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*Building the New Deal:
Federal Construction on College Campuses in 1930s Texas*

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On June 16, 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt approved the National Industrial Recovery Act which was formed “to encourage national industrial recovery, to foster fair competition, and to provide for the construction of certain useful public works.”¹ Out of this act, the Public Works Administration was born and served as a vehicle that provided jobs and assisted in the resumption of construction projects that were cut and scaled down during the early years of the Great Depression. In 1935, under the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act, the Works Progress Administration was formed and was given the “broad task of coordinating the work of other Federal agencies receiving emergency Federal funds for construction,” including the PWA.² In total, these agencies operated for roughly ten years, from 1933 to 1943, though much of the activity occurred prior to America’s involvement in World War II. Projects undertaken by these agencies included the construction of roads, playgrounds, water and sanitation plants, libraries, hospitals, public school buildings, and even expansion projects on many college and university campuses. On February 16, 1934, the Texas Senate approved Senate Bill No. 9, which allowed colleges and universities in Texas to apply for federal funds for useful and needed construction on campuses.³ Texas Woman’s University, then called Texas State College for Women, took full advantage of this opportunity.

The federally funded expansion that took place on the campus of Texas State College for Women during the years of the depression was extensive. Credit for the many buildings built and improvements made to the campus during this period is generally given to Dr. Louis H. Hubbard, the president of the college at the time. Hubbard

¹United States Government, “National Industrial Recovery Act (1933),” OurDocuments.gov, accessed October 28, 2014, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=66>.

² Arthur Burns and Edward Williams, *Federal Work, Security and Relief Programs* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1941), 53.

³ James Rogers, *The Story of North Texas: From Texas Normal College, 1890 To North Texas State University, 1965* (Denton: North Texas State University, 1965), 279.

was elected president in February of 1926 and began his administrative duties in June.⁴ He immediately initiated projects to improve the infrastructure of the college upon starting his tenure as president. These projects included fixing the lighting on campus and updating the heating system in the library.⁵ He also expanded the land owned by the college, adding roughly eighty extra acres to the campus.⁶ When the Roosevelt administration enacted relief programs and created agencies such as the PWA and WPA, Hubbard boasted that he immediately saw the opportunity to further expand Texas State College for Women. In his memoir Hubbard wrote:

I was quick to see the possibilities for expanding the plant facilities of the college. Most other state college presidents seemed unaware of what the Act could mean to their institutions. It was a period when buildings were hard to get that I operated to secure ours...Our success made our institution a conspicuous example among Texas colleges, and put us far ahead of the others as far as our physical plant was concerned.⁷

Hubbard claimed that his quick move to procure New Deal funding made Texas State College for Women a model campus in regards to infrastructure. However, through examination of building records and administrative documents from other Texas colleges and universities including, the University of North Texas, then North Texas State Teacher's College, Texas A&M University, then called the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, Hubbard's claims about Texas State College for Women were clearly exaggerated.

North Texas State Teachers' College and The Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas were chosen for this comparative study because, like Texas State College for Women they had been established for at least thirty years and had clearly defined locations in which to support large scale construction. It is also important to note that this analysis will only examine infrastructure built on the main campuses of each institution. The Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas had established affiliated campuses in various locations in Texas, but the inclusion of these campuses in the study would make comparison with the single campus institutions of North Texas State Teachers' College and Texas State College for Women less uniform. These schools also

⁴ E.V. White, "Historical Record of The Texas State College for Women: The First Forty-Five Years 1903-1948," (Denton. Texas Woman's University Press, 1948), 8.

⁵ Louis H. Hubbard, *Recollections of a Texas Educator* (Salado, Texas: North Texas State University, 1964), 177-178.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 183 and 185.

had similar student body populations of no more than 5,000 students during the depression years. Furthermore, each school was public and therefore eligible to receive full Federal funding.

