

**The New Deal in Madison County: Public Welfare Assistance,
Work Relief, and Economic Regulations in Rural New York**

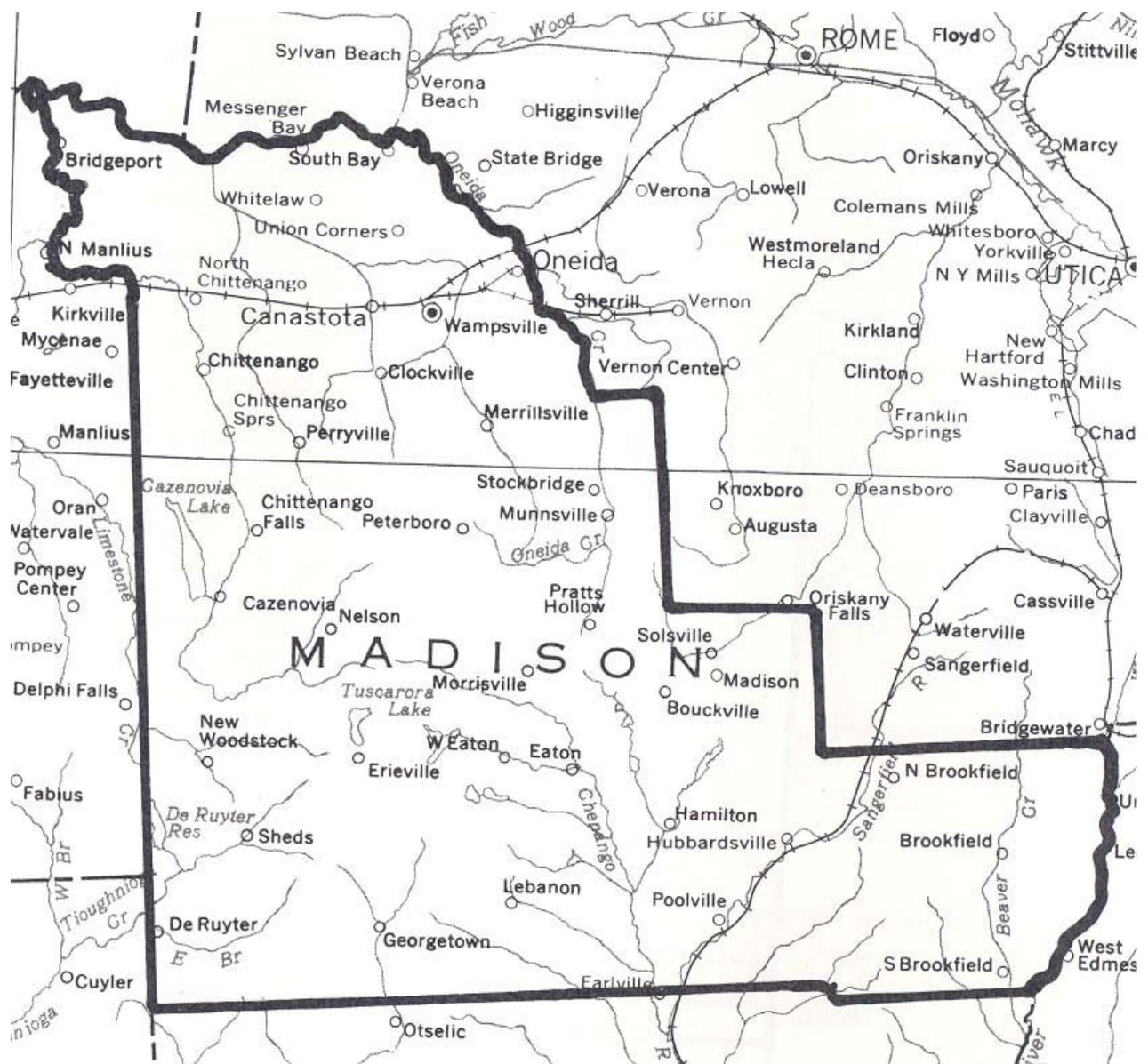
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Introduction

The New Deal forever changed the relationship between local municipalities and state and federal governments. Madison County, New York had very little interaction with Washington, D.C. or Albany, N.Y. before 1929. In 1928, the only funding for services that came from outside the county's borders was thirty-seven thousand dollars for repairing state highways. By 1939, Madison County received three hundred thousand dollars in state and federal support for such programs as highways, work relief, old age security, and orphanages. In a short ten-year span, the county had begun routinely to receive an unprecedented amount of state and federal relief, as did many other counties which previously had little contact with their state and national capitals. While the new aid came in generous amounts, the people of Madison County were not swayed by the politics of those determined to help them through work relief and social services. Although they passively accepted public welfare assistance, the county government was slow to apply for work relief funding, indicating either their unwillingness to do so or indifference to the problem. Meanwhile, most newspapers in the county criticized Franklin Roosevelt's domestic policies which they saw as unnecessary government intrusion. This paper will explore New Deal programs in Madison County, how the denizens reacted to those programs, and to what extent their political attitudes were related to the implementation and applicability of Roosevelt's domestic policies in their own rural environment.

The New Deal was a revolutionary undertaking by the Roosevelt administration. Before the Great Depression, economists and politicians perceived economic downturns as corrections in the business cycle. Economic policies often remained static through

depressions; balancing the budget and the principles of *laissez-faire* remained popular. In this context, the New Deal reflected a radical change in many ways. By the end of the 1930s, the federal government was prepared to spend more than it had collected in taxes, provide direct relief for millions of people through subsidies and employment, and test the limits of federal power in the American federalist system.

In the national elections of the 1930s, the electoral majority gave Roosevelt decisive mandates to implement and maintain his New Deal policies. In 1932, after three years of Depression, Americans were desperate for change and frustrated with the Hoover administration's attempted solutions, and therefore offered widespread support for Roosevelt in the presidential election. People desired the fresh ideas of the challenger and were disgruntled at the ineffectiveness of the incumbent. Roosevelt's victory in 1932, while impressive, did not guarantee him continued success. Republicans had been the dominant party in Washington for decades; in the seventy years between 1860 and 1932, only two other Democrats had served as president. Many Republicans believed they had an excellent chance of defeating Roosevelt in 1936. Despite their optimism, trends in the 1934 mid-term elections continued to favor the Democrats, and in the 1936 presidential election, Roosevelt increased his majority from 1932, capturing forty-six states. However, this was not because of a return to a robust economy similar to the one in 1929; the nation was still in the throes of the Depression. These victories for Roosevelt and his Democratic party indicate a wave of support for the principles of his solution to the economic troubles of the American people, characterized in the New Deal, even though they had not ushered in a new era of prosperity. Certainly there were criticisms of his programs from both the right and left; some believed the United States was becoming

a highly centralized communist state, while others believed that the government was not doing enough for the poorest in America, distrusting the rather comfortable relationship between the government and the giants of industry. Despite these critiques, Roosevelt's victory in 1936 confirmed that the majority of the American people believed in the spirit and goals of the New Deal, even though they had not brought the prosperity of 1929.

Roosevelt's strategy for economic recovery had three components—public welfare assistance, work relief, and economic regulations. When these strategies were put into legislation, they took on many different forms, all designed to bring the country out of Depression. For instance, Roosevelt's plan for work relief was widely varied. As governor of New York, Roosevelt had established the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA), which planned a hodgepodge of projects designed to help New York's unemployed.¹ At the federal level, the Civil Works Administration (CWA) and Works Progress Administration (WPA) performed roughly the same function.² Some programs were more specific in their mission. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) sought to modernize the rural South through hydroelectric dams, and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) focused on caring for an overworked environment while putting unemployed, able-bodied young men to work.³ Likewise, public welfare assistance took different forms. During this period, states and the federal government shared the burden in providing assistance. Those states, like New York, which had frameworks established to provide this type of relief, funneled any federal assistance through their systems. In the Madison County budget for 1934, the treasurer listed

¹ David M. Schneider and Albert Deutsch, *The History of Public Welfare in New York State, 1867-1940* (Montclair, New Jersey: Patterson Smith Publishing Corporation, 1969), 309-11.

² Anthony Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* (New York: Noonday Press, 1989), 198.

³ *Ibid.*, 171-72.

varying categories of state welfare, such as money for a “public health nurse,” “crippled children,” and “old age security.”⁴ In the arena of economic regulations, Roosevelt established two overarching programs to fix problems in the industries and commodities markets of the United States. The National Recovery Administration (NRA) negotiated with businesses to restore livable wages, while the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) established price supports so that farmers might receive a decent return on their products.⁵ The Roosevelt administration employed all three strategies in most areas of the country with varying successes. With this wide array of programs, most towns, counties, and regions of the United States had their own unique experience of the New Deal. This paper intends to provide that narrative for one county in upstate New York.⁶

A Short History of Madison County

Madison County is the geographic center of New York State. In the northern part of the county is part of the southern edge of an ancient lake plain that extends as far north as the Erie Canal and as far west as Albany. On this plain lies the Great Genesee Road, now known as U.S. Route 5, which runs through the two largest cities of Madison County, Oneida and Canastota. South of this expanse rises the Allegheny Plateau. This elevation is dotted with ravines, valleys, and waterfalls, the most famous being Chittenango Falls, some fifteen miles south of Canastota. The first European settlers of Madison County

⁴ Fred M. Root, “Annual Report for the County Treasurer,” *Journal of Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Madison, 1934* (hereafter *JPBS* and year of proceedings) (Oneida, New York: Oneida Democratic Union, 1934), 243.

⁵ Badger, 80, 152.

⁶ For e.g., Bernard Sternsher, ed., *Hope Restored: How the New Deal worked in town and country* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999); Charles H. Trout, *Boston, the Great Depression, and the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Harry A. Kersey, *The Florida Seminoles and the New Deal, 1933-1942* (Boca Raton: Florida Atlantic University Press, 1989); Jo Ann E. Argersinger, *Toward a New Deal in Baltimore: People and Government in the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

settled on this plateau, establishing the Town of Brookfield, presently the easternmost township in the county, at the end of the eighteenth century. Europeans then moved west across the plateau, before finally settling in the valley. Madison County was incorporated in 1806, carved out of the northern part of Chenango County.⁷

In the nineteenth century, Madison County had small, flourishing towns because of the economic impact of the Chenango Canal. Businesses that either sold their goods at points along the canal or accommodated the many traders on the route thrived throughout the county. The dismantling of the canal in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the introduction of railroads forced many small proprietors out of business because of cheaper goods shipped in from Syracuse and Utica. While these new links forced small businesses out, new agricultural markets opened for the New York countryside. The agricultural sector of Madison County could now ship its crops to large cities such as New York, and hence the county became largely associated with farming.⁸ By the 1930s, the largest single employer in Madison County was Oneida Community, Ltd., famous for its silverware. The Community employed nearly three thousand people, hundreds of whom lived in the county. Oneida was the only city in the county to have multiple industries, including the National Casket Company, Oneidacraft, Oneida Vault and Casket Company, and the Smith-Lee Company, which manufactured bottle caps. Other towns either had one major employer or depended largely on the farming economy.⁹

By the 1930s, the major source of income for most Madison County residents was farming. A good indication of the proportion of farmers in Madison County comes from

⁷ Karl Lehman, *Madison County Today* (Oneida Castle, New York: Karl Lehman, 1943), 8.

⁸ Lehman, 39.

