

KANSAS HISTORY

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WPA Library Service, Bookmobile, ca. 1940.

Perhaps the best known of the New Deal's numerous "alphabet agencies" was the Work Progress Administration (later the Work Projects Administration). Created in 1935 to provide paying jobs for out-of-work Americans, the WPA left a tangible legacy in the form of public buildings, reservoirs, bridges, art work, historical research projects, and much more. The Kansas WPA's "construction" projects were overseen by its Engineering Division; "non-construction" work came under the supervision of the Professional and Service Division. The latter included the Research and Records, Public Welfare, and Community Service Sections. "Community Service Projects," read a 1940 report, "operate on a state-wide basis and include activities of value or interest to the entire community." Among the eleven separate projects listed were nursery schools, education for physically handicapped persons, and braille.

The library service was also on the list of Community Service Projects. Employing nearly three hundred people and reaching 180 cities and small towns in Kansas, the service placed workers in existing public and school libraries where, in addition to repairing, accessioning, cataloging, and shelving books, they often allowed the local library to extend its hours of operation. "This sort of work," reported

the *Marion Review*, June 21, 1939, "has been one of the most valuable assets of the professional division of the Work Projects Administration. . . . Our type of library is not able to support as ambitious a program as we desire or as the community demands. By taking advantage of these projects for the past five years we have been able to carry on a program far more advanced than is customary of libraries of our size."

In fifty-two small Kansas towns, where available funds did not allow for a full-time librarian, service employees had complete charge. In many others, traveling libraries were made possible; by 1940 these mobile units had loaned nearly 625,000 volumes. According to a 1941 report, "The WPA Library project maintains a collection of project-owned books and a Bookmobile which will aid in the educational process, giving an established library an enlarged collection of books and the means for distributing library service to rural or industrial defense areas."

The above photograph is the second in a series featuring WPA programs in Kansas in the 1930s and 1940s. The WPA is also the subject of "Steepled in Service: The WPA in Kansas," a special exhibit on display through September 7, 1994, at the Kansas Museum of History.

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Cover: Governor Robert Docking. An article about Docking's four gubernatorial campaigns is featured in this issue. Back Cover: GI at Camp Robinson. The mobilization of the Thirty-fifth Division in 1940 is examined by Christopher C. Lovett.

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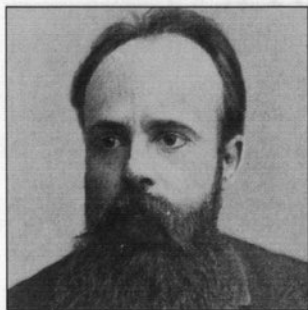
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