The construction that occurred at Texas State College for Women will be examined first. As previously mentioned, President Hubbard had already begun improving the campus of Texas State College for Women before the development of the PWA and WPA. However, when the depression hit, Texas State College for Women too was affected by the economic troubles faced by the nation. In 1932, the Board of Regents was forced to reduce the yearly budget by \$30,000. To avoid a plunge in enrollment rates the board decided to offer reduced tuition to students as well, and put programs in place that allowed students to pay for their education in installments.⁸ To save the college and students further money, the college also acquired several bargain buildings that were converted into dormitories. The girls living in these halls divided the goods and labor of the households and were able to live on campus cheaply for about ten dollars a month.⁹ These measures allowed attendance to rebound to normal numbers by 1934.

In 1933 the total amount spent on facilities on the campus of Texas State College for Women was only \$2.5 million and with the programs put in place by the Board of Regents that allowed for enrollment numbers to reach their normal levels, infrastructure expansion was needed.¹⁰ When Roosevelt passed the National Industrial Recovery Act in the summer of 1933, Hubbard and business manager Marvin Loveless were, as mentioned in Hubbard's memoir, indeed one of the first applicants admitted to the new PWA office stationed in Fort Worth. By the fall of 1934, the duo had procured over half a million dollars for large construction projects on campus. The buildings constructed with these funds included, a science building, a fine arts building, a new dormitory, and a campus hospital.¹¹ In January of the following year, Hubbard procured money from the board to make trips to Washington to gain additional funding for these buildings.¹² In total, federal funds helped established seven new buildings on campus.

The hospital, Hygeia Hall, was the first building to be completed in 1936 and cost approximately \$40,000 to construct. The addition of a fourth floor to one of the larger dormitory buildings, Brackenridge Hall, and the demolition of another, Stoddard Hall, along with the re-build of the residence structure, together cost \$235,000. Two final dormitories built with PWA funds, Houston and Austin Halls, cost \$175,000 to raise. After

⁸ Joyce Thompson, *Marking a Trail: A History of The Texas Woman's University* (Denton: Texas Woman's University Press, 1982), 79.

⁹ Mike Cochran, "WPA Denton City Guide" (city history, Denton, 1988), 53.

¹⁰ Thompson, *Marking a Trail: A History of The Texas Woman's University*, 79.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

these much needed dorms were constructed, ground was broken on the planned classroom buildings in the summer of 1935. The Fine Arts and Science buildings, when completed, cost around the same price as the dormitories each. The final large structure funded with PWA grants and loans was the Music and Speech Building. Ground was broken on this classroom building in 1935.

Though these were the primary buildings raised during the New Deal era at Texas State College for Women, other smaller projects were funded by the WPA. Towards the end of the 1930's, procuring money from the PWA became increasingly difficult, a difficulty which is evident through examination of the Board of Regent meeting minutes from the final years of the decade. There are several instances of the board members discussing the withdrawal of PWA applications and instead putting in applications for funds from the WPA. The number of times this occurs suggests funding from the PWA was becoming increasingly difficult to procure. On January 16, 1940, the Board of Regents approved the construction of a gymnasium, a swimming pool, and a model elementary school that worked as facility to help train future educators.¹³ According to these minutes, the school received \$30,000 dollars from the WPA to assist in the building of the model school while they received \$40,000 for the gymnasium and \$25,000 for the swimming pool.¹⁴ Inclusion of these smaller projects brought the total cost of expansion to \$1.5 million of which roughly \$675,000 was provided by either the PWA or WPA.

Hubbard's New Deal building program will first be compared with the building projects that took place at North Texas State Teacher's College. Like at Texas State College for Women, the depression caused the campus to cut their budget, but similar money saving measures were approved by the board of regents to keep enrollment rates steady during the years of the depression. The continued high enrollment at the college meant new buildings were needed to accommodate the student body. The president of the college from 1923 to 1934 was President R. L. Marquis and, like Hubbard, he saw the PWA as a vehicle to develop the campus, though the budget was tight.

President Marquis was the first administrator to apply for PWA funding. He convinced the Board of Regents to authorize the procurement of the federal funds provided through the National Industrial Recovery Act in a meeting that took place on August 5, 1933, less than two months after the act passed.¹⁵ With approval from the Board of Regents, Marquis submitted proposals for a new dining hall and a girl's dormitory building.¹⁶ Shortly after submitting these requests Marquis passed away. He was succeeded

¹³ "Minutes of the Texas State College for Women Board of Regents Meeting," January 16, 1940, Woman's Collection, Texas Woman's University Archives.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Minutes of the North Texas States Teacher's College Board of Regents Meeting," August 7, 1933, University of North Texas Archives.