⁹ The Town of Nelson had a cheese manufacturing plant, Perryville had a limestone quarry, and Fenner had a stone quarry, but most other towns had only dairy or produce farmers. Lehman, 26-27.

grand jury rolls printed in the *Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors* every year. Of the 299 grand jurors in 1929, 159 were listed under the occupation of “farmer,” or about 53% of the list. Outside the city of Oneida, 68% of the jurors were farmers. Further discounting those whose occupations was listed “retired,” nearly four-fifths of the working population outside of the county’s largest city toiled the ground.¹⁰ Despite the harsh winters and the constant threat of frost damaging their crops, farmers in Madison County, as well as the surrounding area, were able to grow enough to feed themselves. In his history of Madison County, published in 1943, Karl Lehman wrote that “So varied in richness is its soil and other natural deposits that Madison County, if it were today thrown upon its own resources, would be able to support a much larger population than it does.”¹¹ Throughout the thirties, New York farmers suffered their share of floods and droughts, but never long periods of hunger or starvation like their Dust Bowl counterparts. Instead, the menace of the Depression in Central New York was depressed agricultural prices. Since the end of World War I, farmers throughout the country had been receiving less and less for the same crop production. Certainly this was true in Madison County. In 1919, Madison County farmers received over \$660,000 for all crops; by 1924 this value had fallen to about \$309,000, a decrease of over fifty percent. While prices did rise between 1924 and 1929, crops at the start of the depression were still undervalued when compared with their 1919 levels. County farmers fared about the same as their counterparts throughout the state. (See Graph 1.) A cartoon titled “Indications of a Hard, Long Winter” in an October 1931 edition of the *Brookfield Courier* well describes the problems of farmers in Madison County. As a farmer and

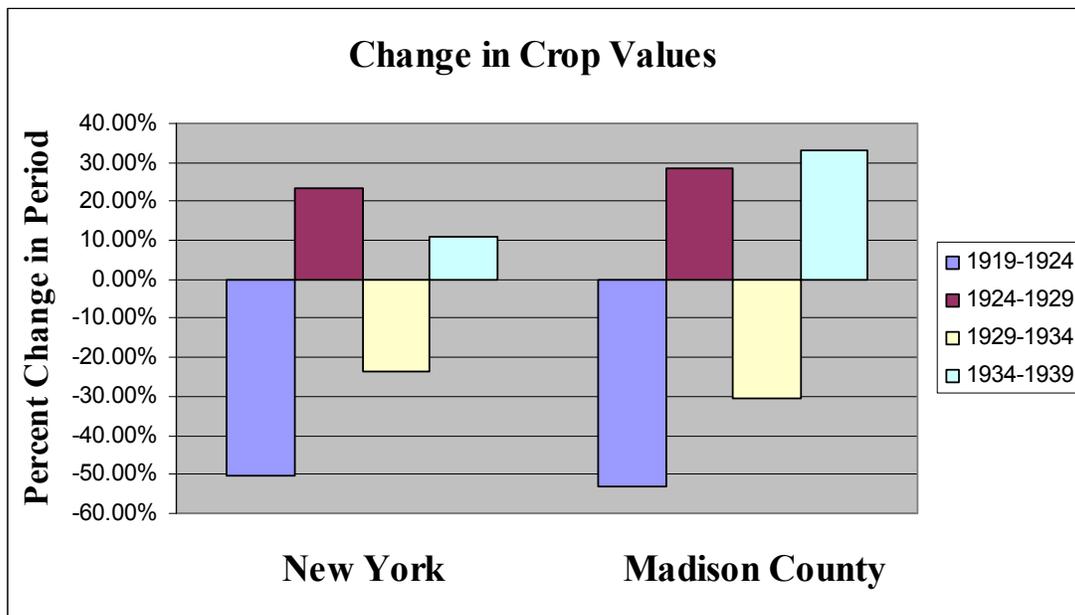
¹⁰ “List of Grand Jurors: 1929,” *JPBS 1928* (Oneida, New York: Oneida Dispatch Corporation, 1929), 162-71.

¹¹ Lehman, 7.

wife take bushels of their harvest down into the cellar, the husband declares, “Well, we’re not going to worry about not having enough to eat this winter.”¹² (See Figure 1).

While farmers could subsist on produce they were unable to sell, their major product—milk—needed to be sold within a few weeks of it being produced, lest it would spoil. Fresh whole milk and processed milk products were the principal income producers for the residents of Madison County, as well as for much of central New York

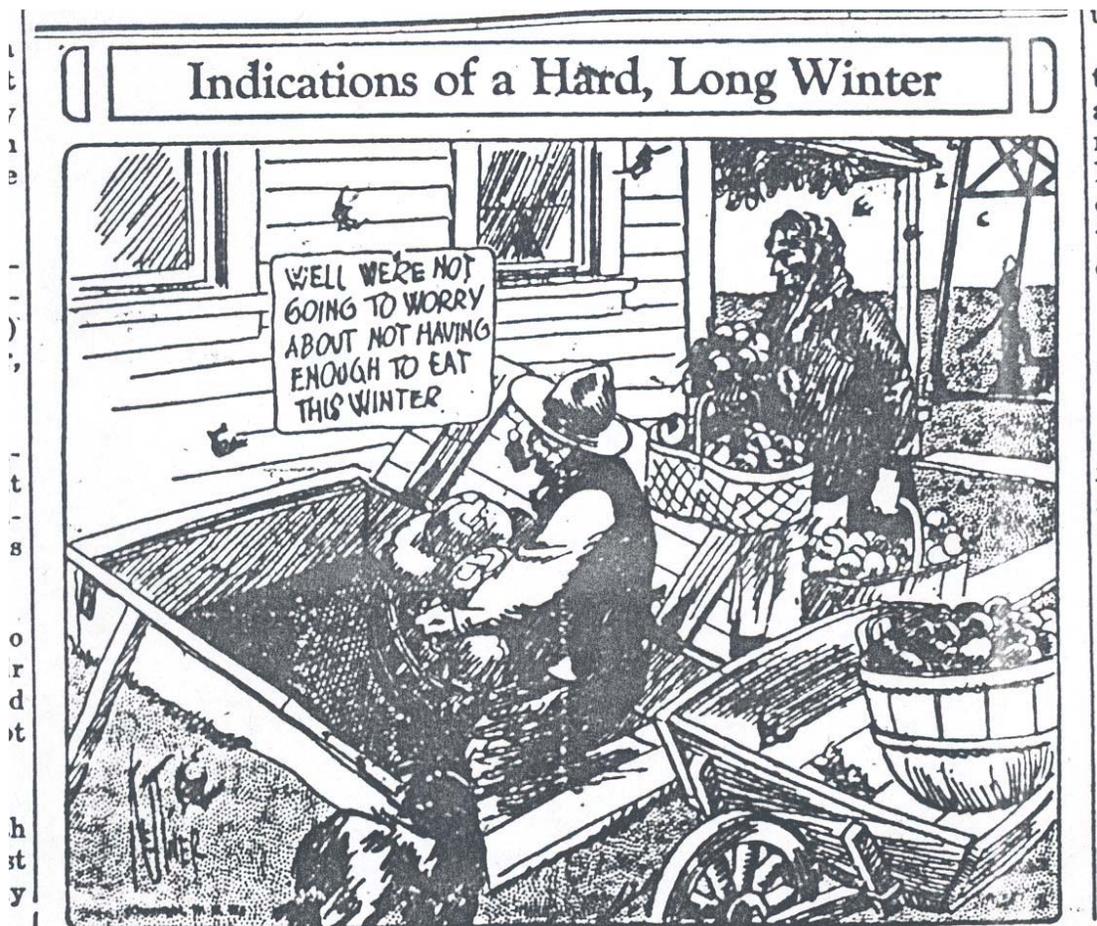
Graph 1. Crop values, New York and Madison County, 1919-1939



Source: Derived from data in *U.S. Agricultural Census, 1929, 1934, and 1939*.

¹² “Indications of a Hard, Long Winter,” *Brookfield Courier (BC)*, 14 October 1931, 4.

Figure 1. Indications of a Hard, Long Winter



Brookfield Courier, October 14th, 1931

and the North Country. In 1929, the farmers of Madison County received over five million dollars for milk products, while collecting just under four million for all other crops.¹³ Rural producers sold their milk at metropolitan markets throughout the state including Syracuse, Buffalo, and, the largest and most important of all, New York City. If the income flow from these areas ceased, this money could not be reinvested in the

¹³ "County Table X—Value of Crops, 1929; Value of Livestock, 1930; and Value of Livestock Products, 1929, *Fifteenth Census of United States: Agriculture, vol. II, pt. 1—The Northern States* (Washington, GPO, 1932), 293.

county, and hence the entire area would suffer. While the dairy farmers of the county certainly had their troubles, the industry was more stable than other sectors of the American agricultural economy. Dairy prices had been relatively constant before World War I, indicating that dairy farmers had escaped the agricultural depression of the 1920s that hit grain producing farmers the hardest.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the decline in milk prices would become the dominant issue throughout the Depression in Madison County, as private, state, and federal establishments attempted desperately to keep production down in order to raise prices.

Politically, the county's newspapers were very active not only in local news and politics, but also informed their readers of state, national, and international events. Between 1928 and 1940, nine newspapers existed within the boundaries of the county: *Brookfield Courier*, *Canastota Bee-Journal*, *Cazenovia Republican*, *DeRuyter Gleaner*, *Earlville Standard*, *Hamilton Republican*, *Oneida Democratic-Union*, and *Oneida Dispatch*. Because of the numerous newspapers in the county, each had an extremely local coverage area. For example, a person in Hamilton who read the *Republican* for his critical source of information received very little reporting on other news in the county outside of the township of Hamilton, which included the village of Hamilton and the surrounding farmland. While he received his state and national news from nationally syndicated columns, he knew very little about what was happening in Canastota or Oneida. Most of the paper notified him of extended, out-of-town trips his neighbors were taking. The front page was reserved for local news, and significant events within the nation and region. Local news could include reports of meetings of the county Board of

¹⁴ Paul Abrahams, "Agricultural Adjustment During the New Deal Period: The New York Milk Industry: A Case Study," *Agricultural History* 39, no. 2 (1965): 92.

Supervisors, coverage of the high school football team, or important remarks made by local politicians, businessmen, or educators. Nearly all of these newspapers had editorial columns, which contained the publisher's views on regional and national news. The politics of the newspapers reflected the county vote, in that nearly all of them argued in favor of Republican policies, with the *Earlville Standard* and *Oneida Democratic-Union* being the exceptions. While the dominant Republican newspapers had some influence over the political beliefs of the county, it is safer to say that the newspapers were representative of the electorate, where Republicans outnumbered Democrats by a three-to-one margin.

This is a portrait of Madison County on the eve of the Great Depression. While the stock market crash is the popular benchmark for the onset of America's severest recession, local farmers, like those around the country, had been struggling for a decade beforehand. Clearly, the essential parts of Roosevelt's New Deal program to most county residents would be those aimed specifically at rural areas—the Civilian Conservation Corps and economic regulations designed to raise agricultural prices, specifically the price of dairy products. This did not prevent local representatives of the Roosevelt administration from also encouraging work relief programs in the county. In the end, however, Madison County residents judged New Deal policies by their cost effectiveness nationally and their usefulness locally. The results of the 1936 election suggest that, by this measure, the majority of county residents found most of Roosevelt's policies lacking.

Public Welfare

Increasing outside assistance in Madison County did not originate in 1933 when Roosevelt became President, but rather the five years before while he was Governor of the State of New York. Roosevelt was elected to the state's highest office in 1928 and reelected in 1930, and led New York through its first encounters with the Great Depression. Even before the stock market crash, Roosevelt had plans to modernize public assistance in the state, signing the Public Welfare Act in April of 1929. This provision modernized local poor laws in New York, some of which had not been revised since the late 1770s. Madison County's own poor law, which was overturned by the new public welfare law, originated in 1821. Before this act in 1929, towns and municipalities throughout New York State were required to support the poor and needy in their area. The Public Welfare Act placed all monies in the charge of the new county office, the Commissioner of Public Welfare. However, this law was more than simply a change of office titles. Certain terms in local public relief were stigmatizing to the needy. In the last report of Madison County's Superintendent of Poor in 1929, those who lived in the almshouse were considered "inmates."¹⁵ Those who had no place to go lived like minimum security prisoners, incarcerated by poverty than any crime they may have committed. Towards the end of respecting those in need, the 1929 act removed certain terms from the government lexicon such as "pauper, almshouse, and superintendent of the poor," and chose "more humane methods of dealing with those who [became] a public charge."¹⁶

¹⁵ "Annual Report of Superintendent of Poor," *JPBS 1929* (Oneida, New York: McHenry Press, 1929), 264.

¹⁶ "Governor Approves Welfare Act," *New York Times (NYT)*, 13 April 1929, 6; "Modernizing the Poor Law," *NYT*, 18 March 1928, 52.

The Public Welfare Act was a foreshadowing of the principles behind New Deal policies. While the Act did not explicitly provide state funds for the new county commissioner, Roosevelt would in the next few years enact new taxes and programs by which the state could provide assistance for the counties. The Public Welfare Act ensured that town welfare officials would be supported by organized county offices, uniform throughout the state. The *New York Times*' editors, in their support for the bill, reasoned that "the town that needs most an efficient overseer is generally the least able to afford it. Consequently, both the poor and the taxpayers suffer."¹⁷ In a few years, this idea would expand to the state supporting counties who needed assistance, and, when Roosevelt became President, he would use the federal government's economic power to provide assistance, not only to states but also directly to those in need.

The passage of this act reveals Roosevelt's concern for public welfare at a time when the thought of the government supporting the needy was far from other politicians' minds. In the age of 1920s conservatism, where many would be content with local public officials distributing aid, New York under Roosevelt led the way in modernizing welfare relief. Not only was he already concerned about the poor, but also the framework that he established through the Public Welfare Act his successors would use in providing different forms of relief. Throughout the 1930s, Governors Roosevelt and Lehman would sign bills providing assistance for a public health nurse, caring for disabled children, and giving aid to the blind. (See Table 1). While the Public Welfare Act did not revolutionize welfare relief immediately, it was a small step in caring for the poor and disabled when few in the United States considered these laws necessary.

