rebounded to \$22,670,597.¹⁵ Bank debits dropped from just under \$2,000,000,000 in 1929 to a comparatively abysmal \$811,000,000 in 1933, but this amount returned to just over \$1.6 billion dollars by 1940.¹⁶ A Department of Commerce report describing the financial status of Tulsa's government in 1939 explained that, in spite of slightly reduced revenues received by the city, its income was sufficient not only to cover the total cost payments of general government, but also to reduce substantially the

city's debt.¹⁷

Other indicators were not as favorable. The value of construction work in 1929 was at \$20,403,000. In 1939 the value of all construction performed was only at \$13,496,000, showing that this industry was not able to overcome depression problems as well as others.¹⁸ Property assessments grew from a \$101,000,000 low in 1933 to \$105,000,000 in 1937, but it remained at this level for the next four years, still significantly lower than the \$150,000,000 level of 1930.¹⁹ The oil industry, while reaching more optimistic levels by the end of the decade, still had been helped little by the New Deal. In addition, population growth, which is often associated with improving economic conditions, was almost nonexistent. This figure in Tulsa in 1930 was 141,258, but it grew only to 142,157 in 1940.²⁰ This represents an increase of only 0.6 percent, while unemployment for the same period grew from 7.5 percent to 11.8 percent.²¹ The best conclusion that can be drawn from this information is that while New Deal programs did slow and perhaps even reverse the downward trend for Tulsa, it was not "revolutionary" enough to propel the city to its pre-depression situation.

In many parts of the United States, economic prosperity returned with government spending that was associated with the preparation for World War II. This was the case for Tulsa as well. The city had a good airport, and Tulsans wanted to expand their ability to attract war industries by improving this facility. Using the automobile industry as an example of what had occurred after World War I, chamber of commerce member Russell Hunt explained that air travel would be greater

after the war than during it, and that those cities with modern air travel facilities would have an industrial advantage over those who were not quick to realize the possibilities.²² Tulsans were eager to take part in the National Defense program, and while as yet they had not received any consideration from the War Department, the recent completion of the Spartan School of Aeronautics, when combined with the possibilities of improving airport facilities, brought the hope that they might get the attention of the department's officials. Mayor C.H. Veale began writing letters to Senator Thomas, explaining why Tulsa would be an excellent choice for defense-related activities.²³

Positive results from this endeavor came in August 1940 when the city received word that the War Department had approved funds through the WPA for an airport project, which included building a hangar at the Tulsa Municipal Airport to house the aviation squadron of the National Guard, plus the construction of an additional hangar and a new runway.²⁴ Even better news came when the chamber of commerce was informed that Tulsa was being considered for one of four bomber assembly plants that would be built in the central United States. The airplane plant would cost between \$10,000,000 and \$15,000,000, and would employ between 8,000 and 10,000 skilled workers.²⁵ The chamber of commerce immediately began a campaign to get the plant and started preparations for the building of housing, which might be needed in the event of a population increase, as well as for the construction of sufficient water and sewage capabilities.²⁶

To the excitement of the city's residents, the Tulsa Tribune announced in February 1941 that the new bomber plant would adjoin the

airport, as the site approval had been given by General C.H. Rutherford of the U.S. Army.²⁷ The bomber plant would be very good for the economy of Tulsa, because it would employ people to build 1,200 four-engine bombers annually. It would also attract many smaller, related businesses and would bring a great deal of attention to Tulsa's growing aviation industry.

The approval of the plant brought other benefits as well. Realizing that substantial expansion of the airport would be necessary in order to be prepared for the construction of the factory, officials began applying for federal funds with which they might contribute to this effort. In late April 1941, approval from the WPA came for over \$600,000 worth of airport improvements, including the construction of new runways, drainage and lighting facilities, and other projects.²⁸ At the end of October, Tulsa received PWA matching grants of \$320,894 for the construction of water and sewer facilities that were now necessary because of the bomber program.²⁹ Additional PWA and WPA grants totalling hundreds of thousands of dollars came to the city to help it prepare for its increasing participation in the national defense program.

Because of the war and the existence in Tulsa of airport facilities that gave it favorable attention by the War Department, the city was able to develop, with the help of federal funds, a new aviation industry. This industry remained and grew after the conclusion of the war and was of key importance in providing jobs and income to the city and its residents even until present times. The New Deal had made certain, limited contributions to the economy, but the

preparation for World War II was what led to recovery.

In terms of the significance of building programs in Tulsa during the 1930s, the FERA, CWA, WPA, and PWA all left positive, permanent marks on the city's infrastructure. The FERA and CWA contributed over \$3,000,000 in jobs and in building for important street and sewer projects and for the construction of larger buildings by early 1935. The WPA also contributed extensive funds for various smaller projects, although Tulsa often had difficulties, due to charter restrictions, in providing matching funds for any larger building. The PWA had little to offer the city, until Congressman Disney was able to procure a massive power and flood control project on the Grand River.