¹⁶ Rogers, *The Story of North Texas: From Texas Normal College, 1890 To North Texas State University, 1965*, 279.

by W.J. McConnell, the dean of the college during Marquis's presidency. McConnell continued to support the building program started by Marquis over the next several years.

The first project approved by the PWA was the dormitory building. The government gave North Texas State Teacher's College \$210,000 to construct the living quarters, named Marquis Hall after the late president who had worked to procure the funds for the building.¹⁷ Another major project undertaken was the building of a library. The college received \$117,000 from the PWA to assist in the construction and outfitting of the structure.¹⁸ In February 1936, yet another project was started using federal funds. The site chosen for the new library called for the demolition of two smaller dormitory buildings that housed music students. To replace this housing a new orchestra hall, equipped with living quarters, was built in 1936.¹⁹ Close to \$40,000 was given by the PWA to assist in the construction of this building. The PWA also funded an addition to the college hospital. The PWA provided close to \$11,000 to North Texas State Teacher's College for the project. These four initial building projects cost \$568,000 - \$400,000 of which came from the PWA.²⁰ All of these buildings were dedicated on April 27, 1937.²¹

However, McConnell was not finished with expanding the campus just yet. At the June 24, 1938 Board of Regents meeting, McConnell presented plans for two more dormitories; one for women and the other for men.²² These two residence halls were named Terrill Hall and Chilton Hall. Roughly \$209,000 was provided by the PWA for these additional buildings.²³ Several months later the Board of Regents approved the

¹⁷ Bertrand W. Heflin, ed. *The Campus Chat*, Vol. 19, No. 40, Ed. 1, August 1, 1935, August 1, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth306040/> : accessed September 08, 2014), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>.

¹⁸ Alvin R. Irby, ed. *The Campus Chat*, Vol. 20, No. 6, Ed. 1, October 17, 1935, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth306047/> : accessed September 08, 2014), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>.

¹⁹ Alvin R. Irby, ed. *The Campus Chat*, Vol. 20, No. 6, Ed. 1, February 15, 1935, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth306047/> : accessed September 08, 2014), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>.

²⁰ "Minutes of the North Texas States Teacher's College Board of Regents Meeting," February 28, 1936, University of North Texas Archives.

²¹ *Campus Chat*, February 15, 1936.

²² "Minutes of the North Texas States Teacher's College Board of Regents Meeting," June 24, 1938, University of North Texas Archives.

²³ Ray Edwards, ed. *The Campus Chat*, Vol. 13, No. 37, Ed. 1, July 14, 1939. (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth306628/> : accessed September 08, 2014), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>.

building of a home management house. The PWA contributed \$11,250 towards the construction of the building.²⁴

Funding from the WPA was also granted to North Texas State Teacher's College. Some of the smaller projects included the construction of tunnels that connected the power plant on the college campus to the larger buildings such as the library, the Education Building, and the Science Building. The WPA also funded the laying of sewer lines in various areas on the campus. The total given to North Texas State Teacher's College by the WPA for these projects was \$20,000.²⁵ Overall the PWA and WPA helped raise six major buildings and construct various smaller projects on the campus of North Texas State Teacher's College. The amount received by the college from the PWA and WPA reached \$640,000. This number is very close to the federal funding amount received by Texas State College for Women, which was roughly \$675,000. While Texas State College for Woman expanded slightly more than their Denton neighbor, records of the building program at North Texas State Teachers' College show that Hubbard was not the lone Texas higher education administrator who saw the PWA and WPA as vehicles for campus expansion.

