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## Nevada historical records survey: The Clark County perspective

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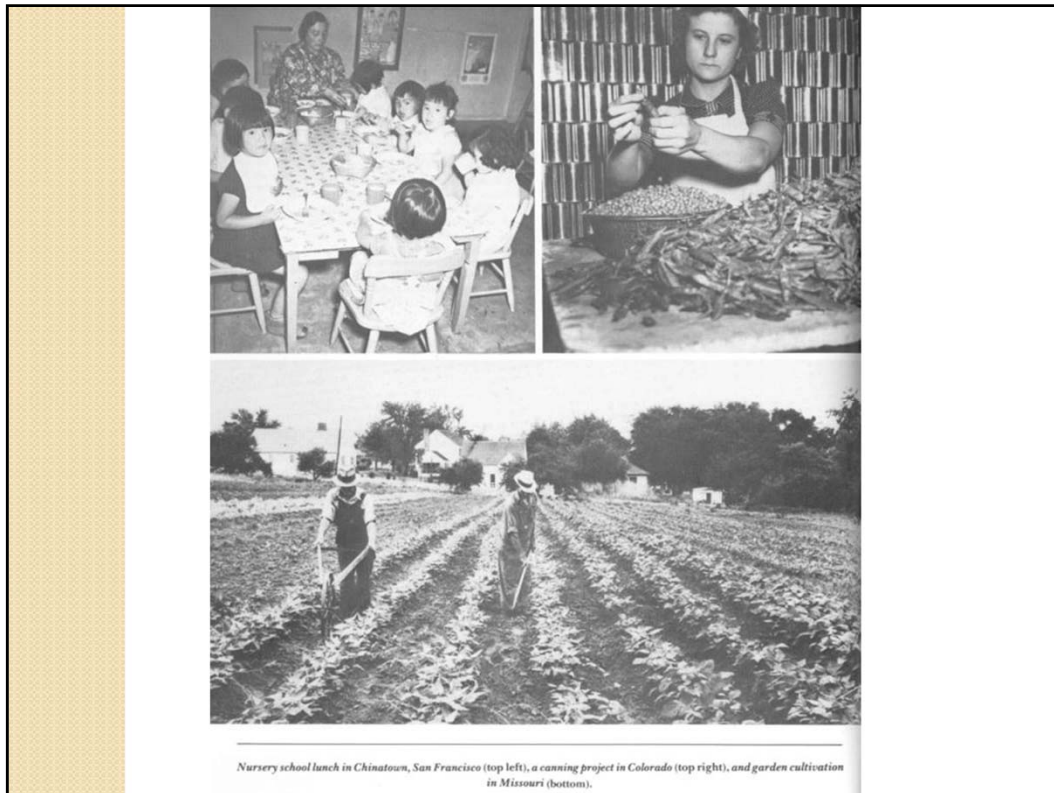
## **Nevada Historical Records Survey: The Clark County Perspective**

Presented at the 9th Biennial Conference of the Nevada Historical Society, Reno, NV, May 2008.



