

Tough times: When jobs were hard to find



SHSI (Iowa City)

Low prices for farm goods provoked strikes and disruptions during the Great Depression. Above, dissatisfied farmers block a cattle truck by placing a hay bale in its path.

In the 1930s, the Park family of Dubuque faced hard times. Between 1931 and 1936, Claud Park found only odd jobs. Claud's family — wife Martha and their children, Claud Jr., Mary, and Dorothy — struggled to survive on Claud's meager wages and the vegetables Martha grew on a patch of land donated by the city.

In bad winter weather, the children stayed home from

school because they did not have enough winter clothing to keep warm.

Many other Iowans also experienced economic hard times during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

During World War I (1914-1918), farmers raised a **surplus** of food to support American soldiers and European families. Banks loaned money to help farmers produce more goods.

When peace came to Europe in 1918, Europeans stopped depending on Iowa farmers for extra food. In the 1920s, farmers continued to produce more goods to pay back their loans. Because of overproduction, farmers were paid less for their crops. Farmers could not pay back their loans. Banks and businesses closed down or laid off workers.

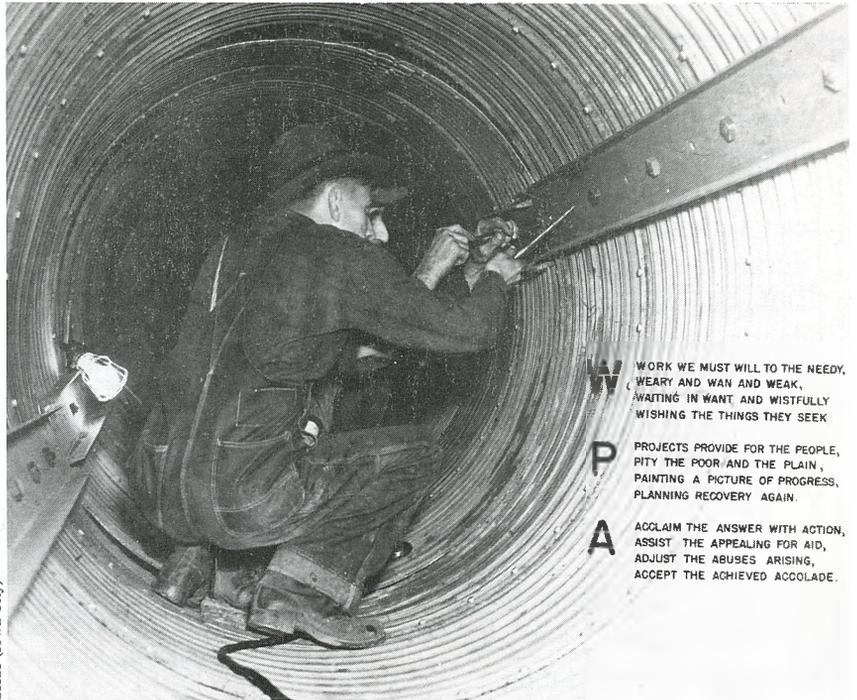
Farmers made tough decisions in the 1930s. Farm owners faced bankruptcy. Tenants often did not earn enough money to pay rent. For some, that meant packing up belongings and moving to a new town, city, or state to start over.

In 1930, the Crumbaugh family sold their 114-acre farm and moved into the city limits of Dubuque, hoping to find jobs. Mr. Crumbaugh never found full-time work during the Great Depression. Some of his 10 children took jobs cleaning houses, as farm hands, or in factories to help support the family.

Others families chose to farm without any promise of earning money. Farmers tried to grow what would sell for the best price.

In the summer of 1932, farm woman Clara Ackerman wrote in her diary, "What shall we do, not raise anything? We are still getting nine cents for eggs and thirteen to fifteen cents for cream which isn't spent for groceries except sugar, coffee, and an *occasional* head of lettuce. Are we tired of our own products? Yes, but we are

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WORK WE MUST WILL TO THE NEEDY,
WEARY AND WAN AND WEAK,
WAITING IN WANT AND WISTFULLY
WISHING THE THINGS THEY SEEK

PROJECTS PROVIDE FOR THE PEOPLE,
PITY THE POOR AND THE PLAIN,
PAINTING A PICTURE OF PROGRESS,
PLANNING RECOVERY AGAIN.

ACCCLAIM THE ANSWER WITH ACTION,
ASSIST THE APPEALING FOR AID,
ADJUST THE ABUSES ARISING,
ACCEPT THE ACHIEVED ACCOLADE.

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The Works Progress Administration (WPA) kept Americans working in the 1930s. ABOVE: Webster City WPA workers repair a sewer, 1939. The poem describes the WPA philosophy. LEFT: WPA workers train to be domestic workers, Des Moines, 1938.

willing to keep on in order to buy the necessities we must have.”

One out of every four American workers were unemployed during the Great Depression. In Dubuque, the city's **sash** and door mills laid off half their workers between 1930 and 1935. Without jobs, many Iowans were too poor to buy basic necessities.

Times got a little easier when the federal government stepped in. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt began the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and the Civil Works Administration (CWA) to give Americans jobs and wages.

Young people also struggled through the Great Depression. Some, like the Crumbaugh children, quit school to support their families. In 1935, President Roosevelt created the National Youth Administration (NYA) to provide work for high school and college students that allowed them to stay in school.

Many Iowa youth joined the NYA. Students prepared classroom exhibits and graded papers. Young people helped to



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WPA workers serve hot lunches in a Mason City nursery school, 1940.

improve roads, install street signs, plant trees, and build bridges. Young women sewed, served school lunches, and worked in libraries and museums. African-American youths built an ice skating rink in Good Park in Des Moines.

The NYA program gave young Iowans work experience that prepared them for jobs following the Great Depression. They also interacted with children from different backgrounds.

In the 1980s, hard times appeared again for Iowans.

Farmers' crop prices were high through the 1970s and then fell suddenly. Farmers couldn't pay back loans and many lost their farms. Farmers left their farms to look for jobs in cities. In 1982, there were around 115,000 farms in Iowa. Four years later, that number shrunk to 109,000. With fewer jobs in Iowa's farms and cities, families worked hard against tough odds to support themselves. They learned to beat hard times once again. ▲