Much of this construction would not have been possible without the New Deal, and its benefits are clear, both for the short and long term. Many of these projects still exist, and they still serve in the same capacity as they did in the 1930s. At the same time, Tulsa did not benefit to the extent that many other cities, especially in the South, did. Tulsa did not receive a new skyline, as did Kansas City, or many other larger facilities that were built elsewhere.

One reason why Tulsa could not capitalize on relief funds was due to problems that existed within the state government. Animosity between Governors Murray and Phillips and the federal government caused problems in the state's ability to procure relief. When Murray had authority over the distribution of funds early in the 1930s, he continually directed it away from Tulsa and other urban areas and instead used it for political purposes in rural parts of the state. While Governor Marland tried to bring the New Deal to Oklahoma, his

ineffectiveness as a political leader and his problems with the state legislature kept this from occurring.

A second reason Tulsa did not benefit as well as it might have from the New Deal was because restrictions within the city charter kept the city from being able to vote bonds that were required as matching funds for federal assistance. When Tulsans wondered why other cities were receiving more money from Washington than they were, they were quick to blame the president and his advisers, because they believed that Roosevelt was concerned with paying attention only to those places whose votes he had to "buy," because of their questionable support. Although there might be some basis for this argument, it is also true that Tulsans were unwilling to change their municipal laws, such as other cities did, so that they could raise matching funds and therefore be entitled to greater amounts of government aid. Roosevelt gave more attention to cities that took the steps to participate in his programs. Although Tulsa at times was able to raise matching funds, usually its government was committed to a balanced budget and opposed to deficit spending. Even if it had made the statutory changes necessary to get more help, Tulsa still probably would not have received the treatment that larger, more prominent cities such as Boston and Kansas City received, but it also might have benefitted more greatly from New Deal programs such as the PWA.

Politically, the New Deal had fallen into disfavor with Tulsans by the late 1930s. The city's residents had shown a preference for more conservative politics with their choice of Governor Phillips in 1938. Although they had shown support for Roosevelt by giving him a majority

in 1932 and 1936, this changed in 1940. In the November election for president in that year, Tulsans turned out in record numbers and gave Republican nominee Wendell Wilkie a 7,000 vote majority.³⁰ For the first time since the depression began, Tulsans were not part of the majority that gave Roosevelt the presidency.

Congressman Disney's opposition to Roosevelt and the New Deal also was becoming apparent by 1939. An Oklahoma City newspaper noticed this, reporting that "apparently [Disney] is making a start toward loosening the Rooseveltian shackles which have bound him so tightly to the New Deal for so long."³¹ This report came as a result of the congressman's vote against a presidential proposal to spend additional billions to stimulate employment and business. Then, in a response to the Townsend bill, which would have provided \$200 a month to retirees who were over sixty, Disney's comment was, "Where are [we] going to get the money?" He also hinted toward a position favoring states' rights; he felt that only the states could end this "spending orgy," because, "Congress apparently is going to continue to spend until someone, some place, somewhere halts us."³² Disney's attacks on federal expenditures ultimately led concerned WPA workers to picket his home. Carrying signs written with the words, "You Betrayed Us," they compelled a rather surprised Disney to explain that he had always supported the WPA, but thought that recent calls for other spending projects were unneeded.³³ It appeared by that time that Roosevelt would no longer be able to assume that he had unqualified support in Tulsa or from its congressman.

It is possible to draw additional conclusions about the impact and

importance of the New Deal in Tulsa. As in other cities throughout the United States, blacks had to endure the depression and often were excluded from aid that the New Deal provided. Although sources reveal little about the situation of blacks in Tulsa, it is still possible to make certain observations. Unlike places such as Kansas City, where this minority group was allowed to benefit considerably from New Deal relief, blacks in Tulsa did receive some help, but it was limited.

The city's black population had experienced success in the field of domestic work, but began feeling the negative effects of the depression in 1931. As has been explained, African-Americans had few places to turn for relief, because most charity organizations in Tulsa served the needs of whites only. Sociology student Francis Burke believed that the principal reason for this situation was that the strict segregation of races in Tulsa had resulted in a lack of understanding of common interests. The white community did not appear to pay much heed to the presence of the black citizens in the culture of the city. Consequently, no provisions were made when no needs were known to exist.³⁴ Therefore, blacks were left to themselves to deal with economic hardships, something that was difficult when they faced economic problems in the best of times as well.

