Jacob Baker, Assistant WPA Administrator, Speaks Before Landscape Architects.

Jacob Baker, Assistant Works Progress Administrator, spoke on "The Relationship of the Works Progress Administration to Planning in America" before the American Society of Landscape Architects, at its annual dinner in the Mayflower Hotel, Monday, January 20. The full text of his address follows:

"I realize that in coming before a society of American landscape architects I do not have to spend any time proving to them the advantages of planning. Were I making this talk to other types of citizens I would be compelled to stress the basic need for planning to begin with. But landscape architects know that if the human use of the surface of the earth is unplanned, men live as wanderers in a wilderness. We have found during the recent history of the boom and the crash and the consequent depression that it is perilously easy to revert to the ways of wilderness in human relations with fear, and cunning and starvation becoming driving social forces.

"Landscape architects realize that planning is a fundamental necessity in their profession, and during the depression they have suffered greatly from the lack of planning engaged in during good times and bad by members of other professions. Thousands of architects were thrown out of work throughout the country as soon as frightened capital and depleted purchasing power made it impossible for the great body of the population to engage in normal expansion of building activities. Among the most discouraging aspects of the depression was the spectacle of thousands of potential planners of buildings, developments, parks and recreation grounds without the facilities for exercising their talent. Other professions were hit as hard as the architectural profession, but probably none was hit harder."
When we were faced during 1933, 1934, and 1935 with the vast problem of putting millions of men of variegated talents to work, we soon came to realize that the architect and the engineer were destined to play a basic role in all of our work. When we planned roads, school houses, dams, sanitary facilities, and recreational centers, it was obvious that we needed the expert aid of thousands of trained men in the architectural and engineering professions. But even when we engaged in activities which seemed very far afield from the work of technical specialists, we found that their talents soon became an important part of the work.

The directors and supervisors of music, drama and art projects, when they came to build or alter anything for the purposes of carrying out their plans with taste and symmetry, had to go to your profession for aid. The workers who are compiling the data for The American Guide project, a social history of and guide book to America's facilities in every walk of life, need the cooperation of those who have spent their professional years in helping to beautify the country. There were thousands of architects available for our purposes. We were faced with the double problem of using their talents to the full and at the same time of giving employment to them on the widest possible scale. Recently landscape architecture and gardening have become almost a relief profession, because of the lack of facilities for private employment due to the depression. The government has used the talents of landscape architects in many ways on hundreds of projects which were carried out under CWA and FERA and which are now being carried out under WPA together with Public Works and Civilian Conservation Camp enterprises.

Projects for recreational centers and park centers have been operating under WPA and local sponsorship in almost every part of the country. In Shawnee County, near Topeka, Kansas, for instance, a recreational center of more than 900 acres, with a 404 acre lake is under construction. The project is arousing a great deal of interest throughout the state, and when it is completed, Shawnee County, Kansas, will have the largest body of water and park area in that section of the state.
"Down in Florida, at Ybor City, a project is operating for the beautification of 557 residential and business blocks. The civic clubs and garden clubs of the community are supporting the project enthusiastically, and approximately 250 families in the area have donated land and labor for the propagation of the 18,000 shrubs needed for the program. The schools at the same time are teaching the children to preserve the new plants and to appreciate them. Then, in Camden County, New Jersey, there is a large park and recreation development operating with WPA funds. The present flora is being restored to a healthy condition, and new planting is replacing flora lost through neglect. This work is incidental to a broader plan on the project, which includes reforestation, flood control, soil erosion elimination, mosquito control and general removal of unsanitary conditions.

I only pick these few instances at random to show you what we are doing which is in line with your work. We have other projects operating in Georgia, in Tennessee, in New York City, in California, and in every state of the union. I don't want to bore you with an enumeration of the park and beautification work being done under the WPA program. The evidence that this work is important comes from the communities themselves which sponsored the projects and are hailing their progress and completion with enthusiasm and gratitude. We are only embarrassed by the demand for more of a similar nature. America has been getting a taste of potential beautification, and the people in small communities and large urban centers who are discovering what can be done to make their lives pleasanter and healthier will not go back easily to neglect and deprivation.