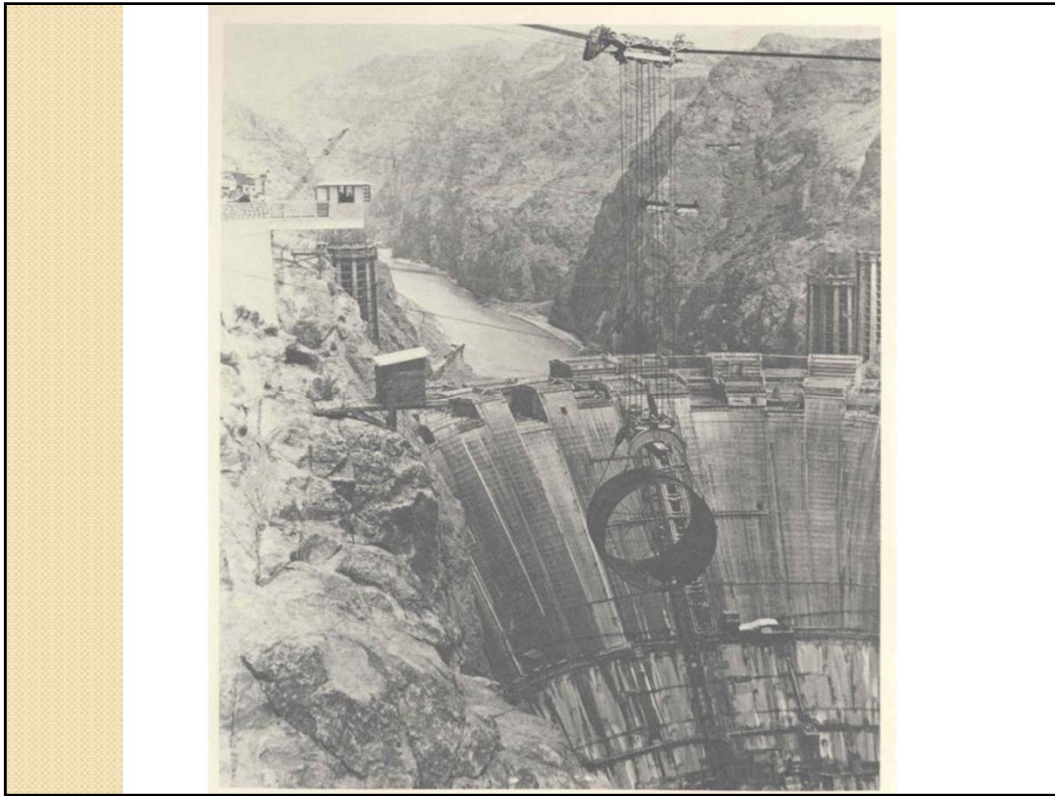
### **Works Progress Administration**

In 1935, the New Deal created the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The mission of the WPA was to fund public works programs all over the country. Its first priority was to provide immediate help to the unemployed. The WPA built hospitals, schools, airports, theaters, roads, hotels in national parks, monuments, post offices, and federal buildings around America. The WPA created various government projects. This included the Federal Theater Project, Federal Arts Project, and the Federal Writers Project. Ultimately, the WPA put money into the American economy during the Great Depression. However, Congress did away with it in 1943.