Attention will now be turned to the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas and their use of federal funding to expand the main campus during the years of the Great Depression. Interestingly enough, the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas did not take as full advantage of the federal relief building programs as did the previously discussed colleges, though federal funding was still used. Once more, examination of the climate at the college before the enactment of the National Industrial Recovery Act needs explanation in order to understand the college's use of funds from the PWA and WPA. Comparatively the depression impacted the expansion of campus infrastructure at the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas less harshly.²⁶ This is largely because of funds from a substantial land endowment procured by the college during the early years of the depression through their relationship with The University of Texas. Originally, the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas was closely affiliated with the University of Texas. Due to this connection, the college received oil royalties from the leasing of the original land endowment of 2,100,000 acres given to the University of Texas by the Texas Legislature.²⁷ By 1926, the royalties from leasing these lands to oil companies reached a high of \$250,000 a month.²⁸ When the depression hit

²⁴ "Minutes of the North Texas States Teacher's College Board of Regents Meeting," September 28, 1938, University of North Texas Archives.

²⁵ "Minutes of the North Texas States Teacher's College Board of Regents Meeting," February 28, 1936, University of North Texas Archives.

²⁶ Henry Dethloff, *A Centennial History of Texas A&M University 1876-1979* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1975), 415.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 416.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

more money was being put into the Permanent University Fund than could be spent by both the University of Texas and the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. With the funds from the land and oil revenues, emergency relief funds from the PWA and WPA simply supplemented a large scale building program already in progress. Beginning in 1932, several major buildings such as an Engineering building, an Animal Industries building, a Veterinary Medicine building, and a natatorium were built using oil royalty money. These buildings cost roughly \$634,000.²⁹ A cost the college afforded because of the money from oil royalties. However, by 1934 the college did turn to federal grants and loans to help fund several smaller projects on the campus.

In 1934, the college put in an application to expand the campus creamery and was given \$40,000 from the government to complete this project.³⁰ An extensive paving program was also started with New Deal funds of \$10,500.³¹ Yet, the biggest project undertaken using funds from the federal government was the development of an airport, supported by partial grants from the WPA. In 1940, the government bequeathed the WPA \$25 million for the construction of airports.³² The WPA provided approximately \$154,970 towards such a project on the campus of the Agricultural and Mechanical College to Texas. The airport was completed in 1941 and another \$75,000 was given by the WPA to light the finished runways.³³ The Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas was one of only a few schools in the nation to own their own airport.

Though the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas did not utilize federal funds as extensively as the other examined colleges, it is clear the Board of Regents and other leaders at the college understood the benefits of these federally funded construction programs and did apply for grants and loans when it was necessary. The Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas simply was not hurting for construction funds as badly as other colleges during the depression and employed other sources of income, such as the oil royalties from the Permanent University Fund, to fuel the college's expansion program.

Texas State College for Women clearly capitalized on funding provided through the PWA and WPA during the depression, but through comparison to the building programs at North Texas State Teacher's College and the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, Hubbard's claim that Texas State College for Women was a conspicuous example amongst universities is exaggerated. In 1939, the PWA put together a book

²⁹ Robert Fletcher, "Here We'll Build a College," (Oral Presentation, the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, College Station, n.d.), 152-160.

"Minutes of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas Board of Directors Meeting," July 25, 1934, Texas A&M University Archives.

³¹Ibid.

³² Dethloff, *A Centennial History of Texas A&M University 1876-1979*, 447.

³³Ibid., 448.

chronicling the work the agency completed from 1933-1939. While this study has shown that colleges and universities in Texas capitalized on the funds provided by the Federal government during the depression for construction, this catalogue of projects shows that this was a nationwide occurrence. For example, Virginia Polytech used PWA money to build a student union. The University of Illinois built several dormitories and a Dental College Building. Meanwhile, the University of Colorado and the University of Arizona built woman's club buildings to accommodate the changing demographic of their institutions.³⁴ This list goes on. However, the fact that other institutions of higher education saw the benefit of these federally funded programs should not take away from what Hubbard and Texas State College for Women accomplished during the years of the Great Depression. Though he was not the only college or university administrator who procured money for plant expansion from the PWA and WPA, the campus infrastructure doubled during this period, a feat that pioneered in a new age at Texas State College for Women.

³⁴ Ibid., 285, 317, and 322.