WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

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STUDY SHOWS DECLINING EMPLOYMENT IN BRICK AND TILE INDUSTRY

A serious decline has occurred in the brick and tile manufacturing industry since the turn of the century, greatly diminishing employment prospects, according to a report prepared by the National Research Project of the Works Progress Administration made public today by Colonel F. C. Harrington, Administrator.

Principal findings of the survey, conducted in cooperation with the National Bureau of Economic Research, are:

> The brick and tile manufacturing industry experienced its all-time production peak 30 years ago.
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> Displacement of brick and tile by other materials during recent decades when building activities were increasing kept the volume of production for the industry as a whole below former peaks even during the construction boom around 1925.
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> Should the 40-hour week become the governing standard in this industry, and should the existing deficiency in housing result in a return to even a 1929 level of construction activity, it is probable that the conservativeness of builders, together with the influence of the existing building codes which favor the use of brick, will result in a volume of reemployment sufficient to approach the employment level of 1929.

The report, "Brick and Tile" is based on a study of the manufacture of five major clay products - common brick, face brick, paving brick, hollow building tile and drain tile - in 108 plants throughout the United States. It considers prospects for future employment after analyzing the factors affecting job opportunities in this industry.

Reviewing developments in the industry, Corrington Gill, Assistant Administrator, who is in charge of all WPA research, points out in his letter of transmittal:

"In 1869 the manufacture of 1,000 common brick required more than 27 man-hours of work. During the next 50 years the labor required dropped to less than 13 hours, and by 1925 only 9 man-hours were needed. The 4,215 plants operating in 1909 employed an average of 76,500 wage earners and produced an equivalent of 15.7 billion common brick. In 1925 almost as much brick - 15.4 billion - was produced by 57,600 wage earners in 1,528 plants, while in 1935 only slightly over 17,000 workers were used to manufacture the 3.4 billion bricks in the 708 plants that operated during that year."

The report points out that "the twentieth century has seen common brick gradually replaced by other building materials, especially in tall office buildings, the larger apartment houses, and factories. Concrete is poured to make the massive foundation; a steel frame supports walls, floors and roof; the walls, whether made of brick or hollow tile, need only be thick enough to shut out the weather. Concrete floors are made for the purposes of fire protection and support of machinery and other heavy equipment; glass is used to a much larger extent than ever before as a structural material and in the greater space devoted to windows.

"Changes in architectural style and in the mechanics of construction, as well as the development of substitute materials, have all contributed to minimizing the use of common brick," the report continues. "Traditions are still strongly in favor of brick, but the trends in modern architecture are toward the use of newer material such as concrete, stucco, glass, and other materials better adapted to modern forms."

"Recovery of employment in the industry depends, of course, primarily on an increased volume of construction," Mr. Gill said, "but the production prospects are limited by the declining use of brick and tile in construction. Reemployment opportunities are further limited by the fact that an increased degree of plant-capacity utilization is likely to result in a rise of productivity considerably beyond present levels in operating plants and in an increased share of the total output produced in the larger and more efficient plants. Also, if past experience is repeated, a major upturn in activity is likely to be followed by the construction of new, more efficient plants and by the improvement of the equipment of existing plants and the installation of new and improved machines."

The report is entitled "Productivity and Employment in Selected Industries: Brick and Tile" and is published as a booklet of 212 pages with many charts and statistical tables. It was prepared by Miriam E. West under the supervision of the late Harry Jerome and William A. Neiswanger as one of the reports of the WPA National Research Project on Reemployment Opportunities and Recent Changes in Industrial Techniques directed by David Weintraub.

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