"Eye-sores, such as Bryant Park, on 42nd Street in New York City, have been turned into lovely spots in the heart of a busy city. Central Park itself has been undergoing long needed improvement with the aid of federal funds. WPA workers are working on a dozen different projects in Central Park. Almost 3,000 skilled and unskilled men are planting trees and shrubs, repairing walks, and reseeding lawns under the direction of landscape architects and under the supervision of landscape gardeners. A rose garden is under construction on the site of some old conservatories. An adult recreation ground with clay and turf croquet courts and pitching areas is being built. Eighteen marginal playgrounds for the small children of New York are being constructed."
"Of greater interest to you gentlemen than the detailed improvements being made in Central Park and other parks throughout the country is the master planning activity for a city of the future being carried on in New York City under auspices of the WPA and the Mayor's Committee on City Planning. A vast graph is being prepared by which the metropolis may steer its natural course of expansion. This work was begun two years ago, but its continuation has been made possible by a grant of WPA funds; 556 technicians are at work on the job.

"The purpose of the work is to make a series of basic studies of public works and services, with the ultimate intention of laying the groundwork for a master plan of the entire City of New York. When completed this master plan will be used as an indicator toward a program of public works in all boroughs, and it will aid in codifying the activities of various civic departments engaged in public works. Data from the studies is already being made accessible to various private groups which are working toward city improvement. But it is as a guide to widespread civic improvement, when the city once more has funds available to renew its vast program of public works, that the master plan survey has its greatest importance.

"Under the leadership of the National Resources Committee there are planning commissions and planning boards operating in close cooperation with the WPA and other Emergency relief organizations. Forty-six states have such planning boards, and there are planning commissions in 400 counties and 800 cities throughout the country.

"I have attempted first to give you a few examples of the specific and general work being done by the WPA which would interest men of your experience and talents. I wish, however, to give you some idea, if I can, of the broad patterns of our emergency programs. We in Washington can only lay down broad national programs to meet specific national problems. Within these broad programs, policies develop. The acceptance of our programs and policies by the states, counties, municipalities and townships constitutes, in effect, planning in operation. Every local community which submitted its project to Washington knew better than we could possibly know not only the needs of its locality but the best means of satisfying those needs. Through our State administrators and their executive assistants, we have been doing our best to direct the activities of local sponsors and of the men on the job in general directions which do not violate/policies which we have had constantly to bear in mind."
Our previous experience with relief and with works projects under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Civil Works Administration convinced us that men and women without jobs want, besides money with which to buy food, clothing, and shelter, a chance to exercise their bodies and minds at tasks which fit in with their previous experience and training. Ever since the inception of this administration's program of work relief, there has been a consistent social philosophy back of our endeavors. That philosophy has been based primarily on the premise that men prefer work to idleness, and that work is better for the individual and the nation than federal and local charity.

There are still a few of our opponents who believe that men do not want to work. They are usually the type whose superior financial advantages convinces them that that society is best which consists of a large body of servile labor and a small group of aristocratic directors. This school of thought which believes that men won't work unless driven by the lash of absolute starvation goes on the fallacious assumption that our wealthier people are necessarily our most competent folk. We have found, after careful surveys, in communities with varying conditions, that men and women in the United States today prefer work under fair conditions to idleness on a dole. Very few of the men and women from relief rolls who have been offered jobs on WPA projects have refused them for any reasons, and in most cases of refusals to work there were involved questions of physical unfitness, lack of transportation to the jobs, and previous engagement in private employment between the time a project got under way and the time a man was registered as on relief.