¹⁷ "Modernizing the Poor Law," *NYT*, 18 March 1928, 52.

As Roosevelt consolidated welfare assistance, he introduced another bill, much less radical, that nevertheless would contribute greatly to the amount of money that all counties in New York State would receive during the Depression. On April 8, 1929, Roosevelt signed New York's first gasoline tax, joining the forty-seven other states in taxing that commodity.¹⁸ The bill directed a healthy percentage of the expected revenue from the tax towards farm projects and the highway budgets of rural counties. As the 1930s progressed, the gasoline tax would provide the bulk of public assistance from the state to the county, usually adding about a hundred thousand dollars to Madison County's highway funds. (See Table 1.) Taxes on gasoline became a common source of revenue by the late 1920s, and its contribution to Madison County was significant.

On March 31, 1930, the New York legislature unanimously passed the Mastick bill, which provided pensions to those seventy years or older.¹⁹ While Roosevelt disagreed with many of the bill's policies, including leaving the burden of distributing the money to County Welfare Commissioners, he nevertheless praised the effort by the Republican-controlled legislature.²⁰ New York was the tenth state to enact a pension bill, with other states considering such laws around the same time, including New Jersey, Virginia, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island.²¹ As the Depression set in, legislatures realized that the elderly poor not only needed but also deserved support from the government. Hence, the ethos behind the Social Security Act of 1935 was similar to that in 1930, with Roosevelt and New York at the forefront of this movement. With these three acts—the Public Welfare Act, the gasoline tax, and the Mastick bill—the state

¹⁸ "Governor Approves State Gasoline Tax and Farm and Bills," *NYT*, 9 April 1929, 1.

¹⁹ "Old Age Pensions Pass the Assembly," *NYT*, 1 April 1930, 4.

²⁰ "Gov. Roosevelt Signs Old Age Pension Bill; Praises Move, but Calls for Further Steps," *NYT*, 11 April 1930, 3.

²¹ "Legislation Pushed for the Aged," *NYT*, 2 February 1930, 31.

government began to direct funds to the poor and elderly among them. Soon, its Governor would become President.

Madison County generally complied with the new directives in the Public Welfare Act. The Board of Supervisors transformed the Department of Charities into the Committee on Welfare and the Superintendent of the Poor into the office of the County Welfare Commissioner. The new Committee on Welfare issued its first report on December 9, 1929, granting \$448.63 in reimbursement to those who cared for people in need.²² Although the government titles changed, the public servants in those positions remained the same. Nevertheless, the former superintendent and new commissioner, F. A. MacIntyre, recognized that changes were being made. In his final report as Superintendent of the Poor, he wrote, “In a few short weeks the Department [of Charities] will be no more....The term ‘Almshouse’ passes into the oblivion of forgotten words to be succeeded by the County Home and an entirely new order will confront us.”²³ The attempt to change the semantics regarding public welfare soon failed however, at least in the official commissioner’s report. In the 1930 statement, MacIntyre still used the word “almshouse,” finally changing to “county home” the following year, only to revert back to the previous term in 1937. While the government leaders of Madison County did not always execute the public welfare bills of 1929 and 1930 to the fullest letter of the law, they generally followed the new regulations.

Reactions to the gasoline tax and old age security were somewhat mixed. While there was little explicit reaction to the gasoline tax, many newspapers cheerily reported that the county treasurer had received a check from the state from that tax and the

²² “Report of Committee on Welfare,” *JPBS 1929*, 184-85.

²³ “Annual Report of Superintendent of Poor,” *JPBS 1929*, 263.

county's share of money from automobile registration fees.²⁴ As far as old age security, the editors at the *Hamilton Republican* supported the bill, noting that "many [elderly] are trained for occupations that no longer exist." They concluded that "old people must live and society must pay the bill."²⁵ Those at the *Brookfield Courier* were less sympathetic, stating that "much of the misery which usually accompanies old age might be avoided by looking ahead before it is too late."²⁶ Generally, Madison County residents did not oppose Governor Roosevelt's efforts to boost public welfare payments and new taxes, most likely because they felt the benefits of the legislation outweighed the costs to them. Roosevelt's support in Madison County was manifested in the election of 1930. In 1928, Roosevelt had received about thirty percent of the popular vote in Madison County; in 1930, he received forty percent, the highest percentage the county would ever give Roosevelt in a gubernatorial or presidential election. The increased support for Roosevelt combined with a strong showing from the third-party Law Preservation candidate, Robert Carroll, gave Roosevelt a scant plurality of 248 out of 5,000 votes in the county. The *Hamilton Republican* noted that Roosevelt was the "first Democrat in many, many years to carry [the] village of Hamilton."²⁷ While the Republican majority of the county was not ready to give their whole-hearted support to Roosevelt, the election of 1930 shows that a growing number of people approved of his performance as Governor.

Even after Roosevelt became President, state aid for public welfare in Madison County continued to increase. The next governor of New York, Herbert Lehman, sustained the policies of his fellow Democrat and previous governor. Looking at the list

²⁴ "Our Assemblyman Lists Legislative Achievements," *BC*, 10 April 1929, 1.

²⁵ "Old age pension coming," *Hamilton Republican (HR)*, 3 October 1929, 6.

²⁶ "What of Old Age," *BC*, 6 August 1931, 4.

²⁷ "Madison County Goes Democratic, Give Roosevelt Plurality of 248," *HR*, 30 November 1930, 1.

of welfare categories, the major focus of state aid to Madison County was for improving the general health of its residents. In 1933, Madison County received state aid in four different welfare categories—support for the county laboratory, old age security, money for a public health nurse, and assistance in the care of crippled children. (See Table 1). A unique item on this list was the subsidization of the bacteriological laboratory. While the official name may conjure up images of a research lab, the institution was more like a county hospital. This laboratory had been in Madison County before the Depression started and not as a work relief project through TERA or any other program. A laboratory report from 1936, included in the Board of Proceedings provides a glimpse of what this establishment did. The hospital recorded 9,391 examinations that year, and bought new equipment that would advance sanitization. They also performed blood tests in order to determine the right matches for transfusions, and tested for diphtheria. The director also recorded three cases of typhoid fever, four cases of undulant fever, and two cases of bacillary dysentery.²⁸ This institution gives us an idea what public health was like in Madison County, as well as what types of programs state aid was contributing to during the 1930s.

Overall, state aid in Madison County was an amalgam of different projects that contributed greatly to the public welfare of the residents. It must be stressed that state welfare began in New York before the set of programs commonly referred to as the New Deal. Acts like the three mentioned in this section originated from state initiatives and not from federal legislation. Thus, one should think of Roosevelt's tenure as Governor of New York as a prelude to his policies as President. It also provides a new interpretation

²⁸ "Annual Report of Madison County Bacteriological Laboratory—1936," *JPBS 1936* (Oneida, New York: Oneida Daily Dispatch Press, 1936), 236-37.

of Roosevelt's First Hundred Days. His administration did not rush revolutionary work relief and public assistance programs through Congress without preparation; these pieces of legislation already had precedents in New York State. A more nuanced look into Roosevelt's days as Governor may give us new understanding for the formation and implementation of his federal domestic policies in 1933.

Although this aid continued throughout the 1930s under a variety of different banners, the heavily conservative newspapers of Madison County instead turned their attention to the largesse and waste of New Deal legislation, rather than criticize the state's public assistance, for several reasons. First, the federal deficit numbers were so overwhelming, they provided a stronger argument for what was wrong with Roosevelt's New Deal policy. Second, the residents could see how the state's welfare was improving their quality of life, and therefore was not a strong argument to remove Roosevelt or his successor, Lehman. State aid provided services that all residents used, while federal resources primarily financed work relief. Precisely because they aided the most people, the public welfare initiatives started by Governor Roosevelt lasted longer than other forms of government assistance launched in Madison County during the Depression era.

Work Relief

The massive work relief projects of the New Deal were one of the most distinctive elements of the era. They represented a radical shift in domestic policies. The idea that the federal government creating programs and paying individuals to rebuild highways, construct building and beautify rundown cities would have been preposterous in 1928. Also, unlike certain New Deal legislation such as the Social Security Act and the creation of the Securities and Exchange Commission, work relief programs folded soon after the American entry into World War II, preserving their legacy in the annals of history. Finally, the programs provided the first direct interaction with the federal government for millions of Americans. Anthony Badger, writer of one of the preeminent works on the New Deal, notes “the most important measure of the New Deal’s effectiveness for many Americans would have to be the generosity with which the New Deal aided the jobless and the unemployables.”²⁹ These projects were commonly referred to by their initials, and to this day many people, even those who did not live in the New Deal era, can recognize these programs such as the NRA, CWA, PWA, WPA, CCC, and TVA. While Roosevelt did have an ambitious plan as President, his vision was supported by the successes of the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA), which, while he was governor, became the first work relief program in the country.³⁰

²⁹ Badger, 190.

³⁰ Schneider and Deutsch, 310.

Temporary Emergency Relief Administration

On August 28, 1931, Roosevelt spoke to the New York State Legislature concerning work relief. The governor proclaimed that “our government is not the master but the creature of the people,” and that “one of these duties of the State is that of caring for those of its citizens who find themselves the victims of such adverse circumstances as makes them unable to obtain even the necessities for mere existence without the aid of others.” While private companies and local governments had done their best to improve wages and living conditions, the depressed economic situation “call[ed] for measures of relief over and beyond the ability” of these groups to provide, and that it was “time for the State itself to do its additional share.”³¹ Stressing that the upcoming winter would be a particularly tough time for New Yorkers, he proposed the creation of the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA) for “providing immediate relief” to those most suffering from the depression. He asked that twenty million dollars be spent on this new program. Roosevelt proposed a restructuring of the state income tax, which at the time only affected the richest of society.³² While public welfare assistance had always been part of Roosevelt’s agenda as Governor, he stressed that the new TERA program would not be a dole or grant. Instead, the state of New York would employ those who had been laid off by businesses, and put them to work on planned government projects. Roosevelt’s plea for assistance to the unemployed during the upcoming winter appealed to the legislature, which enacted TERA a few weeks later.³³

³¹ “Text of Gov. Roosevelt’s Message on Unemployment Relief,” *NYT*, 29 August 1931, 2.

³² “State Relief Plan is First in Nation,” *NYT*, 27 September 1931, 6. The New York State income tax only affected those making over \$5,000 a year, which was a fairly substantial salary.

³³ “Straus Will Direct Relief Work,” *NYT*, 30 September 1931, 1.

Although TERA was passed in 1931, projects funded by this program did not appear in Madison County until early 1933. In late 1931, the Madison County Commissioner of Welfare F.A. MacIntyre attempted to secure TERA funding only months after its inception. His pleas came in November, much too late for any counties to submit plans for that fiscal year.³⁴ In 1932, the bulk of state aid continued to be welfare assistance, and the efforts to bring work relief projects to the county mysteriously disappeared. Finally, in early 1933, the first work relief projects came to Madison County.³⁵ While the reasons for the delays are unclear, speculations can be made. First, to have work relief projects, the towns had to actively apply for funding. Although a significant amount of people could have benefited from these projects, Republican leaders in the towns and county may have been wary to actively request for aid, or simply did not feel that the state government needed to be involved in the affairs of their jurisdiction. Also, many residents in Madison County were probably listening more to Hoover's pleas for private and local assistance than to Roosevelt's offers of state aid. In the first few years of the Depression, most residents may have believed that Hoover's plan would ultimately work, and there was no need for Albany to be involved in the effort. Also, there were most likely fewer TERA representatives assigned to Madison County and other rural areas than to New York's larger cities, and hence less initiative from the state government to institute work relief projects in the area. Whatever the case, there were few work relief projects in Madison County by 1933.

While Madison County newspapers offered little support or criticism for the TERA projects, they voiced an overall concern about the increasing taxation associated

³⁴ *JPBS 1931* (Hamilton: Hamilton Republican Press, 1931), 104.

³⁵ *JPBS 1933* (Hamilton: Hamilton Republican Press, 1933), 27, 130.

with Roosevelt's policies. In late 1931, the *Hamilton Republican* warned that the state government should not simply give charity to the poor but should ensure that they were working for what they were paid.³⁶ The editors also warned that a sales tax might have to be imposed to satisfy Albany's spending habits, even though Roosevelt had assured his constituents that the first round of funding for TERA would come from income taxes levied against the richest in the state.³⁷ While there were these criticisms, the major reason for the lack of opinion about TERA in these newspapers was that the program had little effect on the county for two years after its enactment. The county treasurer listed TERA funding as "work relief" in 1933, listing \$9,260 in aid. He did not list an official TERA grant until 1934, when the county received \$46,703 for various projects. The next year the county received over \$75,000, and in 1936 TERA was discontinued. (See Table 1). So while TERA was an important step in the development of work relief assistance, the impact on Madison County was minimal, and so was the reaction towards its passage and implementation.