The establishment of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Works Progress Administration marked the first step toward recognition of the needs of blacks for social welfare services. Therefore, this is an instance when the actions of the federal government under the New Deal affected current and future relations between whites and blacks in the city of Tulsa. According to Burke,

"The services granted . . . consisted almost entirely of direct material assistance, [and] in this respect there [was] no discrimination in Tulsa on the basis of race."³⁵ She indicates that during 1934-1935, approximately 6,000 families in Tulsa received relief from these agencies, 1,500 of whom were black.³⁶ Moreover, the Oklahoma Emergency Relief Administration, (OERA), operating as the arm of the FERA, provided jobs for eight black case workers, who handled approximately the same number of cases as white workers and awarded approximately the same amount of funds for relief purposes.³⁷

Burke determined that in 1936, more than 50 percent of all Tulsa blacks were dependent upon either public or private social agencies for assistance, while less than 30 percent of whites were in this dependent class. A problem blacks shared with whites was that under the OERA, they received a level of aid that was considerably below their minimum requirements. In one of her own surveys, she found that of 100 black families, 77 received less than \$7.00 a month, while the average received was \$4.77. The average household in these dependent families consisted of 4.03 persons, which provided an average of only \$1.14 per person per month.³⁸ Also, in order to receive any assistance, applicants could become eligible only after having exhausted all of their personal resources. Every material possession of the client, exclusive of personal clothing, was required to be mortgaged or sold. This requirement was particularly destructive to clients whose remaining resources were necessary for any future adjustment and tended to insure permanent dependence on relief.³⁹

Conditions improved under the WPA. Workers who were transferred

to this program in 1935 received from \$35.00 to \$68.00 a month for work requiring various levels of skill. Blacks were paid on the same basis as whites, and there was no racial discrimination except in administrative and supervisory positions. A benefit of this agency for blacks came when a community center for them was built in their neighborhood by the WPA, providing recreational opportunities on a community basis irrespective of attachment to relief rolls. Its activities were varied, but estimates showed that within a year, more than 1,000 persons had participated in its programs, and the center had an average daily attendance of 100 individuals. It was staffed by six black workers who had received college training and experience in teaching or social work.⁴⁰ The WPA and FERA also provided jobs for blacks on public projects and in sewing rooms.

Thus the influence of the New Deal on Tulsa's black community was important. It brought that group new forms of social welfare that it had never had access to before, and it also helped alter the relations between blacks and whites in the city, because each racial group was now becoming more aware of the other as they began working on relief projects. What the New Deal did not do, however, was to give any kind of prosperity to blacks or to ease immediately the strict segregation they faced. Also, as cuts were made in programs such as the CWA or WPA, blacks were usually the first to be released from work.

An indication of the limited ability of the New Deal in helping blacks economically can be determined by examining population and employment figures for the 1930s. In 1930 the black population in Tulsa was 15,203, 9,305 of whom were considered to be a part of the

labor force. In 1940 the total black population was almost identical at 15,151, but only 8,355 were in the labor force. In 1930 7.5 percent of the white labor force was unemployed, while 8.6 percent of the total black population was as well.⁴¹ In 1940, while 10.6 percent of whites in the labor force were unemployed, the number of jobless blacks had risen to a very high 20.4 percent.⁴² Although blacks were receiving new sources of relief, it was not enough to solve serious unemployment.

The New Deal did not solve the housing problem that existed in black neighborhoods, but it did help focus the attention of whites on what had become a very bad situation. In discussions with FHA authorities over what to do about a shortage of housing in the black sections, city officials decided to survey the conditions in those areas.⁴³ A study by the Tulsa Institute of Governmental Research found that extremely poor, unsanitary conditions existed there. The institute's chairman stated that "No city of this size can afford to permit a continuation of health conditions such as we have found."⁴⁴ They had discovered filth and waste dripping from battered garbage cans. Many of the homes had no water or sanitary connections. Because of the segregation laws, several families were forced to live in single dwelling units. The city did not collect garbage in the areas, and left that job to private contractors, whose services had been almost nonexistent.⁴⁵ In one cases, up to 31 persons living in apartment houses all had to use the same outdoor toilet.⁴⁶

The condition of the black neighborhood truly appeared to have been a surprise to city officials, and they immediately began to try to find a solution to the problem. They instituted a "pay-as-we-go"

policy to spend \$60,000 on equipment for the area and proposed a new rate scale for garbage collection there as well.⁴⁷ They proposed a federal housing project, which was believed to be the most direct means of solving the problem of inadequate sanitation and overcrowded living conditions.⁴⁸ Assistance finally came as a result of the war, when the federal government helped the city construct approximately 4,000 homes. Although the primary purpose of the homes was to serve families who were expected to fill defense-related jobs, it was anticipated that after the war, if workers left the community, the homes could be turned over to black residents, thus helping solve their chronic housing problem.⁴⁹

This was, of course, a small step in solving a big problem. The New Deal did, however, bring the attention of the larger community to the problems of blacks. It left the local government to decide how relief would be spent on them, but the New Deal required officials to allow blacks to participate in relief projects. By taking steps such as those that uncovered the sanitation and housing problems where blacks lived, it encouraged whites to take future steps in providing for this population group. In Tulsa, where the two racial groups had interacted only very rarely before, now whites and blacks would begin to become more aware of each other.