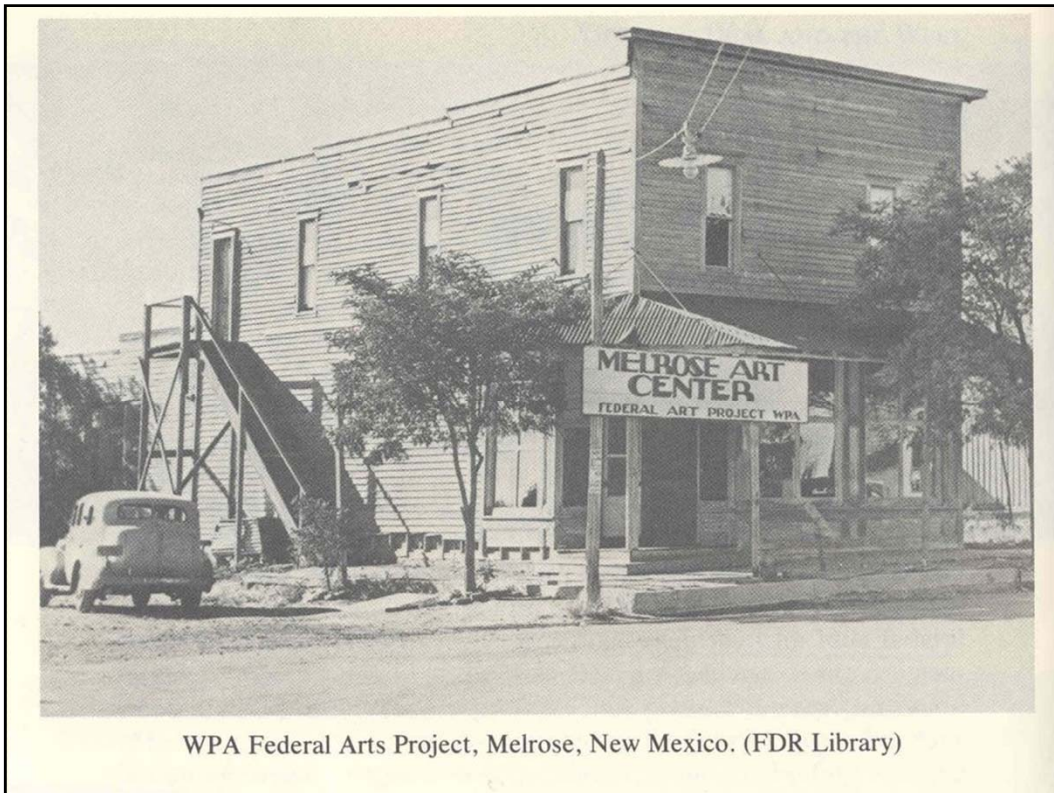
**(Click)**

President Roosevelt's administration created a new set of political ideas with the New Deal. One of them being a new form of social assistance. For example, the work relief programs of the WPA. The idea behind the WPA was government as employer of last resort.



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In 1936, the American economy was on the rebound due in large part to the relief programs of the WPA. The WPA affected every county in America. Specifically, it created roads, buildings, and parks. Further, the WPA's positive affects to the economy contributed to Roosevelt's reelection.



WPA Federal Arts Project, Melrose, New Mexico. (FDR Library)

**(Click)**

At the same time there needed to be more financial support for the historical agencies within the Mississippi Valley and the country. Public appropriations for historical agencies have been reduced throughout the country. However, there was growing popular interest in history. Also, the value of the work of historical societies was gaining a wider understanding within the public. For example, membership within historical societies held up during the Great Depression. In Missouri, membership even increased.

# Works Progress Administration

## Pre-history of the WPA

- CWA
- Examples of CWA Work

(Click)

(Click) Pre-history of the WPA

(Click) C.W.A.

An example of the increase in historical activity has been the implementation of the Civil Works Administration (C.W.A.). The C.W.A. was a New Deal Program that began on November 8, 1933 and ended on March 31, 1934. The C.W.A. workers were utilized on various historical projects throughout the United States.

(Click) Examples of C.W.A. Work

An example of the C.W.A in action was within Wisconsin. Wisconsin used several C.W.A. individuals who worked on the compilation of indexes. These indexes were for the Wisconsin names within the censuses of 1840 and 1850.

# Works Progress Administration (cont.)

## Establishment of WPA Surveys

- **Federal, State, and Local Surveys**
- **Responsibility of the Federal, State, and Local Surveys**
- **Political Scientists and Historians Interests in the Survey**

(Click)

(Click) **Establishment of WPA Surveys**

(Click) **Federal Survey and State & Local Survey**

In November 1935, President Roosevelt approved two survey projects that would be important to Political Scientists and historians around the country. Students of law and history would find this important, as well. The first project authorizes a survey of federal government archives that are not located within Washington D.C. The other is a project that surveys state and local historical records. There was a budget of \$1,195,800 made available by the federal government to implement these two surveys.

There was a real need for educating on the public of the importance of the two surveys. This was something that everyone could get involved in. It was believed that there were plenty of families out there with papers in their possession that held important significance in terms of national or local history. Therefore, it became important that the word get out about the importance of these two surveys.

(Click) **Responsibility of the Federal, State & Local Surveys**

In the beginning, the Works Progress Administration was the sponsor of the federal survey while its administration was conducted by the National Archives. The National Archives was created around the same time as the Works Progress Administration and was given the authority over all archives within the United States government. The state and local survey were administered by the Works Progress Administration, as well. Specifically, it was administered by the Division of Women's and Professional Projects.