Public Works Administration

When Roosevelt became President in 1933, a number of work relief projects came to Madison County along with the rest of the country. The administration through these initiatives promised to put people back to work, while building the local infrastructure of communities, conserving the environment, and improving the quality of life for the American people. The first two of these programs were the Public Works Administration

³⁶ "Work or Charity," *HR*, 1 October 1931, 4.

³⁷ "War Taxes Coming," *HR*, 17 September 1931, 4.

(PWA) and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA).³⁸ While the PWA focused on programs designed to build cities' public works, FERA was a more general plan for work relief, designed to work through state relief organizations if they existed before the federal program. This meant that in New York, all federal money allocated through the FERA program was sent to the TERA fund and invested in TERA projects.³⁹

Although the federal government spent \$3.3 billion through the PWA across the country and Washington, D.C. and gave \$37 million of relief to New York through the FERA program, these two massive programs had little influence on Madison County.⁴⁰ The PWA established a few projects in the county. In late October 1933, a drainage project on Lenox and Sullivan streets in Oneida was funded through the PWA at a cost of \$106,000 and employed a hundred and fifty men for a few months.⁴¹ The PWA was also at work in Munnsville improving their water systems. In that instance, both federal money and local taxes contributed to the funding of the project.⁴² Besides these few anecdotes, the PWA had little impact on the county. Roosevelt's first federal work relief program was perhaps the most insignificant New Deal project that ever came to Madison County.

³⁸ Badger, 66, 191-96.

³⁹ Schneider and Deutsch, 322.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 322; Badger, 66.

⁴¹ "Lenox-Sullivan Drainage Project Will Employ 150," *Oneida Democratic-Union (ODU)*, 26 October 1933.

⁴² "Munnsville Planning for Water System," *ODU*, 30 November 1933.

Civil Works Administration

During the winter of 1933-34, the number of work relief projects in the state increased as a result of the Civil Works Administration (CWA). Just as Roosevelt had once been concerned about the citizens of New York and established TERA for the winter of 1930-31, so his administration now worried about how millions of Americans would survive the oncoming winter. As planned, the funding for the CWA could only be spent between November of 1933 and February of 1934. During the winter, nearly 834 million dollars would be spent on work relief around the country.⁴³

By mid-December, many projects in Madison County that had started with local funding were now being paid for by the Civil Works Administration, and organizers were designing an increasing number of federally funded plans. Road construction accounted for over half of all CWA money spent in the county. In Hamilton, sewer work on the old Chenango Canal bed now benefited from federal funding. Oneida received funds for improving its airport, as well as creating a tax map of the city. Other projects included an addition to the county jail, an improvement of Canastota and Sullivan's water and sewer systems, and additional work on the athletic fields at the state school in Morrisville.⁴⁴

There were mixed reports about how many people were employed by the CWA during that winter; estimates ranged from eight hundred to over a thousand. The vast majority of these workers were men, with only ten women employed as stenographers for the county administration of the federal program. The weekly cash payroll for the county peaked at

⁴³ Schneider and Deutsch, 324.

⁴⁴ "Awaiting Approval of CWA Relief Projects," *Madison County Leader and Observer (MCLO)*, 14 December 1933; "Ask 18,000 From CWA For Airport," *ODU*, 7 December 1933; "Canal Sewer Repair Become C.W.A. Project," *HR*, 21 December 1933.

\$16,000.⁴⁵ Nearly three thousand in the county had applied for a job under the CWA, but by the middle of January, 2116 were still registered without work.

The CWA was the first program to require those who needed work relief to sign up with the Administration. Organizers would then pick from this list those who would be chosen to work on projects. Essentially, it was a list of those who desired work, and from this list a rough figure of the unemployment rate can be obtained. The 1930 census found 15,806 gainful workers in Madison County.⁴⁶ Taking the number of people on the roll and dividing it by the number of workers in 1930 gives an unemployment rate of 18.7%. This was fairly high even during the Great Depression, when most rates hovered around 15% during the Hoover administration and Roosevelt's first term as President.⁴⁷ However, this number might have been impacted by a number of things. First, many people could have left the county in the four years between the census and the CWA, simply because there was little work. Second, residents from other counties could have signed up on Madison's roll of workers wanting employment, which would have made the unemployment rate artificially high. Third, some of the people on the list may not have needed work to survive, having enough to eat but very little monetary resources. The people in Madison County and those in the rest of upstate New York who were in the same situation understandably wanted to achieve a better standard of living and the government programs offering jobs through the CWA must have been appealing.

The CWA employed about a thousand people in Madison County at the height of the program, far short of the number who signed up to work. By the beginning of

⁴⁵ "One Thousand Forty at PWA and CWA in County," *ODU*, 11 January 1934.

⁴⁶ "Table 10—Unemployment Returns—Classes A and B, by Sex, for Counties and for Urban Places of 10,000 to 50,000: 1930," *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Unemployment*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C., GPO, 1931), 723.

⁴⁷ Badger, 66.

February, only 596 were at work, and the CWA began to employ fewer and fewer people.⁴⁸ Even at its peak, the Civil Works Administration fell far short of supplying work to meet the demand for employment in Madison County. While some saw the program as a failure, it did establish a new order of federal funding in Madison County. It was the first program to really analyze what Madison County needed improved. Traditionally, much of the expenditures went to road improvement. The fact that the CWA put an emphasis on this indicates that the program was not looking for jobs to create, although it is quite likely the notorious ‘leaf-raking’ projects occurred.⁴⁹ Also, the support from the CWA was always intertwined with local funding. At the beginning of February, the *Democratic Union* provided a list of projects undertaken by the CWA, and about two-thirds of these had county or municipal funding in addition to the federal support. The largest amount of money appropriated by local authorities for any one project was the sewer work in Hamilton. Included in the nearly ten thousands dollars spent on the project by that municipality was a \$3800 contract awarded to the Earlville Concrete Pipe Company for the new pipes.⁵⁰ This relationship between the federal government, private companies, and local municipalities seems to be typical for Madison County, and suggests that businesses in the area were still capable of providing significant products and services not only to government, but to private citizens as well.

Through the CWA, many individuals, not only in Madison County but rural areas around the country, had their first direct contact with the federal government. Not only

⁴⁸ “CWA Projects Going in Many Communities,” *ODU*, 1 February 1934.

⁴⁹ Harry Hopkins had emphasized that CWA money was not going to be used for leaf-raking, snow-shoveling, or street cleaning. Abuses of the federal money subsequently found became to be known as ‘leaf-raking’ projects. Badger, 198.

⁵⁰ “Canal Sewer Repair Becomes C.W.A. Project,” *HR*, 21 December 1933; “CWA Projects Going in Many Communities,” *ODU*, 1 February 1934.

that, but federal aid gradually increased during the existence of this program. While in New York federal money from the program for relief had eclipsed state and local funds by the fall of 1933, the shift came later for Madison County—in the spring of 1934. A few projects in the county were completely funded by the CWA, and only in the case of the Hamilton sewer project did local appropriations spend more money than the federal government. Obviously, many of these improvements would have not been initiated if it had not been for the federal impulse to do its best at providing work for the unemployed. Overall, it is difficult to gauge if there was a change of opinion regarding the CWA or federal work relief in the county. The *Oneida Democratic-Union* continually praised the measures through articles noting the progress of the projects and editorials supporting Roosevelt's plan. Meanwhile, conservative newspapers in the county rarely noted the program's local effects, but objected to the national cost of the program. Silence for local efforts, in such a heavily Republican county with right-leaning bias, usually implies general consent, or perhaps contentment, with the program. Still, the majority of Madison County were still concerned about the cost of these massive programs, complaints that would increase as Roosevelt's New Deal became more complex and the chance to oust him grew nearer.

Civilian Conservation Corps

While Madison County had many disagreements with Roosevelt and the Democratic Party, one program that favorable to most residents was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC was another part of the First Hundred Days legislation, passed only a few weeks after FDR's inauguration. The Corps was designed

to solve two pressing crises affecting the nation in 1933. The first was vast unemployment. The program targeted unemployed and unmarried young men for specific reasons. Males just out of school and out of work were the most likely to get into mischief if they were unemployed. They also were the most able workers of any demographic, able to do the labor-intensive work required of the Corps. The second problem was the state of nature in the United States. Settlers and pioneers had recklessly cut down forests and in many places the soil had been worn out after decades of intensive farming. While the Dust Bowl was the largest disaster of this sort, many parts of the country had problems with soil depletion and excessive erosion. Also, Madison County was plagued with diseases of trees, shrubs, and bushes, such as Dutch Elm disease and blister rust.⁵¹ The solution was to put unemployed men to work planting forests, treating diseases of trees and shrubs, and replenishing the soil.

The Civilian Conservation Corps also functioned differently from any other work relief program. Young men worked in camps, ate and slept together, and sent a large percentage of their money home to their families. Life in the camps resembled the military. Each camp was complete with a barracks, a mess hall, a recreation hall, a headquarters, and an infirmary. The members the Corps wore military uniforms. The first commanding officers were from the Army, although the Corps soon had their own leaders. There were regular inspections of cabins, morning exercises, and lectures on personal hygiene. Yet, the CCC was not a military organization. Its purpose was to help the civilian population in controlling erosion, building roads, and planting trees. While other New Deal programs focused primarily on urban improvement, the CCC was

⁵¹ "Dutch Elm Disease," *Cazenovia Republican (CR)*, 23 July 1936, 4.

committed to making nature profitable by restoring the environment, which had been destroyed by decades of reckless farming.⁵²

Because of the Corps' focus on rural concerns including agricultural output and soil preservation, its work had more relevance to Madison County and central New York than most other New Deal programs. In its first year, the Corps established camps throughout the region—in Sherburne, Oxford, Chenango Forks, Deposit, Oneonta, Fayetteville, Pulaski, North Pharsalia, and Port Byron. While Madison County did not have any camps by the end of 1933, young men from the area were already working away from home. Camp 37 in Sherburne took forty-five Madison County boys, limiting recruits to “any unemployed and unmarried young man between ages of eighteen and twenty-five, inclusive, [who has] actual dependents to whom a substantial portion of his pay must be allotted.” Every man was assured of housing, adequate food, and equipment. Employees received thirty dollars a month, and much of that wage was sent home to their families.⁵³ With two dozen camps already established in central New York by the beginning of 1934, federal officials decided to build twenty more camps in the state.⁵⁴ That spring, the first camp in Madison County was established near Brookfield at Moscow Hill; a second was soon added at Chenango Falls.⁵⁵ A year later, camps were located at DeRuyter and Sheds.⁵⁶

⁵² Alfred Emile Cornebise, *The CCC Chronicles: Camp Newspapers of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2004), 7-8; Billy Hinson, “The Civilian Conservation Corps in Mobile County, Alabama,” in *Hope Restored*, ed. by Bernard Sternsher, 32.

⁵³ “CCC Camp will take 45 Boys from Madison County,” *HR*, 29 March 1933.

⁵⁴ “New CCC Camp will be located near Brookfield,” *HR*, 29 March 1933.

⁵⁵ “CCC Camp at Brookfield,” *ODU*, 26 April 1934; “CCC Camp—Chittenango Falls,” *ODU*, 10 May 1934.

⁵⁶ “Over 5,000,000 Trees Near DeRuyter is Objective of Year-old C.C.C. Camp,” *HR*, 16 April 1936; “Six-Months-Old C.C.C. Camp at Sheds Plans Erosion Control in this area,” *HR*, 21 May 1936.

