



FEDERAL WORKS AGENCY  
WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION

For Release on Delivery  
Thursday, March 21, 1940.

COLONEL HARRINGTON SPEAKS AT DEDICATION OF ARMORY-AUDITORIUM IN  
NORTH CAROLINA

Speaking at the dedication of the armory-auditorium in Lumberton, North Carolina, Thursday, March 21, 1940, (about noon, EST) Colonel F. C. Harrington, Commissioner of Work Projects, said:

I am glad to be here with you today to help dedicate this new armory and auditorium. It is a project I have followed with considerable interest. You do not have to be an engineer to see that this project has been handled efficiently and intelligently. We owe much credit to Mayor Johnson and the city officials who sponsored and cooperated on this project; to Mr. Prevatt, our engineer in charge of WPA construction in Robeson County; Mr. Burney, the project superintendent who was directly in charge of this job; the WPA workers who actually built this armory; and Mr. McGinnis, the very efficient and hardworking State Administrator under whose guidance and enthusiastic interest so much valuable work has been done in the State of North Carolina.

This is one of the best examples of the successful co-operation that has gone on between the WPA and the public officials and other citizens of hundreds of communities in the State of North Carolina.

- 2 -

Mayor Johnson, I want to say to you that the town of Lumberton may well serve as an example of enlightened and public-spirited cooperation in getting important work done. This new building -- which, I understand, Lumberton is willing to let Battery B use if Captain Wishart promises to take good care of it -- this new building is one of several hundred new armories constructed and improved in the United States by means of just the kind of enlightened cooperation the people of Lumberton have shown. To be exact, there are 222 new armories that have been built through community cooperation with the WPA since the program started in 1935; 31 additions to existing armories have been constructed during the same period; and 344 armories have been reconstructed or improved. In this State, 23 new armories have been completed and 2 are nearing completion.

The building we are dedicating today cost \$104,000, of which the Federal Government paid some \$66,000, and the City of Lumberton the remainder, or approximately \$38,000. I think we can all agree that this money has been well spent.

Those figures I cited are definite and I like to mention them for a very definite reason. When you have a large body of facts of that kind -- whether you are speaking of armories, or of hospitals, or of school buildings -- you have the best possible answer to that segment of our citizenry who even today persists in informing us that WPA workers do nothing but lean upon their shovels. It is only a legend of course and I am glad to see it passing into the mists of history.

- 3 -

It is becoming increasingly hard for anyone to say that WPA workers are charity cases, or a burden on their communities, when they produce wealth of this kind. No one who drives very far upon any highway in this county can say it, unless he refuses to look at the road ahead, the public buildings beside it, or the improvements of various kinds which have been made to hundreds of public facilities.

It is pleasant to be able to bear witness to the completion of a well-conceived and well-rounded project for a comprehensive civic center. I understand, Governor, that this is your sixth armory dedication. I noted with great satisfaction that the merchants of this community, and many institutions of the community and the State, are well represented in this celebration. That is as it should be, and I offer a final word of congratulation for this evidence of good old-fashioned American community spirit. As long as we can count on that kind of spirit we need have no fears for our nation's future.

This building will have a double usefulness as an armory and a civic center. Peaceful community activities, we hope, will always have their place here. If the day ever comes, however, when this building has to be used as one of a great number of training centers throughout the country, we shall be prepared. General Metts, as I do not need to inform anybody who has been close to the development of this project, has followed the building of these structures throughout the State with more than ordinary care.

And so all of us here today -- citizens of your community, workers whose skill went into the construction of this building, visitors who have come to bear witness to a job well done -- all of us can take pride in the dedication of one more unit in a national construction

program. It is a program made up of many thousands of concrete  
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achievements -- schools, hospitals, bridges, highways -- as well as the intangible things which are difficult to measure because they can only be expressed in human terms. This community and every community in the State and in the Nation is becoming a better, cleaner, more healthful place to live in because of the work of the people who only a few years ago felt that they were unwanted, and of no use to their communities or themselves.

In creating useful work instead of allowing large numbers of our citizens to remain idle we have been taking part in a great experiment which is democratic in the best sense: that is, in providing the greatest good for the greatest number of people, and providing it through cooperation and good will. Without that spirit of cooperation all our high-sounding ideals would be nothing but empty words. And without agreement upon a plan that works, all the good will in the world would be wasted.

In many cases, people find nothing wrong with the WPA program in their own community, yet feel perfectly certain that it is badly run in other places far enough away so that the details are conveniently obscure.

That, as we all agree, is human nature. Many critics of our program find it objectionable in the abstract even though actual proof that it works is right before them. The unemployment problem is often thought of in the same manner -- as something so abstract, so far away, that we do not relate it to actual conditions right in our own communities, for which we have a personal responsibility. Yet national unemployment difficulties cannot be met in general unless they are met in this county and in every one of the 3,000 counties of the nation, by cooperation among the citizens working with the agencies they have themselves created.