(Click) **Political Scientists and Historians Interests in the Survey**

The survey work should be important to political scientists and historians because it would show the history of political institutions. Also, the surveys would show the story of the expansion of governmental functions. Political scientists could provide their own objectives that they were important to them. This would aid in the creation of the surveys. For example, if researchers at the University of Chicago were interested in population shifts, then the survey workers in Cook County would pay attention to land maps and records.



## **Works Progress Administration (cont.)**

### **WPA in Nevada**

- **Nevada**
- **National Field Supervisor for the Eleven Western States**

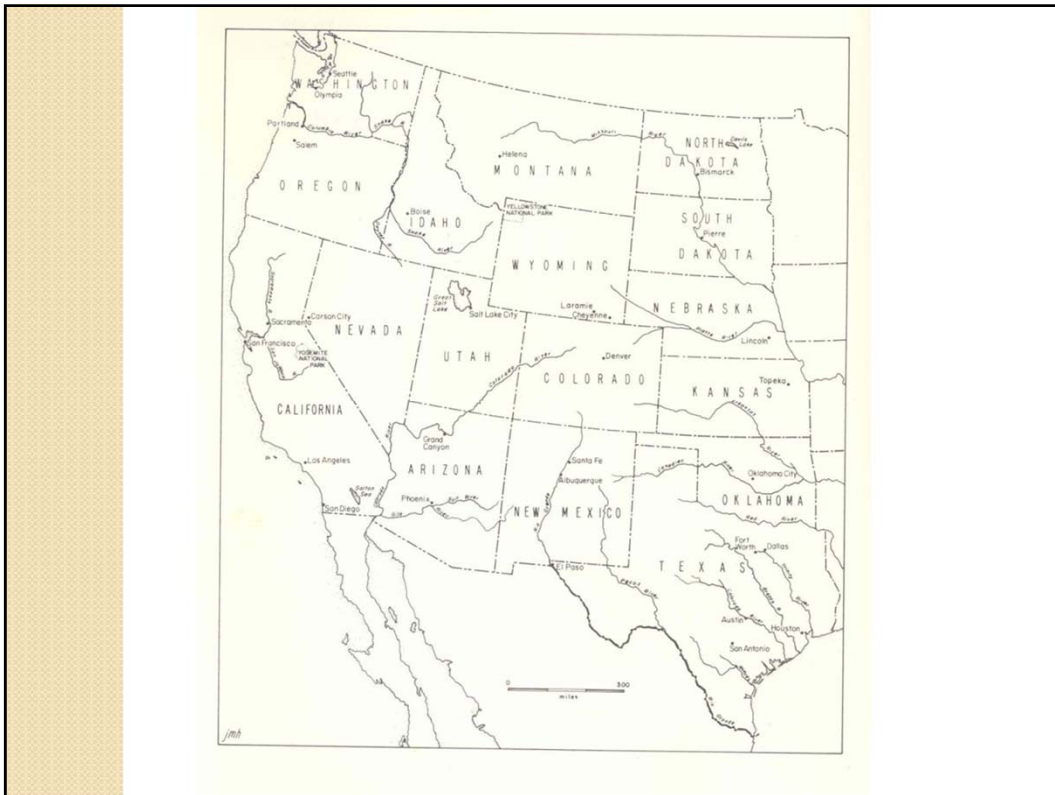
**(Click)**

**(Click) Nevada**

In several of the western states the surveys were related to the Federal Writers Project. In Nevada, the survey work was conducted by a former mining man who received technical assistance from Mrs. Beulah H. Leonard. Mrs. Leonard received a masters degree in History at the University of California.

**(Click) National Field Supervisor for the Eleven Western States**

In other western states, State Directors of the Federal Writers Project not only worked on their writers related projects, but the Historical Records Survey, as well. **(Click)** The overall supervision for the eleven western states came under Colonel J. M. Scammell, who was a National Field Supervisor of the Historical Records Survey.