Of all the work relief programs in Madison County, residents felt the most connection to the work of the CCC. While TERA, the CWA, or WPA funded temporary projects, the camps were more permanent and focused on issues that mattered to the rural denizens of the county. The CCC workers also became personally involved with the welfare of the county. On a Sunday morning in March 1936, Jesse Moses, the chairman of the water, light, and sewer commissioners in Hamilton, noticed that the dam at Woodman's Pond had been damaged by heavy rains and needed emergency repair. By that evening, 150 men from the Moscow Hill camp were at work on the dam, replacing and reinforcing sandbags. Fifty more from Sherburne came to relieve them in the morning. Their work prevented dangerous flooding conditions in Hamilton. Coming home from this exhausting and unexpected evening of work, two CCC men, Clarence A. Rycraft and Stanley Sarenski, noticed a small fire at the Market Basket in town, and were the first on the scene. Although nobody was injured, the mayor sent out personal thanks "expressing appreciation of those units' 'heroic efforts'" in repairing the dam and helping put out the fire.⁵⁷

In the spring of 1936, the organizers of the CCC and the editors of the local papers established a media campaign to inform the public of the nature of the Corps' work throughout the county. Hugh E. Coe, the superintendent of the Moscow Hill camp, wrote that his division was replanting 200 acres of timberland that had been cut down for farming purposes and now lay fallow. Coe noted of the camp's work, "Outside of value of the trees grown, planting prevents soil erosion, holds the moisture in the soil, and also builds up the soil, restoring the fertility....The CCC camps have made it possible to do

⁵⁷ "Action taken to reconstruct dam before rains threaten to weaken bulwark of 2,000 bags," *HR*, 26 March 1936.

this work now that would have taken 20 years to do if it had not been for the CCC camps.”⁵⁸ The primary focus of the camp at DeRuyter was also reforestation. H. O. Devin wrote that over 3 million trees were planted by the camp in the previous year. The CCC also improved “truck trails,” designed to help firefighters to quench forest fires, which occurred at certain times of the year. They built fences and improved streams, and sponsored Blister Rust Control Week, putting emphasis on blister rust disease that affected White Pine trees and spread through currant bushes. Devin also emphasized the importance of the Civilian Conservation Corps around the country, saying that it had “taken thousands, yes, millions from the streets...and has placed them in a position where they are bound to gain physically, mentally, and morally.”⁵⁹

At Sheds, the focus was on soil conservation. Western Madison County and other areas in the region had suffered greatly from sheet erosion, which occurs when there are no properly built irrigation ditches for water to run off. Instead, water flows over a large area of farmland, creating many small ditches that eventually become deeper and deeper gullies. In late November 1935, a month after the camp was established, the Corps invited farmers in the area to a meeting discussing erosion and soil conservation. Out of this gathering came the Four County Soil Conservation Association, which was designed to improve the soil of the surrounding area. The camp planned a two-pronged strategy. First, to prevent further gullying, they built dams in some of the largest ditches to slow down the speed of the water. Also, they planted various species of bushes were planted to hold the soil in place. The second step was replenishing the soil. This was accomplished by chopping down trees and having their tops “carefully cut and spread on

⁵⁸ “Moscow Hill CCC Camp Only 8 Months Old; Nearby Land Improvements Noted,” *HR*, 9 April 1936.

⁵⁹ “Over 5,000,000 trees near DeRuyter is Objective of Year-old C.C.C. Camp,” *HR*, 16 April 1936. Similar article also appeared in the *Oneida Democratic Union*, 2 Apr 1936.

the ground, . . . increasing [the] organic matter of the soil.”⁶⁰ The work done by the Sheds group as well as others in the county had important and long-lasting effects for the farmers of Madison County.

The accomplishments of the CCC were decidedly different from the work of other New Deal programs. Most road improvement projects sponsored by the CWA or TERA lasted only a few weeks and provided men with work and a paycheck, and at the end of the day, workers would go back to their families. In the CCC, young men, who could serve anywhere from six months to two years at a particular camp, ate, slept, and worked together. This provided a sense of camaraderie for local men that was unique to the camps. The camps also established a unique culture which was recorded in Corps newspapers. These are detailed extensively in Alfred Cornebise’s book, *The CCC Chronicles*. In Madison County, the *Hamilton Republican* refers to the *Conservator*, which the Corps planned to publish in Hamilton for the camps of the “district,” but it is unclear how many camps this newspaper reached, or if it ever was published at all.⁶¹ In these newspapers, men of the camp could submit short stories, illustrations, and serials, all for the reading pleasure of the camp’s inhabitants. It gave workers an artistic outlet during the intense labor of the camps.

The CCC is well-remembered by those it affected. The National Association of Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni, founded in 1977, now has 4,500 members, although that total has dwindled because of the deaths of veteran CCC workers. The Association writes that “many [boys] had never been beyond the borders of their state, and others had not even left home. Yet, many would never return. They would choose to

⁶⁰ “Six-Months-Old CCC Camp at Sheds Plans Erosion Control in this Area,” *HR*, 21 May 1936.

⁶¹ “CCC Camp Will Take 45 Boys from Madison County,” *HR*, 29 March 1933. I have tried to track down *The Conservator*, but my efforts have been unsuccessful.

remain in towns and villages near their camps....Those that did return...came back as successful products of an experiment in living that had renewed and stored their confidence in themselves and in their country.”⁶² Before the CCC, these men were part of a lost generation that had little hope of finding a job. When they were discharged from the CCC, the boys turned men left “with a light of hope in his eye, and the faith that spell[ed] success.”⁶³ Certainly that was the sentiment in Madison County. While the papers railed against the Social Security Act, the AAA, and the WPA, they remained relatively silent on the CCC. However, in one *Cazenovia Republican* issue, the publisher wrote in his “In Brief” column, “200,000 youths in the CCC camps are studying for the future.”⁶⁴ This is how many saw the CCC—a program that fought the forces of Depression, the abuse of the environment, and the increasing isolation of the American people while improving thousands of acres of woodland and farmland.

Works Progress Administration

The last and greatest New Deal work relief program was the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Enacted in 1935 under Roosevelt’s Second Hundred Days legislation, the WPA was initially funded at 4.8 billion dollars.⁶⁵ The WPA focused heavily on urban projects; the project’s work on New York City has been studied extensively as a great achievement in urban planning and beautification.⁶⁶ By the time

⁶² NACCA, “History of the Civilian Conservation Corps,” 3 December 2004, www.cccalumni.org.

⁶³ *The Bugle*, 7 October 1935 (CCC newspaper in Barnwell, South Carolina), quoted in Cornebise, 234.

⁶⁴ “In Brief,” *Cazenovia Republican (CR)*, 11 October 1936, 4.

⁶⁵ Badger, 201.

⁶⁶ See John David Millett, *The Works Progress Administration in New York City* (Chicago: Committee on Public Administration of the Social Science Research Council by Public Administration Service, 1938); Jerre Gerlando Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal: the Federal Writers’ Project, 1935-1943* (Boston: Little Brown), 1972; Diana L. Linden and Larry A. Greene, “Charles Alston’s Harlem Hospital Murals:

the administration was dismantled in 1943, it had employed eight million people, far more than any other work relief project. This program was marked by very specific projects, including the Federal Writers' Project and Federal Art Project, which focused on providing relief for white-collar workers.⁶⁷ It was the most ambitious government work relief project up to that time.

Like most work relief projects, the WPA did not greatly affect Madison County. In May of 1936, only 130 were employed through the WPA; by September, that number had dropped to 112.⁶⁸ The WPA funded a few sewer projects in Oneida, and twenty-two women sewing for the Red Cross. WPA funding also partially contributed to the foundation for the Broad Street Hospital in Oneida.⁶⁹ New Woodstock received monetary support for the addition to its high school. Over fifty thousand dollars was appropriated for this project, although half of the men employed were imported from outside of the county "due to the lack of that type of [skilled] workers in Madison County."⁷⁰ The county administration also commissioned two art projects funded by the WPA. Alizon M. Kingsbury received nine hundred dollars for a mural at the Canastota post office while Humbert Albrizio was compensated to the amount of five hundred and fifty dollars for his work in the Hamilton post office.⁷¹

Another project completed supported by the WPA was a sewer line in Hamilton on Eaton and Utica Streets. The village contracted with the Solsville Construction

Cultural Politics in Depression Era Harlem," *Prospects* 26 (2001): 391-421; Beth S. Wenger, "Memory as Identity: The Invention of the Lower East Side," *American Jewish History* 85, no. 1 (1997): 3-27.

⁶⁷ Badger, 204; Francis V. O'Connor, "The New Deal Art Projects in New York," *The American Art Journal* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1969): 58.

⁶⁸ "Madison County Projects," *CR*, 7 May 1936, 1; "Relief Projects Cost 7,459 in County for Month of March," *CR*, 2 July 1936, 1.

⁶⁹ "Finding Job Work," *ODU*, 5 December 1935; "Looking Backward over 1935 Events," *ODU*, 2 January 1936.

⁷⁰ "New Woodstock Asks WPA Aid for Addition to High School," *CR*, 2 February 1936, 1.

⁷¹ O'Connor, 70-71.

Company and twenty hired men to build the sewer pipes, while the WPA employed twenty additional men to lay it.⁷² The workers completed the project ahead of schedule, but someone neglected to tell the federal coordinators. Six months after the completion of the projects, WPA officials sent a note to Hamilton village officers offering assistance to finish the project. Leon Waldman, the Superintendent of the village, wrote back that the project had already been completed. The mistake was duly noted in the *Republican*, which called the WPA “ubigutous” [sic] and an “illustration of inefficiency, misinformation, and a welter of confusion.”⁷³ Lest we forget, the conservative newspapers of Madison County were quick to point out the deficiencies of Roosevelt’s programs, and they did not leave the administration much room for error.

While one can find many examples of work relief in any area of the country during the New Deal, most programs, save for the CCC, had short-term impacts. The Civil Works Administration probably employed more people at any one time than any other federal work relief program in the county, but even it hired far fewer than the number who applied. Nonetheless, the scarcity of this type of assistance does not suggest that these programs fell short of expectations. Many of Madison County’s residents were farmers, and thus land-rich and money poor. Whereas those in urban areas had little means to support themselves beyond wages, rural economies had unsold produce, milk, and other agricultural commodities on which they could subsist. Roosevelt’s detractors in Madison County mostly criticized the waste and inefficiency of the projects, not that they employed fewer than those that applied. The only project that completely escaped criticism was the CCC, which was admired for its work in the county, the benefits it

⁷² *HR*, 12 December 1935.

⁷³ “WPA project here is approved as autos whiz over completed work,” *HR*, 22 October 1936.

provided their young men, and the improvement of farming and undeveloped land that was sorely needed.

Economic Regulations

National Recovery Administration

Through welfare assistance provided through state governments and relief supported by federal resources, the Roosevelt administration ensured that government provided economic stimulus to bring the country out of Depression. Although these projects were effective, Roosevelt knew that the federal government could not be the only actor in the national economy. Roosevelt's goal was not to eliminate business, but rather encourage American businesses, from small proprietors to large corporations, to regulate themselves for the good of the country. The National Recovery Administration (NRA), part of the larger National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), was the administration's first attempt to work with businesses to control wages to reduce unemployment. The government worked with industries separately to determine at what price and number of hours controls would be set. Depending on the industry, the hours ranged anywhere from thirty to forty hours a week and the wages varied between eight and fifteen dollars a week.⁷⁴ According to the strategy of the NRA, these controls would reduce unemployment, more evenly distribute wages among the American labor force, and increase purchasing power for all Americans. The NRA had difficulty imposing its rules simply because businesses, especially large industries, could simply choose to ignore them. Henry Ford was particularly resistant to any federally imposed wage controls.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, most industries did comply with the NRA, but wanted the assurance that they could still control prices. Hugh S. Johnson, head of the NRA, agreed to this compromise, but many consumer advocacy groups disagreed with his judgment. They

⁷⁴ John Kennedy Ohl, *Hugh S. Johnson and the New Deal* (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1985), 113-37.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 127-28.

reasoned that if industries could set their own prices, then they could simply recoup losses from the imposition of higher wages.⁷⁶ The struggles of the NRA reveal the difficulties in Roosevelt's plan to regulate industries in order to provide decent wages during the Great Depression.

While the NRA was primarily concerned with establishing wage controls on large industries, Johnson instituted a populist strategy in order to gain support for the initiative. If employers would cooperate with the 35-hour work week and a minimum wage of forty cents an hour, they could display the famed Blue Eagle icon in the front window, indicating that they “did their part.”⁷⁷ All around the country, employers signed on to comply with the NRA codes, even in rural Madison County. In all of the major towns in the county—including Oneida, Morrisville, Cazenovia, Hamilton, and Canastota—businesses registered as active members of the NRA through local postmasters, Chambers of Commerce, or other business associations.⁷⁸ The propaganda campaign for the NRA also focused on consumers. In Madison County, a drive of consumer pledges began around September after the registration of commercial establishments. Local Boy Scouts went door to door to sign up people who pledged only to patronize businesses that were NRA-compliant.⁷⁹ This technique gave consumers a chance to feel involved in this war against the Depression.

As businesses and consumers continued to agree to follow the terms set forth by the NRA, the ever inventive Johnson decided to organize parades around the country to build support for the program. The Roosevelt administration asserted that the success of

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 175-83, 193.

⁷⁷ *Badger*, 83.

⁷⁸ *HR*, 31 August 1933, 1.

