

MAKING A DIFFERENCE *for Iowans*

Clippings



Lyon • O'Brien • Osceola • Sioux Counties

A Weekly Column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

Week of November 2, 2015

For Immediate Release

What in the World is the WPA?

Guest Writer Pat Kosters, Iowa Master Gardener

Recently while walking past the Rock Valley City Park baseball field grandstand, I looked at the little blue “Work Projects Administration 1940” plaque. How many people have noticed that plaque or know what it means? While the Work Projects Administration (WPA) program is long gone, its legacy lives on in some form in nearly every community in the United States – many without a sign or record of its significance. For those of you who don’t know much about the 1930’s Great Depression and “The New Deal” efforts to get our economy going again at that time, let me explain...

When the Great Depression hit the USA in 1929, the dollar’s value tanked, the economy hit rock bottom and millions of Americans lost their jobs. In 1933, President Franklin D Roosevelt introduced a series of programs designed to stimulate the economy and put Americans back to work. That effort was called “The New Deal” and the Works Progress Administration was one of those programs. Later changed to Work Projects Administration, it was designed to fund the building and improvement of our nation’s infrastructure, promote art and culture, and provide jobs for more than 8½ million unemployed workers. The idea was to pay able-bodied people to work rather than to just give them a handout. It was said, “Give a man a dole and you save his body but destroy his spirit. Give him a job and you save both body and spirit.”

Between 1933 and 1943 the WPA paid Americans to build roads, bridges, schools, and post offices; to construct libraries, museums, botanical gardens, and parks; to create murals and other art projects. Thus, Sioux Center built their city park band shell and Rock Valley built their city park baseball field grandstand.



*"WPA sign" by Jonathunder - Own work.
Licensed under Public Domain via Commons -
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:WPA sign.JPG#/m>*

As WWII loomed, criticism of management and funding for what some considered “frivolous projects” eroded support and the WPA was terminated. Some states and historical societies microfilmed or indexed records; others destroyed them. We are left with no national record of WPA projects. Many of Iowa’s records are housed in the Special Collections Department at Iowa State University.

Frivolous projects? Those of us who are ISU Alumni do not consider the Grant Wood mural in the Parks Library frivolous, nor do we consider Christian Andersen’s sculpture and bas-relief panels at the Veterinary Medicine and Food Science Buildings frivolous. Golfers don’t consider the Veinker Memorial Golf Course in Ames frivolous. All are WPA projects.

Frivolous? Whenever I walk past that little blue WPA plaque on the Rock Valley City Park grandstand, I think of my Grandfather who played baseball for the Washington Senators, which later became the Minnesota Twins. After moving to Rock Valley, Grandpa continued to play alongside semipro teams on this same baseball field until 1949 when it was used for Northwestern Iowa Amateur Baseball League games. It is currently managed by the Rock Valley Schools.

Didn’t notice that plaque? Look for it on the north side of the grandstand on 12th Street.

- 30 -

ISU Extension and Outreach Contact:

Margaret Murphy, Horticulture Educator and Regional Local Food Coordinator

712-472-2576 or mmurphy@iastate.edu