The housing situation for whites was better, but only as it related to the FHA, as no low cost housing program had ever been built for them by the New Deal either. In 1935 the chamber of commerce reported that as of August of that year, Tulsa was leading the United States in the number of FHA-insured loans per capita.⁵⁰ Therefore,

Tulsa had enthusiastically joined other cities in participating in Roosevelt's plan for long-term, low interest home loans backed by the federal government. The percentage of total families owning their own homes actually increased from 1930 to 1940, growing from 38.1 percent to 40.8 percent.⁵¹ The construction of low-cost housing would not begin, however, until 1968, when the city formed its first housing authority.

The New Deal did not alter the political situation in Tulsa. There was no political machine there such in Chicago, Memphis, Kansas City, or Boston. While Tulsa's mayors and commissioners did what they could to obtain New Deal funds, the emphasis in Tulsa tended to relate to local problems, especially those associated with crime. Because of this, Tulsa received little attention from President Roosevelt. The president had most of his dealings with Tulsa through its congressional representatives and with the state government. As discussed previously, this situation probably hindered Tulsa's ability to receive more New Deal help.

The provisions for labor under the New Deal influenced the development of labor organizations in Tulsa. Both the AFL and the CIO came to the city and struggled against each other to organize its workers. The CIO was successful at organizing oil workers, who represented one of the largest labor blocs in Tulsa, and leading them in a long strike against the Mid-Continent Oil Corporation. Such a strike would have been impossible before the 1930s. The group also interacted with the NLRB, which was a part of President Roosevelt's answer to the failed NRA.

Other changes occurred in Tulsa as a result of the New Deal as well. As in many other communities, the process of distributing relief came more under the control of those trained in the social sciences, professionals who were interested more in the rehabilitation of the client than in previous charity solutions. Social security existed and grew in Tulsa, as it did throughout the United States. While these are important, one of the most significant changes that occurred was in the relationship between Tulsa, and other cities, and the federal government. In the future, Tulsa would turn to Washington, D.C. more often than it had previously. The Tribune acknowledged this process as early as May 1933. Noticing how several cities had been turning to Uncle Sam for relief, the newspaper realized that the federal government was seeking broader powers than it had possessed before. In an editorial, it commented that "The old order, under which local governments were to all intents and purposes completely independent, seems to be dissolving with amazing speed. A new lineup is in the making, and it may produce changes that will alter the whole face of our society."⁵²

The New Deal did not end the depression in Tulsa. As late as Christmas Eve, 1938, county commissioners were requesting an increase in the relief fund to aid 2,400 families.⁵³ The city continued to struggle with bond indebtedness, problems with the state government, and an inability to attract the attention of New Dealers in Washington. But as has been indicated here, the New Deal altered life in the city and relations with the federal government, much as it did throughout the nation, and many of the changes endured. It did not represent a

revolution, and in many ways, Tulsa benefited from the New Deal less than did other places. The city also was fortunate in having the resources and a population that helped it rebound more successfully after the initial crisis than did other cities. Tulsans supported the president and his ideas until they no longer seemed to work. Economic rescue finally came with the preparation for the war, and this event helped build a strong aviation industry to work alongside Tulsa's creator, the oil industry. The New Deal's significance came not in its immediate attempts, but in the way it altered Tulsa from its isolation as a thriving boom town to its future participation in a larger national order.

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6. Ibid., 27 January 1939.
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11. Ibid., 3 September 1939.
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13. Scales and Goble, Oklahoma Politics, 213-14.
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21. Ibid, Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population, vol 2 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), 41. The figure of 11.8 percent unemployment is the total for those seeking work as well as those employed on public emergency work.
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34. Burke, "Survey of the Negro Community," 78.

35. Ibid., 81-82.

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41. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census, Unemployment, 35.

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VITA

Timothy A. Posey

Candidate for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Thesis: THE IMPACT OF THE NEW DEAL ON THE CITY OF TULSA,
OKLAHOMA: HOW SIGNIFICANT WAS IT?

Major Field: History

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, On September 26, 1968,
the son of George Posey and Linda Williams.

Education: Graduated from Union High School, Tulsa, Oklahoma in
May 1986; received Bachelor of Arts degree in History from
Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December
1991. Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts
degree with a major in History at Oklahoma State University
in May 1994.

Experience: Raised in Tulsa for most of my life, although I spent
some time in Enid; employed in the Department of Geography,
and then in the university bookstore, at Oklahoma State
University while working on my graduate degree.

Professional Memberships: Phi Alpha Theta, Phi Kappa Phi.