It is true that unemployment is a national problem. But the Nation is not a shadowy abstraction far away from us; it is right here; it is thousands of communities like this with fundamentally the same problems as yours, problems which in the last analysis will be solved by cooperation. Society today, more than at any time in the history of mankind, is a complex organism that depends upon the harmonious functioning of all its elements for its very life. So we must think of the problems of the Government and of the Nation as matters that depend upon what we ourselves do for their solution.

Here in Robeson County you have furnished a good example of what can be done with a work program in creating tangible wealth for yourselves and your children. Mr. McGinnis's report was issued a few days ago for the cumulative accomplishments in the State since the program started in 1935. His report for this county is also available. The report of our national achievements, for the same four and one-half year period, has been sent to the press as a report to the nation. All citizens interested in the future of the work program should know about those reports and the extent and significance of the work accomplished. Nearly half a million miles of roads, highways and streets have been reconstructed and improved over the Nation. Over 55,000 bridges and viaducts have been built. We have constructed over 23,000 public buildings, of which 4,000 were schools. A great sanitation program has been carried on with the construction of over 15,000 miles of sewers, over 500 sewage treatment plants, and many other public utilities which are now in the service of communities throughout the nation. In cooperation with the United States Public Health Service we have drained



nearly 3 million acres of swampland and the Surgeon General has stated that those and other WPA activities have advanced our national control of malaria by 20 years. Our workers have aided in the great national campaign of conservation by the irrigation of a quarter of a million acres and the reconditioning of the irrigation systems of nearly 4 million acres.

Last October I had the pleasure of helping to dedicate our largest single WPA project -- the great new airport at New York City, La Guardia Airport. At that time I pointed out that much of the work accomplished there was not visible in the finished product. La Guardia Airport is now a broad level expanse which looks as though it had been formed by nature. But the acres which represent that landing field were literally carried there and set down upon what used to be nothing but mud flats and water.

Here in North Carolina we are particularly proud of the airports which have been built in Charlotte, Wilmington, and Friendship, and the airport now under construction at Winston-Salem.

In the nation as a whole we have built nearly 200 modern airports of the first class and reconditioned over 300 others. Going to the opposite extreme for my last statistics, we have built over a quarter of a million feet of tunnels.

An inventory of such large achievements would not have been possible without the most important element in every single job -- the element of cooperation. Public health work aided by WPA projects represents one excellent example of such cooperation among many agencies. Educational work represents another. The airport construction of which I spoke is a good example of the way in which Federal agencies cooperate with State and local ones. All our airport projects are passed upon by the Civil Aeronautics

Authority so that we shall provide the most effectively coordinated system of airports and airways for the Nation as a whole. Cooperation of another sort takes place in the sharing of responsibilities among the stronger and the weaker communities of a given State, so that those which cannot afford to pay as much toward the total cost are aided by those which can afford to pay more.

A further very necessary element, which should never be forgotten, is the individual initiative of local citizens and local officials in working for community improvements, frequently under discouraging handicaps, until they finally see those improvements made. Civic organizations, public spirited governors and mayors, and many whose names never appear in the record -- all these have worked together for the general good. Our communities need, and the nation needs, the energy and imagination of such good citizens.

Some of our critics have said that aid from the government is destroying local initiative. I think you know that this is simply not true. Our critics have also sometimes charged that community and Federal help to the needy unemployed is destroying their individual initiative. It is said by such hostile critics that the workers on WPA projects don't want to take private jobs. Our investigators have looked into thousands of such alleged cases, and in nearly every instance they find that the private jobs referred to by our critics do not exist. And when the critics are asked for the names of WPA workers refusing private jobs, they are unable to give that information.

I think you will agree that your WPA workers here in Lumberton are not any different from other workers. They are not a special group. Unemployed workers come into the WPA and go out again constantly. The turn-over is very large. The problem of unemployment is not a problem of individuals who cannot get private jobs. It is a problem of large numbers,



varying from month to month as to the individuals who compose them, and having only this fact in common -- that at the time they are out of work. This applies at present to some 10 million American workers -- not exactly the same 10 million now as last fall.

There is much useful work that still remains to be done in all our communities throughout the nation -- work that the needy unemployed can do. This armory and auditorium here in Lumberton is an example of it. You have provided work and wages for an average of 78 workers for a year on this building. In the same way, on a variety of useful public projects, 2,300,000 people are now employed in all our American communities. The work they are doing is making this a better, healthier, happier and more comfortable America for us all to live in.

I should like to point out, also, that both the money spent by sponsors on materials, and the wages paid to WPA workers are useful in maintaining our economic system and in creating private employment. WPA wages -- 87% of all WPA expenditures -- are spent locally for the necessities of life, and local trade is everywhere greatly helped by these WPA expenditures.

And now I want to close with another word about the WPA workers of Lumberton whose labor and skill went into the construction of this building. In return for the wages paid to them, they have given us a good job. This new armory is a credit to the City, the State and to the Nation, and in dedicating it today we also affirm that it is a credit to the men who built it.

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