⁷⁹ “Consumer NRA Pledge Begins Soon,” *ODU*, 7 September 1933, 1.

their policies to bring the country out of Depression “carri[ed] certain psychological values that are as priceless as patriotism itself at this juncture of our economic history.”⁸⁰ Because the NRA depended on everyone working together, the policy needed resounding, even exuberant, support. In fact, Johnson, who had worked for the War Department in the Great War conscripting troops, wanted to “stimulate the same coercive community pressure for conformity that had been so successfully invoked in World War I.”⁸¹ In order to make this happen, Johnson called for “Buy Now” parades, which encouraged citizens to buy from NRA vendors. This strategy would accomplish three objectives. First, the parades would stir up excitement about the NRA. Second, it would pressure businesses not conforming to NRA rules to see the consumer market that would boycott them if they did not comply. Finally, it would encourage citizens to spend money, a strategy that even Hoover had used as a means to stimulate the economy. Johnson scheduled these parades for the fall of 1933.

While the movement to comply with the NRA was strong in Madison County, there were different responses to the new program. On August 24, 1933, on the back page of the *Hamilton Republican*, a near-full page panel proclaimed the “Roll of Honor” for the NRA. Each commercial establishment that participated in the NRA had an advertisement in which it voiced its support for the program. Participants included businesses like the National Hamilton Bank, Smalley’s Theatre, Larsen Hardware, Colgate Shoe Shop, College Pharmacy, and Wood’s Garage. Businesses known by the names of their proprietors also gave support. L.J. Danehy owned the Red and White grocery store. John MacQueen was a clothier. J.L. Flower ran a dry cleaning business.

⁸⁰ George McJimsey, Gen. Ed. *Documentary History of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidency* vol. 17 (Congressional Information Service, Inc., 2003), 575-76.

⁸¹ Badger, 83.

All of them voluntarily participated in the NRA. A similar advertisement ran in the *Oneida Democratic Union*, which had on its roll fifty-six businesses. However, while many participated in the new program, there were mixed attitudes about it. Some likened the Depression to America's newest enemy; John MacQueen proclaimed that "a country that has never lost a war is now on the verge of its greatest and noblest victory." The *Democratic Union* called for a united effort to combat the Depression, asserting that "no sensible person sees in this effort any threat to the success of any person or legitimate business. We are all to co-operate for the public welfare and future safety of our country."⁸² Nower's Market of Hamilton declared that the NRA would say goodbye to "slave drivers," "profiteers," and "shirkers." Others had a more muted tone. The "Republican Press," as the newspaper in Hamilton called itself, stated, "We're doing our part. We've already put into effect here the President's recommendations for NRA observance and practice."⁸³ As with the rest of the nation, the difference in attitudes in Madison County between those who were solidly behind the policy and those who went grudgingly along with it were evident.

While many conservative residents had their reservations about NRA policies, the parades in Madison County were a resounding success. The towns of Madison County participated in two parades in the fall of 1933. On September 27, 1933, one NRA parade was held in Utica. Both the *Madison County Leader and Observer*, based in Morrisville, and the *Hamilton Republican* hailed it as one of the largest peacetime demonstrations ever held in Central New York. The parade involved thirty-seven cities, fifty bands, two hundred decorated floats, and about 16,000 marchers. It took the entire parade four hours

⁸² Editorial, *ODU*, 16 November 1933, 2.

⁸³ *HR*, 24 August 1933, 8; *ODU*, 28 September 1933, 8.

to pass by the reviewing stand. The Morrisville American Legion and the Morrisville High School Band both marched, while the Colgate University Band from Hamilton led the fourth division of marchers. In general, both papers reported a wonderful day of “cooperation and neighborliness,” while also recognizing that the parade was a “boon to many Utica merchants” because of the large number of consumers gathered in the city.⁸⁴

On October 12, 1933, a few weeks after the Utica parade, Madison County had its own festivities in Oneida. The *Leader* predicted the participation of two hundred delegations and a thousand decorated automobiles.⁸⁵ Organizations in Oneida had skipped Utica’s parade to prepare for their own. This parade would be not only for the NRA, but for Madison County to show unity in their struggle. The parade was organized in the same way as Utica’s, with various organizations and occupations coming to march in the parade, including bugle bands, high school marching bands, postal employees, factory workers, fraternal bodies, and so on. The *Democratic Union* also noted the large turnout for their parade, reporting that the first divisions had finished the route before the last divisions had started. As in a regular parade, there were prizes for the best floats, with the Oneida schools coming in first place. Local businesses and companies, like New York Light and Telephone and Ruby Lumber also participated with floats in the parade. The *Union* declared that the parade was a “splendid manifestation of co-operative spirit.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ “Plans for big NRA parade for Utica District,” *Madison County Leader and Observer (MCLO)*, 21 September 1933; “Hub Sends Delegation NRA ‘Buy Now’ Drive,” *MCLO*, 28 September 1933; “Local Merchants Participate in Utica NRA Parade; Colgate Band Leads Fourth Division,” *HR*, 28 September 1933.

⁸⁵ “County NRA Parade Marching in Oneida,” *MCLO*, 12 October 1933.

⁸⁶ “Oneida Celebrates Recovery From Long Depression by Monster Parade Thurs.,” *ODU*, 12 October 1933; “Oneida’s NRA Parade Splendid Manifestation of Co-operative Spirit,” *ODU*, 19 October 1933.

Without a doubt, the people of Madison County responded enthusiastically to the parades, though they were many skeptical of federal intervention. While one may have expected this kind of response from a heavily Democratic area, the success of the parades in Madison County shows “how little action was needed to restore Americans’ hope about the nation’s future” during the Great Depression.⁸⁷ People were desperate to regain a sure economic footing, and so they responded well to any effort that might be implemented. Charles Alexander has a more complex view of this enthusiasm. The public, according to Alexander, saw the Depression as an attack on the capitalist system, which they believed was an integral part of the American economy. “Nationalism [in the New Deal] found expressions in both national and regional planning movements,” and the NRA parades was one way ordinary people could participate in defeating Depression.⁸⁸ People took Roosevelt’s calls for rallies to defeat the menace of depression quite seriously, much in the same way they held parades for soldiers marching off to Europe for the Great War. Those in Madison County who opposed Roosevelt did not initially perceive the NRA to be an attack on the free enterprise system. Although rhetorical accusations of Roosevelt being a socialist would increase as November of 1936 neared,⁸⁹ most saw the NRA as a collective effort to combat the forces of the brooding economic downturn. The Depression was the enemy of the American people, and it would take the collaborative action of the nation to restore the vitality of the capitalist economic system.

⁸⁷ Sternsher, 5.

⁸⁸ Charles C. Alexander, *Nationalism in American Thought: 1930-1945* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1969), 23.

⁸⁹ “He Ought to Know,” *HR*, 15 October 1936, 4.

While there was initially high-spirited support for the NRA policies, the enthusiasm died down quickly after the parades. Many historians who have analyzed the failure of the National Recovery Administration assert that it ultimately was unable to enforce the ambiguous and highly complicated codes that it created, and hence the tenuous fervor artificially created by the administration inevitably receded.⁹⁰ While this may have been the case for wage workers and large corporations, support for the NRA in Madison County most likely receded because its regulations were inapplicable and unneeded regarding small-town proprietors. Only a week after the Oneida parade, the federal government passed an exemption of all code regulations for small-town merchants, identified as those with “less than five employers in towns with less than 2500 citizens.”⁹¹ Since the codes clearly pertained to corporations with regular wage labor, which many small businesses and farmers did not have, it made sense for the federal government to exempt those enterprises. This exemption left only a few businesses, mostly in Oneida, following NRA regulations. Many in the county could no longer see the significance of “doing their part.” Again, the most important concern for the citizens of Madison County was depressed prices, not wage regulations. The Blue Eagle would still be emblazoned on the *Republican* and the *Democratic Union* for a few years after 1933, but the effectiveness of the program was neutralized. While the NRA created the most excitement of any New Deal program, its lack of applicability made the codes irrelevant to most denizens of Madison County by the end of 1933.

⁹⁰ Badger, 83-84; Brand, 30, 118.

⁹¹ “NRA Exemption of Small Town Stores and Farmers,” *MCLC*, 2 November 1933.

The Dairy Industry and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration

While Madison County was unconcerned with the economic regulations set forth by the National Recovery Administration, they did have their troubles in their own economic sector, the dairy industry. Although they did not suffer the same plight as the Dust Bowl counterparts, who were completely devastated by drought, overwhelming debt, and zero crop production, low dairy prices impeded on the ability of New York farmers to pay off debts or modernize their farms. Milk prices had risen in the late 1920s after five years of postwar decline, but in 1930 and 1931, prices dropped sharply. In February of 1930, the market price for butter in the state was 35 ½ cents a pound and cheese was 18 cents a pound, compared with prices of 50 and 24 ½ respectively not six months earlier.⁹² The decrease in demand reflected the tough times of the depression, and lack of monetary resources caused the extremely poor to cut down on their milk consumption, relying on water as a substitute. Farmers found themselves increasing milk production during the early years of the depression to compensate for low prices, resulting in a surplus. The *Hamilton Republican* explained to its readers the economic situation, reporting that “increased production combined with a curtailed demand due to general business depression...has caused a decline in prices.”⁹³

The nature of milk as a commodity also played an important role in the fluctuations of supply and demand. Milk farmers, or producers, got the most value from fluid milk, the type that would be sold directly to the public for drinking. This milk was the best and freshest, literally the cream of the crop, and producers were interested in selling as much of it as they could. Dealers, or those who buy milk from producers and

⁹² “Milk Market is Now Demoralized,” *BC*, 12 February 1930, 1.

⁹³ E.A. Crawford, “Reason for Milk Surplus is Explained,” *HR*, 27 March 1930.

sell it to the public, were only interesting in buying as much as they could sell. Fluid milk only lasts a few weeks before spoiling, and so dealers had to be certain they could sell most of their product. Producers would sell lower quality milk to processing plants, which would make it into cheese, cream, or butter. For it, they received a lower price than for fluid milk. However, if producers could not sell their freshest milk to dealers, they sent it to processing plants in order to cut losses. Producers hoped to sell as much fluid milk as possible, and the more dairy farmers sold in that sector, the larger the profits.⁹⁴

With a surplus of fluid milk flooding the metropolitan markets, dealers cut prices drastically to compete with each other. Between World War I and the early 1930s, producers and dealers had relied on the Dairymen's League to control prices in New York. The League was a conglomerate of nearly half of all dairy farmers in the state, and also included representatives from dealer organizations, including the largest, the Borden Farm Products Company. With prices falling, the League, led by its president Fred Sexauer, recommended that farmers cut production of milk, advising them to "dispose of unprofitable cows, veal more calves," and "stimulate greater consumption of milk in farm homes."⁹⁵ They also planned to renegotiate contracts with their members, as well as with other independent producers, in order to limit production and raise prices. However, some producers distrusted the League's motivations, and believed that the change in contracts and its desire for more oversight benefited the large dealers. They were able to persuade enough farmers not to agree to the new contracts, and the League's inability to handle the crisis of milk prices was a significant blow to their influence in the industry.

⁹⁴ Abrahams, 92.

⁹⁵ "Dairymen's Dinner Largely Attended," *HR*, 30 October 1930.

The failure of the League's goal of raising milk prices indicated the ineffectiveness of private attempts to shore up the dairy industry, and the need for government involvement to improve the economic health of upstate New York.