The reports which have been coming in from the states invariably comment on the eagerness and efficiency of the majority of men and women who are at work on projects. Most of the millions of men and women of the United States who have received jobs through the WPA program have shown their gratitude at the opportunity to exercise their skills and to keep active while earning their keep and that of their families. Direct relief doles were a humiliation to the millions of people who were out of work in the United States through no fault of their own. Many of those people were sensitive people who had been accustomed all their lives to earning their own livings. Suddenly they were deprived of those opportunities by world economic conditions, and they were thrust into the position of beggars of the community.
"By a carefully planned program of works projects, we have attempted to remove the humiliation from public aid. Men and women are working at socially useful projects for wages. They feel once more that they are giving value received for what they are getting to support life. In fact, there is developing a community spirit as a result of works projects which will be a valuable asset to America in the future. For the first time in their lives many men and women are experiencing the advantages of cooperating with citizens of their own communities to produce advantages and services of value to the entire group.

"Among the thousands of projects which have been selected by WPA for operation throughout the United States are projects which touch the interests and use the energies of all classes of the population. We have projects in operation which benefit everybody from a lawyer to a mother. Young men just out of college who have been deprived by the depression of an opportunity to use scientific training are getting that opportunity on WPA projects. Old men who had professional skill or technical ability and who were shoved aside during the progress of technological development are receiving the chance to use the abilities which they had spent so many years in acquiring. Skills which private industry has needed badly in the past, and which it will need again, are being preserved by the use of government funds.

"In addition to the importance of the works program to individuals who needed jobs so badly, the program has been of great importance in maintaining the economic order for those who already had jobs and capital. If they had not been given opportunities to use their skills, millions of men would have fallen into a pool of unskilled labor, whose physical and moral fibre would have deteriorated rapidly at the expense of the entire society in which they were living, and to the particular industries and service professions in which they had been trained. The skill and training of millions of unemployed must be maintained, and the skill and training of hundreds of thousands of young people growing up to take their places must be developed, if the economic order is to re-absorb the unemployed, whose purchasing power it needs so badly for its own continued prosperity.
"Merchants throughout the country are already feeling the effect of WPA wages on their sales, and this effect will prove much greater as the men who are now receiving wages for work catch up on their debts and begin spending for replacement of clothing and other necessities and comforts. In addition to this great benefit to the retail merchant, the farmer is benefiting by the thousands of miles of farm-to-market roads being built on WPA projects, which make it possible for him to gain access to wider and wider markets in all kinds of weather.

"There is still some misconception of the purposes and policies of the WPA program in various parts of the country. One of the commonest misconceptions is that the WPA was designed to take care of every man and woman out of work in the United States. The Federal Government agreed to aid the states to take care of the employable population of the United States on relief as of November 1, 1935, but it remained and still remains the obligation of the states to care for those of their citizens who are physically incapable of work, or who have lost their jobs and resources since November 1st. The program is not designed to take care of members of the unemployed population who have personal resources or who have relatives who can give them assistance.

"The immediate problem of the Works Progress Administration was to put as many men and women to work as possible in as short a time. At the same time care had to be exercised that these men and women were working at useful work and that the money contributed by the Federal Treasury was spent properly and valuably. The need for haste was great, but the need for caution was also great. The effort was made to design light projects which could be put into operation swiftly.

"As Mr. Hopkins pointed out: 'A park or a swimming pool, for instance, can be started without delay and affords immediate employment, after which the workers can move on to the big construction jobs of the PWA or the Housing Division.' This did not mean that the Administration was opposed to the utility of heavy construction projects for huge dams and large public buildings. It meant merely that as a matter of policy the lighter, more flexible projects, more numerous and locally valuable projects had to take precedence over the gigantic public works designed to serve large areas.
Even though speed was necessary, every precaution was taken under the WPA program to guarantee that projects would be useful and valuable. Every project planned in a local community was sponsored by some local government agency or some quasi-public local organization. The projects thus originated in the communities which they were designed to benefit, and so investigation and argument concerning their value could be carried on in town meetings, city hall conferences or state offices before submission to Washington for approval. In the communities in which they originated the projects also had the advantage of being examined by lawyers, engineers, architects and other experts in their fields, and then by the State Administrators and their staffs. After that process was finished, and the projects were submitted to Washington, they were examined thoroughly by the legal and technical advisers of the Works Progress Administration. Finally, they had to have the approval of the President and the approval of the Comptroller General of the United States, before funds could be released for their prosecution.