(Click)

# Federal One

## Composition of Federal One

### I. Federal Writers' Project (FWP)



(Click)

(Click) **Composition of Federal One**

Federal One (or, more properly, Federal Project Number One) became the collective name for the group of projects under the Works Progress Administration. The five elements of Federal One were:

[Federal Writers' Project](#) (FWP)

## Federal One (cont.)

2. Historical Records Survey (HRS, originally part of the FWP)
3. Federal Theatre Project (FTP)
4. Federal Music Project (FMP)
5. Federal Art Project (FAP)

(Click)

(Click)

[Historical Records Survey](#) (HRS, originally part of the FWP),  
[Federal Theatre Project](#) (FTP),  
[Federal Music Project](#) (FMP), and the  
[Federal Art Project](#) (FAP)

Federal One was part of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Second New Deal, and was the largest of its projects.

# Historical Records Survey

## Pre-History of the Historical Records Survey

- Survey of Records before the HRS

## Luther Evans and the Creation of the Historical Records Survey

(Click)

### (Click) Historical Records Survey

The idea of creating a survey of state and local records had been discussed among historians since the turn of the century. For example, Massachusetts and Rhode Island were the only two states to establish a public archives commission by 1900. Further, Massachusetts had done more than any other state in the union to utilize its own records.

### (Click) Pre-History of the Historical Records Survey

In 1930, the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council established a joint committee. It was called the Joint Committee on Materials for Research and its chairman was Robert C. Binkley. This committee later created the foundation of a national survey of local records.

### (Click) Survey of Records before the HRS

In the following years there were surveys of state and local records created by the Civil Works Administration (C.W.A.) and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). However, in January of 1934, the joint committee met to answer the question of a possible nationwide survey of archives. In February 1934, the secretary of the Joint Committee on Materials for Research was directed to draft a proposal for a nationwide survey. The joint committee formed a subcommittee, as well. It was named the Commission on National Archives Survey and it promoted the idea of a nationwide survey of archives. The commission proposed a survey of state, county, and local archives to be implemented by 2,775 workers.

### (Click) Luther Evans and the Creation of the Historical Records Survey

In June 1935, a former political science professor from Princeton named Luther Evans went to Washington D.C. to meet Harry Hopkins who was the Administrator of F.E.R.A. and the WPA about a possibility of a job.



Harry L. Hopkins, Administrator of F.E.R.A. and WPA. (Library of Congress)

**(Click)**

Hopkins had seen old records in the Capital building recently and thought it would be a good project for someone to organize them. Evans suggested that the recently established National Archives would be the right people to take care of the old records. Evans suggested that another useful project would be a survey of federal records located outside of Washington D.C. It would be the records located within the federal courts and offices throughout the country. Hopkins liked the idea and suggested that Mr. Evans continue looking into it.

Evans visited the officials at the National Archives and returned to Hopkins with what would eventually become the Survey of Federal Records. Later Hopkins would suggest a similar survey for state and local records.

In October 1935, Evans who became a W.P.A. "Supervisor of Historical Projects", completed the plans for the two surveys. By November an appropriation of \$1,195,000 was made available. The appropriation was given in a single allotment to the Historical Records Survey (HRS) which had become a WPA sponsored federal project under the Federal Writer's Project. By the end of 1935, Evans would go on to become the Historical Records Survey's first national director. By 1936, the Historical Records Survey Agency would be relocated to the Division of Women's and Professional Projects of the WPA.



### **(Click)**

The first task of a survey worker was to locate the records within a courthouse or repository and arrange them in order so that they could be described. The second task of a survey worker was the creation of a report providing a brief history of the county, a summary of legal history regarding the records, maps and diagrams as to the records file location. Finally, the completed reports were then mimeographed and distributed in small quantities.

The Historical Records Survey was considered a success. It was also considered the most economical projects within Federal One. It produced helpful products and showcased how untrained workers could be employed. It even developed a methodology for archival description. This methodology would later become a model for the archival profession.

