

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

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The following address was delivered by Corrington Gill, Assistant Administrator of the Works Progress Administration, at the dedication of the University of Minnesota Hydraulics Laboratory, Minneapolis, Minn., on Thursday, November 17, 1938:

President Ford, Dr. Snyder, Dean Lind, Dr. Straub, ladies and gentlemen. I am most grateful for the privilege of taking part in the dedication of this fine contribution to the research equipment of the University of Minnesota. At the risk of doing violence to the cordial spirit in which I have been made welcome, I feel that I should, in all frankness, to confess my status as an alumnus of the University of Wisconsin. Perhaps it is fortunate for me that this program precedes the gridiron event of day after tomorrow, but I can only hope that even the inevitable outcome of Saturday's game will not put me in the awkward position of being persona non grata in Minnesota.

It is hardly necessary for me to say that the WPA is justly proud of its part in the construction of this structure -- not only because it represents the finest of its kind but because it is tangible evidence of the realization of an ideal. Cooperation with institutions like the University of Minnesota in the practical development of plans for such outstanding improvements to their facilities is the very corner stone on which the WPA program is built.

I hope that all of you will take advantage of the opportunity to inspect this laboratory. I have been extremely interested in Dr. Straub's account of the unique problems encountered in its construction and I have been tremendously impressed with the skill and determination which has brought about their solution. Since I am not an hydraulic engineer, I am sure it would be most presumptuous for me to undertake a technical discussion of this new equipment which Dean Lind, Dr. Straub and their associates can explain so much more effectively.

So, if I may, I should like instead to talk with you about a part of the WPA program which is symbolized by this fine addition to the equipment

and facilities of the University.

After more than five years of participation in the relief activities of the Federal government -- first with the FERA, then the CWA and now the WPA, I am more than ever firmly convinced that, given a situation in which there is serious unemployment and destitution, any remedial measures can and should be in the form of useful work projects. This building which we are dedicating tonight is pretty substantial evidence in favor of that position. And this new laboratory is symbolic, not only of the thousands of public improvements realized but it represents one way in which this program has contributed to the progress of knowledge.

The fact that more than 1500 new school buildings have been constructed and over 16,000 modernized is fairly generally known. So too, the reduction of our illiterate population by nearly a million individuals, and the employment of a hundred thousand jobless instructors to conduct adult education classes attended by more than four million persons are matters of record. But something that is not so well known is the fact that out of this program have grown several thousand scientific and scholarly articles and books based on work projects involving some form of research activities. It is this part of our program that I should like to discuss with you a little more in detail.

As far back as 1933, investigations of the dependent unemployed revealed the presence of substantial numbers of so-called white-collar workers on the relief rolls. Many of them were file-clerks, typists, book-keepers, salesmen and others for whom it was fairly simple to devise highly useful clerical projects. Among other things, nearly three hundred million items in various types of important record systems have been indexed, cataloged or otherwise made more accessible and useful. But a relatively small group of these unemployed workers -- two or three percent of the total -- had some kind of technical or professional training which fitted them for research. True, these people could have been set to work copying records but, with countless unexplored fields of research awaiting attention, it seemed imperative to utilize their talents and training more effectively in this direction.

This job was not a simple one. It was necessary to put people to work as quickly as possible. Research -- more so than the building of a road or small school house -- cannot be based on ready-made or quickly drawn plans. Scientific investigation on a mass basis was a new adventure -- almost an uncharted course.

Many of the first research projects with relief workers were undertaken under the guidance of other Federal agencies. For instance, the first large-scale systematic study of housing, under the direction of the Department of Commerce, resulted in the collection of long-needed data for 64 large cities. This survey was the forerunner of more than 250 locally sponsored real property surveys which are indispensable to plans for improvement in housing conditions.

The National Health Survey, a WPA project under the direction of the United States Public Health Service, has furnished the most comprehensive data on disease and medical care ever compiled in this country. Records on three-quarters of a million families were collected. The wide public interest in this study has made its conclusions well-known, but the scope of its contribution to public health will probably never be estimated. I believe it is also important that the 5,000 individuals who worked on this survey were not left in idleness or assigned to some manual job. On the contrary, they collaborated in a tremendously useful task and they worked at jobs which made use of and, in many cases, further developed their special skills and training.