Although many farmers were pleased by the League's defeat, the dispute over extremely low prices continued. This frustration culminated in the milk strikes of August 1933. For two weeks in the late summer, farmers expressed their desperation by dumping milk into the ditches and gulches of upstate New York. Their basic demand was for a single price for all fluid milk leaving farms, whether it went for processing or for fluid consumption; in this way farmers could better guarantee their profits. In a few places, the situation turned violent. Milk trucks were overturned and farmers blocked trucks from delivering their product. Fearing Communist influence in these strikes, local law enforcement officials as well as the State Police, who had been called in by Governor Herbert Lehman, dispersed dumping demonstrations and arrested those who threatened violence at processing plants. Although most places in New York did not suffer greatly from a milk shortage, the strike certainly brought the plight of the dairy farmer to the attention of many New Yorkers.⁹⁶

The problems besetting the dairy industry had great significance in Madison County. Every week, the county's newspapers reported new developments on price issues, indicating the importance of the economic sector for the residents of Madison County. Editors of the newspapers frequently reported issues discussed during the Dairymen's League's meetings, and often published quotes from Fred Sexauer, the president of the League. While many farmers in Madison County participated in the milk

⁹⁶ "More Milk Spilled as Strike Spreads," *NYT*, 3 August 1933; "Farmers Clubbed in Up-State Strike," *NYT*, 2 August 1933; Abrahams, 95.

strike of late 1933, their actions were not as severe as in other places. The *Madison County Leader and Observer* called the strike “the greatest internal disturbance in the history of the county,” but gave no indication of any particularly violent events occurring within the county’s borders.⁹⁷ Those who were part of the League in Madison County denounced the violence associated with the strike, and their influence seemed to extinguish any violent uprising.⁹⁸ About 200 herd owners from the League joined the strike in a peaceful manner by declaring a milk holiday during a meeting in Canastota for farmers in Madison County and eastern Onondaga County. They refused to provide milk to dealers, but they never took action against the processing plants in the region.⁹⁹

Many individuals who were not dairy farmers took a personal interest in the economic crisis. Dexter H. Teed, a frequent op-ed writer for the *Republican* and a well-known citizen of Hamilton, understood the farmers’ frustration. While he disagreed with the idea of striking, he agreed in principle with the producers’ demands. He proclaimed that the underlying problem with milk prices was preventing “unscrupulous groups, corporations and all capitalistic enterprises from exploiting labor.”¹⁰⁰ The three groups he was probably referring to were the Dairymen’s League, which represented both dealer and producer interest, independent dealers who often bought milk from other states if the price was cheaper, and Communists, who had gained some influence in the North Country. Teed called on the State Milk Control Board to prove their worth, and guarantee a fair price for New York’s dairy farmers. While Teed was not the voice for all the residents of the county, he hints that the economic situation of the dairy farmer was so

⁹⁷ “Reviewing the Situation From a County Seat Desk,” *MCLC*, 10 August 1933.

⁹⁸ E.A. Crawford, “The Milk Situation,” *HR*, 3 August 1933.

⁹⁹ “More Milk Spilled,” *NYT*, 3 August 1933.

¹⁰⁰ Dexter Teed, “Speaking Frankly,” *HR* 10 August 1933.

distressing that perhaps the state and federal governments should be involved in improving their situation. The milk strikes brought the Depression home to Madison County, and no single economic issue received as much space on the front page of the county's newspapers as the plight of the region's dairy farmers.

By the winter of 1933, it was clear that something more had to be done. The New York State Milk Control Board did establish a price floor at which dealers could buy milk from producers. This was moderately successful, but cheaper milk from outside states still threatened the profits for farmers in New York. This problem was particularly acute in the largest market, New York City, where dealers had their choice of producers from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Vermont. In addition to the price fixing, the state also established the first publicly financed advertising campaign for milk in New York. Many newspapers in Madison County did their part by displaying the small, ubiquitous "Drink Milk—It's Good for You" slogan in their papers, some even putting the logo prominently beside the title of the paper. The state continued to contribute to this campaign throughout the Depression. It was an early example of public service advertising campaign that state and federal governments frequently use today to influence the behavior of the public. While the campaign helped, the state had no control over outside producers, which supplied about thirty-five percent of New York City's consumption. In this context, it was clear that the federal government needed to intervene.¹⁰¹

As Roosevelt campaigned for the 1932 election, he spoke to many different figureheads in the agricultural industry about the plight of farmers. While Roosevelt the politician gave "characteristically vague but sympathetic" responses to these ideas, he did

¹⁰¹ Abrahams, 96.

use some of them in his plan to solve American agricultural problems.¹⁰² In early 1932, a group of Roosevelt advisors created a plan that would become the hallmarks of Roosevelt's Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA). This plan had three components designed to raise prices—acreage restriction, processing taxes, and subsidies to farmers who complied with agricultural production schedules.¹⁰³ When the Supreme Court repealed the AAA in 1935, the Roosevelt administration was forced to implement changes in its policy. The new genesis of the AAA in 1938 worked more closely with state governments and agricultural cooperatives, which allowed the principles behind the AAA to last for decades after the New Deal period.¹⁰⁴

At its onset, the AAA focused on two regulations to combat depressed milk prices in New York—controlling production and fixing prices. The AAA's first action was establishing production quotas at 90% the previous year's production for every dairy farmer. The AAA levied processing taxes against plants to pay for this production control program. The program also attempts to fix prices, but resale prices, or the value at which dealers sold to consumers, were more difficult for the AAA to set simply because of the sheer number of resellers. By 1935, the AAA dropped its plan to fix prices and hoped to raise them by limiting production, similar to the industrial strategy of raising prices by raising wages.¹⁰⁵

These first attempts by the AAA were moderately successful, but these policies involved unprecedented federal intervention, a fact that made many conservatives, not

¹⁰² Gertrude Almy Slichter, "Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Farm Problem, 1929-1932," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 43, no. 2, (September 1956): 251.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 248.

¹⁰⁴ Abrahams, 97, 99.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

only of upstate New York but other rural areas, uneasy.¹⁰⁶ Critics challenged the constitutionality of the AAA, and questioned whether the Roosevelt administration would be successful at imposing its policies in the long-term. The Supreme Court found in favor of these critics, overturning one state policy and one federal policy in 1935 and 1936 respectively. The first forbid New York from fixing prices for milk produced out-of-state and sold in the state. The AAA then took on the responsibility of setting these milk prices. Then, in early 1936, the Supreme Court ruled that the AAA could not create processing taxes to pay for production controls. This second action deprived the AAA of its greatest amount of influence.¹⁰⁷ The AAA attempted to circumvent this decision by buying milk from producers. In 1936, the federal government, through the AAA, purchased 6,386,380 pounds of surplus dry skim and evaporated milk.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, the Supreme Court effectively stripped the AAA of its power to control production, and thus the role of the federal government in New York's dairy industry became unclear. By 1936, the power of regulation reverted back to state and private institutions.

Attitudes in Madison County on the AAA varied from frustration with the struggling economy to understanding of the difficulty of the dairy situation. The conservative newspapers saw this program as simply another example of unneeded federal intervention and felt that conditions would not be any better or worse had the government not intervened. The *Hamilton Republican* was particularly critical of Roosevelt's policies, remarking that "to pay a man cash for not doing something

¹⁰⁶ Jean Choate, *Disputed Ground: Farm Groups That Opposed the New Deal Agricultural Program* (Jefferson, North Carolina, McFarland and Company, 2002), 73, 92.

¹⁰⁷ Abrahams, 97.

¹⁰⁸ Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, *Five Million People, One Billion Dollars: Final Report of the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, November 1, 1931-June 30, 1937* (Albany: State Office Building), 50.

productive seems like a happening in *Alice in Wonderland*.”¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, J. Hubbard, writing in the *Cazenovia Republican*, noted that, “one of the great difficulties in obtaining a satisfactory means of farm relief lies in the fact that it is almost impossible to organize agriculture.”¹¹⁰ However, those that disagreed with Roosevelt’s agricultural policies in upstate New York were not alone. Many farmers were bitterly opposed to his production controls as well, preferring to produce what they could and sell it at the price they could get. One Illinois farmer who was critical of Roosevelt proudly stated, “I can make a living without government help....I’d rather run the farm myself. I hope they won’t take it away from me....I’d rather sell 200 bushels of corn at 40 cents than 150 bushels at 50 cents....Every man would get along if he’d spend less than he takes in.”¹¹¹ Others were also concerned that the rise of agricultural imports into the United States, along with controlled production, were taking profits away from farmers at home and giving them to producers abroad. The *Republican* presented statistics showing the monumental amount of hogs, corn, and wheat that had been shipped into the United States during his first term.¹¹² With all of these complaints against the Roosevelt administration’s agricultural policies, one cannot characterize American farmers during the period as ungrateful; there were clearly shortcomings to these policies. However, many of the organized protest groups against Roosevelt’s AAA disagreed about alternatives to his policy, and therefore never gained significant support. Perhaps these groups were searching for the return of the independent farmer, an idealistic concept dying in the 1930s after two decades of tough economic conditions for the agricultural

¹⁰⁹ “The A.A.A.,” *HR*, 13 February 1936, 4.

¹¹⁰ “The A.A.A.,” *Cazenovia Republican*, 13 February 1936, 4.

¹¹¹ Choate, 59, 169.

¹¹² “The Foreign Flood,” *HR*, 27 August 1936, 2.

sector.¹¹³ Those who agreed with Roosevelt's policy interpreted his actions as keeping the interest of the small farmer in mind as cooperatives grew ever larger.

In the case of the New York dairy industry, there is still disagreement about the effectiveness of the AAA. With a number of actors involved, there are debates about whether federal intervention, state assistance, organized cooperatives, or simply the improving economic conditions was most responsible for the industry stabilizing in the late 1930s. State-centered theorists hold that the AAA was the major perpetuating force for the price control of agricultural commodities during the New Deal period. While the federal policy needed support from farm organizations initially, Roosevelt was able to implement the AAA with relative ease after its passage in May of 1933. Kenneth Finegold concludes that the only significant protest of Roosevelt's agricultural policy came from industrial interests, not renegade farmers.¹¹⁴ This view sees the AAA as one of the first attempts of the federal government to establish agricultural policies, and that the impetus to control prices and stabilize the agricultural economy came from the federal government, not farm organizations.¹¹⁵ These arguments came about as a reaction to what state-centered theorists called "society-centered theorists." This latter group argued that the genesis of farm policy in the New Deal came about through rural populist movements.¹¹⁶

In the past fifteen years, there have been new interpretations in this debate, especially when analyzing the federal government's intervention in the dairy industry.

¹¹³ Choate, 190, 193.

¹¹⁴ Kenneth Finegold, "From Agrarianism to Adjustment: The Political Origins of New Deal Agricultural Policy," *Politics and Society* 11, no. 1 (1982): 24, 27.

¹¹⁵ Gregory Hooks, "From an Autonomous to a Captured State Agency: The Decline of the New Deal in Agriculture," *American Sociological Review* 55, no. 1 (February 1990): 30, 33.

¹¹⁶ Jess Gilbert and Carolyn Howe, "Beyond 'State Vs. Society': Theories of the State and New Deal Agricultural Policies," *American Sociological Review* 56, no. 2 (April 1991): 204-05.

Although more recent historians have classified their argument as a mixture of state and society theories, Paul Abrahams came to similar conclusions nearly forty years ago. His study concluded that successful government involvement in New York's dairy industry was a "Federal-State" initiative.¹¹⁷ New analyses have added new factors. E. Melanie DuPuis found that "sub-national" states not only in New York but also in Wisconsin and California made attempts to control the failing industry before the creation of the AAA.¹¹⁸ Certainly this was true in New York and Madison County. The attempts by the Dairymen's League and the state government indicate that those in control of the New York dairy industry before the Depression were not desperate for federal intervention to save their economy. While the AAA initially did not work with these groups in 1933, its rebirth in 1938 provisioned for consideration of state and private influences in economic policy making. Although the evidence does affirm this relationship in the New York dairy industry, there is not necessarily a correlation between this situation and other developments of agricultural policy during the New Deal era. Historians should reconsider the genesis of those policies to determine if such cooperative relationships existed in other commodities, or whether the AAA took a more dominant role in formulating such strategies.

¹¹⁷ Abrahams, 100-01.

¹¹⁸ E. Melanie DuPuis, "Sub-National State Institutions and the Organization of Agricultural Resource Use: The Case of the Dairy Industry," *Rural Sociology* 58, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 440.

The 1936 Presidential Election

In 1936, after four years of New Deal policies, a nation voted on whether to keep its President or replace him. Essentially, it was a referendum on Roosevelt's New Deal ideas. The Republican challenger was Alfred Landon, the Republican Governor of Kansas who had had political success in an era where upstart Republicans were scarce. Landon ran a campaign modeling himself as a "New Deal Republican," one that agreed with many of Roosevelt's policies in theory but criticized how those ideas were implemented. A big issue in the election was Roosevelt's massive spending and the large national debt that had built up. The *Cazenovia Republican* noted that New Deal spending had equaled all federal expenditures from the Washington to the Taft administration.¹¹⁹ Republicans thought that the bold moves of the Roosevelt administration would prove to be their undoing in the 1936 election.

The newspapers of Madison County were certainly optimistic about Republican chances in November. All the newspapers in the county, save for the *Oneida Democratic-Union* and the *Earlville Standard*, supported Landon, having little positive to say about the Roosevelt administration and its policies. They noted the "enormous amount of inefficiency in the present relief system," and were critical of his agricultural policy for reasons described above.¹²⁰ J. Hubbard, who wrote about the election for the *Cazenovia Republican* through the year, warned that new taxes would probably have to be imposed to pay off the debt, and that "it is becoming more and more evident to the average man that he, and not some remote millionaire, is going to have to pay for the

¹¹⁹ "The Relief Load," *CR*, 14 May 1936, 4.

¹²⁰ "Relief," *CR*, 28 April 1936, 4.

extravagance of this administration.”¹²¹ There was no policy that was sacred or had any positive impact. In fact, one must assume that the only good things that Republicans in Madison County had to say about Roosevelt related to the policies on which they kept silent, namely, the Civilian Conservation Corps. They also had little criticism for the state’s public welfare system, which Roosevelt had instituted as governor.