# Historical Records Survey (cont.)

## Historical Records Survey Work

- General Process of the H.R.S. Workers
- By-Products of the H.R.S.
- Human Value from the H.R.S. Work
- Maryland Example of the HRS

(Click)

(Click) Historical Records Survey Work

(Click) General Process of the H.R.S. Workers

The general process of a Historical Records Survey worker involved sorting, cleaning, arranging, preserving, and indexing.

(Click) By-Products of the H.R.S.

There were by-products of the Historical Records Survey. They included making communities conscious of their history and proving the value of public records. The survey even located lost documents.

(Click) Human Value from the H.R.S. Work

There was even a human value to the survey work. The workers began to notice the value in the training that they had received. Even if the jobs were difficult the workers were diligent. These jobs and the good work habits that came from them would aid the workers in the attainment of future employment opportunities.

(Click) Maryland Example of the HRS

Luther Evans appointed Walter F. Meyer as the new Maryland director of the Historical Records Survey in 1937. The work done within Maryland proved the ability of inexperienced workers -- who were carefully supervised -- to accomplish important results as long as it was modeled after the examples and procedures of the Historical Records Survey.

# Historical Records Survey (cont.)

## Historical Records Survey Ends

### Legacy of the HRS

- Survey of Federal Archives
- Survey of County Records & Church Records
- Survey of Manuscripts
- Other Projects

**(Click)**

### **(Click) Historical Records Survey Ends**

The HRS national headquarters office would be closed by the 1939 Appropriation Act. However, the Library of Congress would hire back most of the staff that worked at the headquarters. The HRS staff who worked for the Library of Congress provided technical support to the states who continued their own records survey projects. The Library of Congress project would end in August 1940. As time went on the WPA would only have a handful of HRS technical personnel. By February 1942, if there were any HRS related work, then it had to be war related. The federal and state HRS projects would cease completely by February 1943.

### **(Click) Legacy of the HRS**

The legacy of the HRS can still be seen today. There were several type of surveys that the HRS implemented during it's time as a WPA sponsored federal project. They included the Survey of Federal Archives, Survey of County records, Survey of Church Records, Survey of Manuscripts, American Imprints Survey, and other projects.

### **(Click) Survey of Federal Archives**

The Survey of Federal Archives eventually published 506 volumes. There were only 81 volumes that were not published.

### **(Click) Survey of County records**

The HRS would best be known for its survey of county records. In fact, out of the 3,066 counties within the United States, the HRS completed 90 percent of their surveys. However, only 20 percent of these surveys were published. The survey of church records tended to be an inventory of a signal denomination within a state.

### **(Click) Survey of Manuscripts**

The HRS surveyed the manuscripts located within historical societies, libraries, and private collections. This ended with the creation of statewide guides. These guides summarized each institutions contents.

### **(Click) Other Projects**

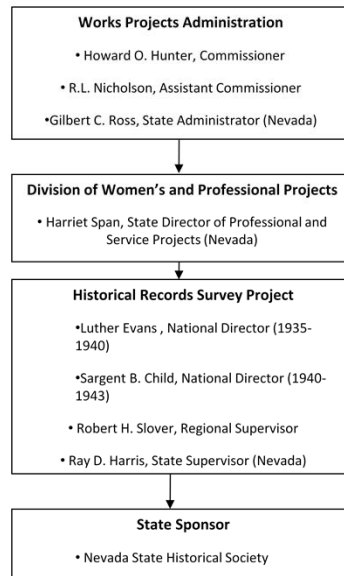
There were countless other national projects that the HRS performed. This included the inventory of state records, municipal records, and a maps survey. There was even a project involving a bibliography of American literature.