Perhaps one of the most important of these nation-wide research projects is the study of technological changes and unemployment. Detailed and carefully organized studies of the displacement of workers by machines are currently being made in cooperation with other Federal and private research organizations. More than 25 reports have thus far been issued and they form the most exhaustive analysis of this problem ever undertaken.

There are many other such nation-wide projects, but I should like now to mention another important type of activity. Literally hundreds of municipal and other public officials, hampered for years by the lack of essential data of one sort or another, have devised many splendid research projects to fill this need for information. More than 250 cities and counties have analyzed their traffic problems and, on the basis of the studies, have speeded up traffic and

reduced accidents. A long series of studies of juvenile delinquency, its causes and types, have assisted in crime prevention programs. Inventories of the school facilities of many cities and counties have resulted in essential changes and rearrangements. Countless local studies of unemployment and dependency have provided a more adequate factual basis for the administration of relief and reemployment activities. Analyses of industrial accidents and diseases have resulted in more effective preventive measures and in more equitable compensation policies and procedures. Here again, these jobs have been done by workers who would otherwise be unemployed. And, since many of them had been trained for such jobs they have done them well -- so well, in fact, that they have frequently been hired by the city or county to keep on doing them -- not as work projects but as regular budgetary activities.

Then there is another group of projects which, to you who are closely associated with the University will, perhaps, be even more significant. Just as the University and the WPA have cooperated in the construction of this building, we have also joined forces in undertaking some of the actual research problems themselves. Some of you are no doubt now making use of the assistance of WPA workers in connection with your own research.

The field of WPA activities in pure research is naturally somewhat more restricted. It is only natural that the relief rolls do not contain many highly trained specialists. But I am sure you will all agree that one of the most difficult problems confronting the research worker in a university is the lack of assistants to do the more routine jobs. Frequently he lacks funds to hire them and his teaching schedule doesn't permit him to do them himself. The research chemist, for example, who has to prepare his own standard solutions and wash his own apparatus is hardly making the most productive use of his own training and talents. Unemployed workers, with varying amounts of technical or professional training have thus provided a supply of labor which has been used to do what we might call the "leg-work" for many research specialists.

At New York University they have assisted in a study of the theory of the multiple diffraction grating. Project workers at the University of California have assisted in the study of the chemistry of endocrine secretions

and in many experimental studies in the fields of anatomy and animal physiology. Outstanding studies of the physical and mental development of children have been carried on with the assistance of project workers and an important analysis of blood coagulation was completed as a project.

I do not have time here to recall to your minds the entire list of projects on which the University of Minnesota and the WPA have collaborated. Among them most of you will doubtless recall the series of agricultural studies on farm income, vocational education in farm management, crop production and prices, weed control methods, and agricultural employment. The University has also sponsored useful surveys on tuberculosis death rates, and surveys of local government finance, personnel and administration. This list could be continued, but it is perhaps sufficient to say that there are few fields of research to which project workers have not made some contribution. But in this connection I should like to make one point very clear. The WPA does not pretend to assume credit for this research. The credit goes where it rightly belongs -- to the university faculty members, the public officials and others whose training, ingenuity and labor have made their conception possible and their completion a fact. We, as employees of the WPA are proud to have been of assistance. We are proud, too, of the 47,000 workers who have been employed at tasks which have enabled them to maintain and develop their skill at the same time making substantial contributions to human knowledge.

We found, earlier in the program, that research projects were sometimes operated without making the data available to other research workers. To correct this situation the WPA now requires all sponsors of research projects to publish their results. It is, of course, unnecessary for me to point out here that the value of research to society is in large part dependent upon its availability for practical application and as a basis for the investigations of other research workers. In order to fulfill more adequately this essential research clearing-house function, the WPA has recently issued an index and digest of more than 2600 research projects already completed. I am confident that we shall solve other problems as I believe we have found a solution for this one. I know that we may count on your assistance in the endeavor.

May I say once more that I am very happy to have had this opportunity to meet with you tonight. The WPA is grateful for the opportunity to participate in the realization of the plans and ideals which this building and equipment represent. And for the WPA as well as on my own behalf I want to express the sincere wish that these research facilities will result in a full realization of the aims and objectives of all of you who have so effectively cooperated in their completion.

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