Not only were the newspapers highly critical of Roosevelt, but they also believed they had an excellent chance of winning. The *Republican* noted that economic conditions, especially for the dairy farmer, were improving.¹²² If the economy continued to grow, conservatives hoped that people would feel that Roosevelt’s New Deal policies would be unnecessary. In the summer, the Republicans nominated Landon, and the party in Madison County supported their candidate. Hubbard praised Landon as a down-to-earth man, “a theorist instead of a dreamer” like Roosevelt.¹²³ In late August and September of 1936, the Publishers Auxiliary Service of New York performed a straw poll with the assistance of small town and rural newspapers around the country in order to get a sense of how the public would vote in the election. Ballot boxes were set up in local businesses where voters would add their vote to the box.¹²⁴ As the “results” came in the weeks following, supporters of Landon had to feel good. The final straw poll tally in late October showed Landon ahead of Roosevelt 57.1% to 36.8% and leading in twenty-eight of the forty-eight states.¹²⁵ Meanwhile, Al Smith, former governor of New York, had led a small faction of Democrats who disagreed with Roosevelt’s policies out of the party

¹²¹ “Taxes,” *CR*, 3 March 1936, 4.

¹²² “The A.A.A.,” *HR*, 13 February 1936, 4.

¹²³ “The Republican Choice,” *CR*, 23 July 1936, 4.

¹²⁴ “Landon Gains in Cazenovia, Roosevelt in Town of Nelson, Straw Vote Poll Indicates,” *CR*, 27 August 1936, 1.

¹²⁵ “Rural Districts Favor Landon, Final Returns of County Papers Straw Poll Shows,” *CR*, 22 October 1936, 1.

and announced that he was voting for Landon. Conservatives were whispering that a coalition of Republicans, Independents, and these “Jeffersonian Democrats” could defeat Roosevelt. Hubbard, even though he had no influence on the situation whatsoever, openly suggested that perhaps the vice presidential candidate on the Republican ticket should be one of these dissenting Democrats.¹²⁶

When the actual results were tallied, conservatives were shocked. Roosevelt had carried forty-six states, leaving Landon with only Maine and Delaware. The electoral vote tally was an unprecedented 523 to 8. The *Cazenovia Republican* wrote that Roosevelt’s popular majority would probably reach ten million. Despite their defeat, the majority in the county were pleased about increasing their Republican majority from four years earlier.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, the results were unexpected; many factors had indicated a Republican victory in November. In the weeks following however, it became clear that why people nationwide had decided to vote for Roosevelt. First, voters ascribed the recovering economy to his New Deal policies. Second, many owed their sustenance to Roosevelt’s work relief programs, which gave people the resources they needed and the dignity of working for their wage. Finally, Landon did not represent himself as much of an alternative to Roosevelt, most likely because the general feeling throughout the country was that his policies were working. One contemporary chronicler of the 1936 election describes Landon’s campaign this way: “He opposed deficit spending and tax increases, but only if problems could not be met without resorting to such steps. He opposed the expansion of bureaucracy, but only if it was an unneeded and wasteful

¹²⁶ “Coalition?” *CR*, 11 June 1936, 4; “The American Point of View,” *CR*, 11 October 1936, 4.

¹²⁷ “In Spite of Democratic Sweep State and Nation, Cazenovia and Madison County Even Stronger Than They Were Four Years Ago,” *CR*, 11 November 1936, 1.

expansion.”¹²⁸ Such qualifications in position do not make a strong candidate. Hubbard, writing for the *Cazenovia Republican*, showed surprising insight only days after the election. Summing up the Republicans’ defeat, he wrote, “they were really running a New Deal Republican, and the nation felt that as long as the New Deal was inevitable, Franklin D. Roosevelt was the best man to lead it.”¹²⁹

Republicans in Madison County were proud that they did not follow the rest of the country in increasing Roosevelt’s majority from 1932. They thought that, considering Roosevelt’s overwhelming victory, perhaps they were one of the few counties that had increased their Republican vote in 1936. Even today, some analyses of the 1936 election see the incumbent’s victory as a triumph of the common people. These interpretations emphasize the corporate interest in the Republican party, who supported a rural Kansan to front for what really was an attempt to defeat Roosevelt and reverse his policies.¹³⁰ Although there no doubt were corporate interests endeavoring to defeat Roosevelt, this explanation ignores farmers who were dissatisfied with New Deal policies.

In a voter analysis of the 1936 election, Courtney Brown looked closely at the national shifts in voting patterns, and determined to find from where Roosevelt’s majority came. Did Republicans who voted for Hoover switch parties and vote Democratic in ’36? Was it an increase of new Roosevelt supporters? Were simply more Democrats coming to the polls? In addition to these questions, Brown focused on certain populations of voters, including worker, urban, and farm blocs. His conclusions showed

¹²⁸ Donald R. McCoy, “The New Deal Through Alf Landon’s Eyes,” *The Midwest Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (1964): 64.

¹²⁹ “The Election,” *CR*, 13 November 1936, 4.

¹³⁰ See Michael J. Webber, *New Deal Fat Cats: Business, Labor, and Campaign Finance in the 1936 Presidential Election* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000); Clyde P. Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform: the Republican Party During the New Deal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

that Madison County had actually followed farm voting trends. Republicans gained three percentage points of all eligible farm voters between 1932 and 1936, while the Democratic vote dropped about a half a percent in rural areas. Brown concluded that between 1928 and 1932, the general trend between elections was that Republicans had switched their vote to Democratic. Between 1932 and 1936, a new set of voters responded, either in favor or against Roosevelt's policies. In the farming areas, these new voters tended to vote Republican, while in the urban and worker populations, the vote was Democratic.¹³¹ Therefore, Madison County was not the only area of the country that had an increased Republican presence due to dissatisfaction with Roosevelt's agricultural policies.

¹³¹ Courtney Brown, "Mass Dynamics of U.S. Presidential Competitions, 1928-1936," *The American Political Science Review* 82, no. 4 (Dec. 1988): 1168, 1176.

Conclusion

In January of 1938, the *Hamilton Republican* ran an editorial concerning liberalism and conservatism in the nation:

There have been many times when American business completely dominated the policies of the American government. And that, of course, was wrong. Neither our economic society nor our political society should dominate the other...It is only when these two powerful forces co-operate in harmony that we progress. Business and government should become reconciled and keep that way. There is nothing inherently wrong with our capitalistic system. It is the foundation of which we have built the might of America.¹³²

In the span of twelve years during the Great Depression and the New Deal, there was a radical change in the influence of the state and federal government in Madison County. In 1929, the county utilized very little money that was not collected through county or local taxes. Funding only came from two sources—state highway aid appropriated every year, and taxes from the registration of automobiles. There was zero federal funding. In 1939, Madison County received the most state and federal aid to that date, \$361,813, in eleven different categories. This dramatic change is reflected in the *Republican's* attitude towards the relationship between business and government. It is inconceivable that the conservatives in Madison County would have thought that business dominating government in the late twenties was a negative trend; many in America lauded corporations for bringing unprecedented wealth to the country. Now it was clear that unbridled capitalism was dangerous to the national economy, and that without government oversight, swings in the business cycle could be more extreme, creating an uncertain and shaky financial environment. Although funding decreased after 1939, Madison County still received well over a quarter of a million dollars from state and

¹³² “It’s All Wrong,” Editorial, *HR*, 27 January 1938.

federal sources throughout the 1940s. Even with state and federal assistance becoming permanent influences in the county government, the Madison County electorate would remain staunchly Republican in their politics.

While Madison County passively accepted public welfare, the majority of voters disapproved of many of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs until the end of their existence in the early 1940s. In Madison County, many municipalities funded road projects and other infrastructure improvements throughout the 1930s with little help from the state or federal government, and therefore work relief was not considered as essential as other programs for assistance. The project that received the least amount of criticism was the CCC, which was instrumental in those areas that affected the county the most like soil and forest restoration. In addition, the Corps had a comparatively long-term presence in the county—four major camps that each lasted about three years, much longer than any particular work relief project.¹³³

While the county's newspapers strongly critiqued AAA policies, county residents did not ignore the problems in the dairy industry. The *Hamilton Republican*, *Madison County Leader and Observer*, and *Democratic-Union's* calls for state and federal intervention indicated that the dairy industry needed to be rescued from the unfair pricing practices of large dealers by an institution much larger than any co-op farmers could create collectively. However, while many county Republicans were highly critical of the AAA during the election, the program's actions in the late 1930s did help dairy farmers. When Roosevelt first established the AAA, his plans for economic regulations were ambitious, frequently stretched the boundaries of federal power, and eventually the Supreme Court declared it in violation of the Constitution. When the AAA was

¹³³ "Recovery May Be 'Round Corner,' CCC Camp closes," *HR*, 10 June 1937.

reinstated in 1938, it was held within the limits that the Court had set for it, but this limited power resulted in far more positive results than the AAA's first attempts. The AAA now respected the state and cooperatives' demands more than they had before, and together with New York was able to create a workable schedule of compensating farmers for their product. Perhaps the most worthwhile efforts of the AAA were the bringing together of all producers in the five states that supplied milk to New York City, ensuring the same prices for all.¹³⁴ While rural citizens realized the need for state and government intervention in their crisis, they were much more comfortable with a federal government that had certain restrictions on its power to artificially affect prices and production.

For the *Hamilton Republican* to concede that the intervention of government into business was the right thing to do is an indication of the way arguments had changed about the role of government in private life during the New Deal period. By the end of the 1930s, most Republicans acknowledged that there was a role for government in the economy. Roosevelt's economic policies effectively shifted the question from *whether* the government should involve itself in the capitalist system to *how* it should do so. This does not mean that Roosevelt desired to create a socialist state. On the contrary, he conferred with, and did not ignore, the wealthiest in America to plan a course of action intended to benefit the whole of the nation and to preserve America's capitalist structure. Perhaps the most radical idea in the New Deal was the notion that capitalism could be saved at all. Could the government provide relief for its citizens and regulate industry without stifling the independent, enterprise spirit of America? The Roosevelt administration, together with its conservative opponents, showed that the government could. The delicate balance between government power and commercial freedom still

¹³⁴ Abrahams, 99.

occurs today, but the idea that they should be intertwined originates from the New Deal policies of the 1930s.

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Table 1-State and federal aid to Madison County, 1928-1940
 Compiled from *Journal of the Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Madison, 1928-*

Year	State Highway Aid	Motor Fuel Tax	Motor Vehicle Fees	County Laboratory	Old Age Security	Public Health Nurse	Crippled Children	Work Relief	Snow Removal
1928	36,218.85		39,640.96						
1929	36,843.40	33,565.18	44,328.94						
1930	39,090.00	100,687.89	46,550.65	3,825.91					
1931	51,394.63	109,200.73	45,921.87	3,057.62	10,336.37				
1932	38,880.00	109,444.25	44,421.54	2,775.72	7,222.90	3,500.00	4,747.65	1,830.74	
1933	12,304.66	104,612.59	44,703.07	1,851.33	26,725.15	1,250.00	2,338.27	9,260.31	3,153.99
1934		105,870.65	45,583.78	2,779.81	11,797.56	1,250.00	486.92	1,375.21	3,650.77
1935	30,000.00	108,346.82	46,415.67	890.78	28,056.99	2,500.00	7,277.81		4,842.12
1936	38,000.00	112,246.11	49,666.70	3,731.66	20,805.87	2,500.00	2,794.05	2,403.47	6,690.40
1937	38,000.00	121,801.27	50,466.10	3,164.31	61,256.94	2,500.00	725.16	2,673.93	5,808.36
1938	38,000.00	120,199.09	53,904.14	2,989.03	101,913.44	2,500.00	514.00	3,946.11	8,166.06
1939	19,441.95	126,560.59	50,516.11	1,567.40	121,266.99		1,246.05	15,800.64	7,565.85
1940	55,398.06	130,868.33	56,052.62	3,947.60	109,290.32		2,332.80	11,389.44	8,406.50

1940, Annual Reports of County Treasurer

Year	TERA	Blind Assistance	Dependent Children	Other Public Welfare	Reforestation	Totals
1928						75,859.81
1929						114,737.52
1930						190,154.45
1931					500.00	219,911.22
1932					500.00	212,822.80
1933						206,199.37
1934	46,702.80					219,497.50
1935	75,620.30					303,950.49
1936						238,838.26
1937		1,091.63	2,118.14			287,487.70
1938		2,615.02	10,936.02			334,746.89
1939		2,282.39	15,373.82	191.47		346,247.97
1940		3,261.47	14,627.74	2,459.81		380,947.14