# **Nevada Historical Records Survey**

**Hierarchy of the Historical Records Survey in Nevada**

# Hierarchy of the Historical Records Survey in Nevada



**(Click)** The Hierarchy of the Historical Records Survey in Nevada consisted of:

**(Click)** Works Progress Administration

**(Click)** Division of Women's and Professional Projects

**(Click)** Historical Records Survey Project

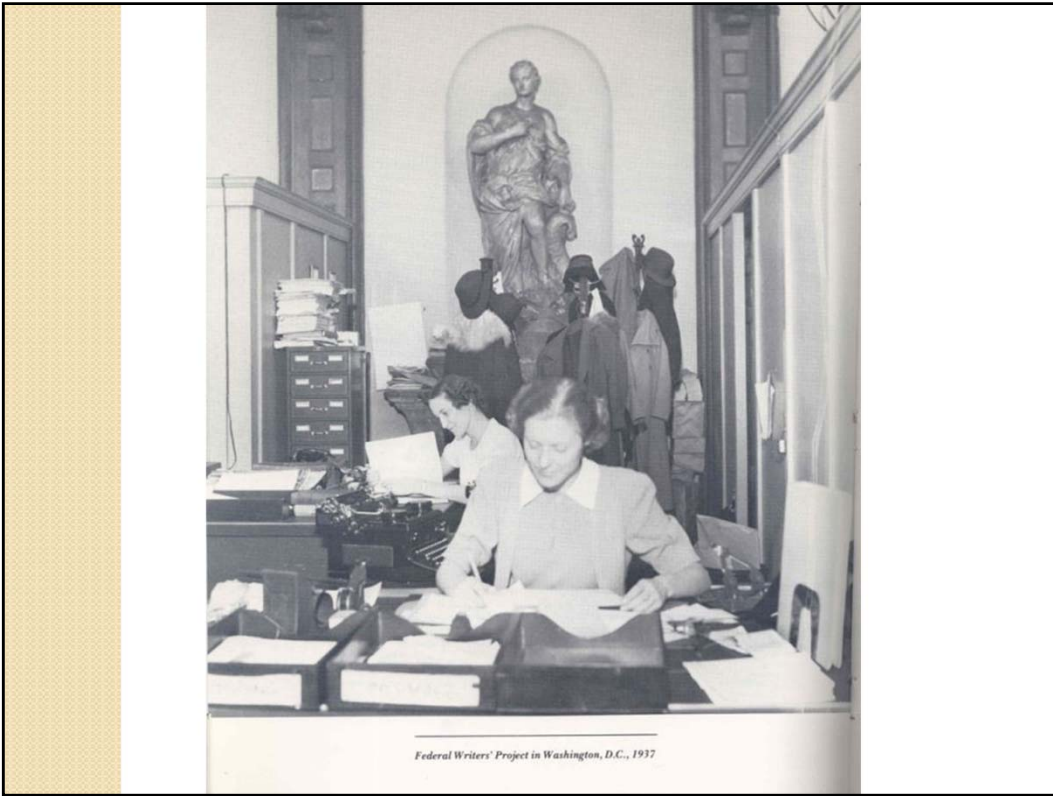
**(Click)** State Sponsor



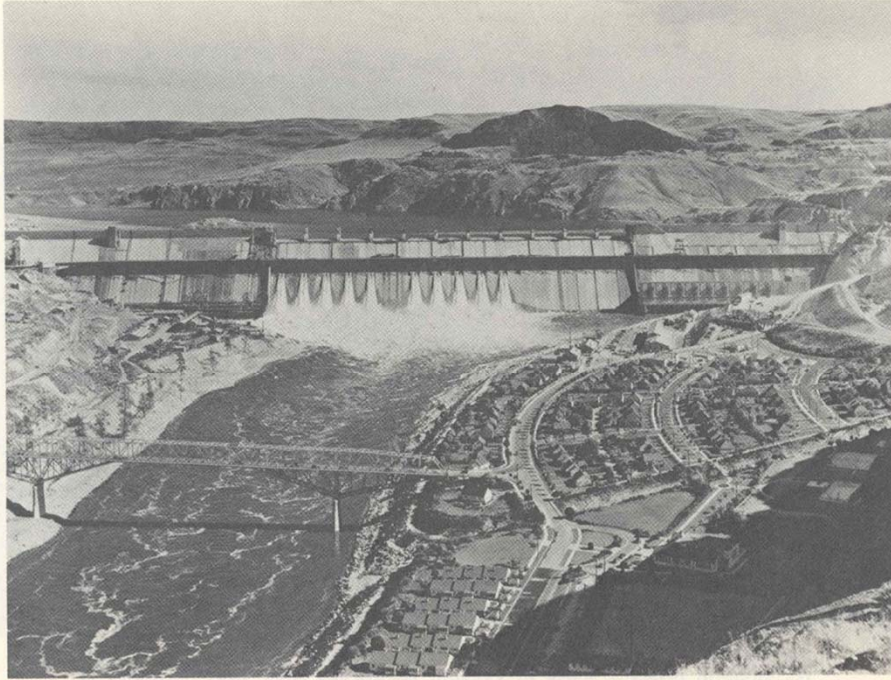
## **Conclusion**



*A historical records survey worker in the Utah County Courthouse, Ogden, Utah*



*Federal Writers' Project in Washington, D.C., 1937*



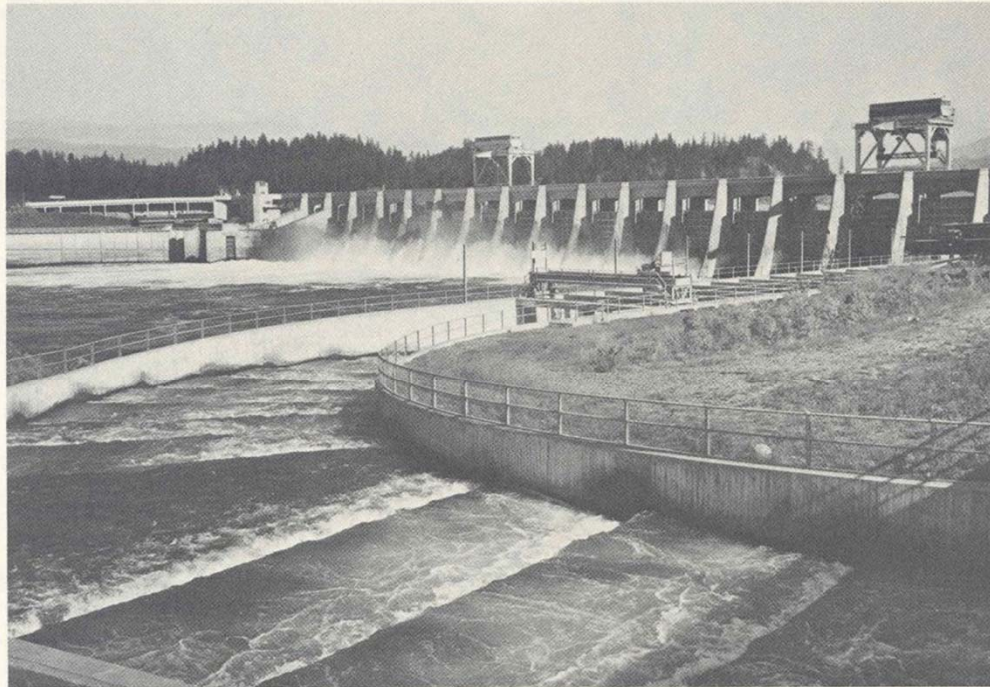
Grand Coulee Dam, Columbia Basin reclamation project, Washington State, June 13, 1941. (Library of Congress)



The President and construction engineer F. A. Banks at the Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River in Washington State, October 1937. (FDR Library)



*Music copyists in Philadelphia*



Fish ladders and Bonneville Dam, Columbia River, northwest Oregon, October 1941. (Library of Congress)

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The economy went up and down relative to the amount of federal spending during the 1930s. It is argued that if Roosevelt's WPA spending decreased more slowly over time, then the country would have reached prosperity in a more orderly fashion.