"The plan behind the Works Progress Administration called for both centralization and decentralization. The Federal Government, supplying approximately 80 per cent. of the money for projects throughout the country, controlled the use of that money through its central offices in Washington and through its administrators in the states, appointed by Washington. Through the Treasury Department offices throughout the country, the Federal Government exercised supervision over the purchase of materials and supplies. But the Works Progress Administration is also properly decentralized. The State Administrators not only represent the administration at Washington in the states, but they work in cooperation with the local sponsors of projects, and through their district directors and supervisors, they bring a knowledge of local needs and problems to the attention of the federal officials in Washington. The actual work on projects is directed by local and state citizens who are residents of the communities receiving aid. Through labor management representatives and safety directors the interests of the workers on projects are protected, and their grievances received careful consideration."
Before a work program could be developed which would insure millions of men and women jobs at work which they could perform usefully, an immense amount of careful research work and planning had to be done. When the Federal Emergency Relief Administration began its activities in May 1933, nothing was known about the size of the national relief load. Nothing was known about the proportion of employables and unemployables who required relief and who were even then eager for work. Their occupation had not been tabulated, and there was no accurate information on the relative importance of the rural and urban relief problems.

By research studies and by practical experience the data necessary to formulate programs and policies was acquired. After WPA was organized, it required the ingenuity and careful consideration of engineers, sociologists, social welfare agencies, personnel managers, and other professional men and women to work out projects in sufficient variety and of sufficient value to care for the millions of unemployed and to satisfy the needs of towns, cities and rural areas.

Several fundamental problems had to be met at the outset. It was necessary that work-relief projects and the wages and hours paid on them should not be so attractive as to induce men and women to stay on temporary government projects rather than seek permanent private employment. For that reason a worker's pay on projects was calculated according to his minimum budgetary needs. If he or she desired a better life, the worker was compelled to seek the wider opportunities of private employment. The work wage on projects has never been either a luxury wage or a cultural wage, but a security wage, which would guarantee the minimum requirements of a human being belonging to the particular person's category of skill and training.

In its vast work program the WPA has had the cooperation of the United States National Park Service, of the War Department, of the Civilian Conservation Corps, of the U. S. Employment Service, and of dozens of bureaus and departments of the Federal Government. In the states the planning of parks and recreational projects has had the cooperation of the state conservation boards and state agricultural departments. The planning boards and commissions in the states, counties and municipalities are also cooperating with us.

The WPA program offers a great opportunity to educate large groups of people in the importance of adequate and intelligent planning on a permanent basis.
The emergency experience of the FERA, CWA, and WPA will form a background for future generations who will have available the records of our achievements and our mistakes. So far as the immediate future is concerned, the WPA has in the course of its work been able to train a capable and efficient administrative staff for fast and careful work. These thousands of men throughout the country who have gained experience in the first comprehensive works program in American history will form a nucleus for future public works endeavors.

"In addition the experience of the WPA program will give the American people an added interest and experience with large federal programs for public works and will add to their respect for proper planning of community endeavors. This will be true not only of the population as a whole, but the experience gained in local communities in community cooperation for the community good will prove invaluable when the local units plan once more for their own needs and desires. Towns and villages which had never previously thought of cooperation for the purposes of developing recreational and beautification projects will now be less reluctant to inaugurate local public works, since they have had valuable object lessons under WPA auspices of the advantages to be gained from common endeavor.

"In aiding this development and in technical assistance to your local communities as well as to the Federal Government you experts in your very important field can be of outstanding service to the community and to the nation. The value of your experience with landscape work, which plays such a predominant part in so many public works, will be welcomed by the civic organizations in your own states and cities, and the value of your advice and criticism will always be of great service to national administrative bodies in charge of public works projects. We can only initiate programs and policies, but it is up to the technicians to help us carry out our plans and to aid us in making those plans as practicable and as useful as is humanly possible."

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