

— THE — NEW DEAL

Looking Back, Moving Forward



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Contents

-
- 1 INTRODUCTION
Christopher N. Breiseth

I: THE NEW DEAL: RECOGNIZING AND PRESERVING THE LEGACY

- 4 **Kathryn Flynn and the NNDPA: A Quarter
Century of Leadership**
Christopher N. Breiseth
- 12 **History of the New Mexico Chapter of the
NNDPA**
Kathryn Flynn
- 16 **The New Deal: Most Creative Public Policy
Initiatives in U.S. History**
Robert Leighninger
- 20 **New Deal's Successful Spending and
Financial Plans**
Price Fishback
- 25 **Evolution of the Living New Deal**
Gray Brechin
- 27 **A New Deal Odyssey**
Harvey Smith
- ## II: INFRASTRUCTURE/COMMUNITY
- 30 **The Southern Colorado Chapter of the
NNDPA**
Barbara Diamond
- 32 **A New Deal Legacy in the Pikes Peak Region**
Pat Musick
- 40 **The New Deal in Chicago**
Margaret C. Rung
- 48 **Roosevelt, New Jersey: A New Deal
Community Continues to Honor its Heritage**
Michael Ticktin
- 50 **My Arkansas New Deal**
Linda Lingle

III: NEW DEAL PERSONALITIES

- 54 **Frances Perkins and the New Deal**
Christopher N. Breiseth
- 60 **Frank C. Walker: At the Center of FDR's
New Deal
Speech, October 18, 1940**
T.J. Walker
- 70 **Memorials to Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt**
Margaret C. Rung and Christopher N. Breiseth
- 73 **Henry Wallace and the New Deal**
David Wallace Douglas
- 76 **Harry Hopkins**
June Hopkins

IV: NEW DEAL ART AND ARTISTS

- 80 **The Civilian Conservation Corps Art Project**
Kathleen Duxbury
- 86 **Jan Charles Marfyak and New Deal Art and
Artists**
Jan Marfyak
- 88 **Pennsylvania New Deal Post Office Art**
David Lembeck
- 93 **New Deal Film Festival in Chicago**
Alan Stein

-
- 100 EPILOGUE
Christopher N. Breiseth
-

- 101 **The Economic Bill of Rights**
-

- 102 **Federal Firmament / A Chart of the New Deal**
-



The New Deal in Chicago

MARGARET C. RUNG

In 1938, the Lakeview Post Office at 1343 W. Irving Park Road in Chicago unveiled its new mural, “Epoch of a Great City,” depicting the history of the city in three seminal events: its founding with Fort Dearborn (1803); destruction during the Great Chicago Fire (1871); and phoenix-like re-emergence after the fire as a modern industrial and commercial hub. Painted by New York-born artist Harry Sternberg (1904–2001), the mural was commissioned through the Treasury Department’s Section of Painting and Sculpture (later named the Section of Fine Arts), one of several New Deal public art programs created during the Great Depression.¹

“Epoch of a Great City” captures Chicago’s dynamism, illuminating two skylines, one dominated by the Chicago fire and the other by the skyscrapers that began to dot its downtown starting in the 1880s. In the mural, this modern Chicago includes technologically sophisticated manufacturing and agriculturally-based industries connected to a vast expanse of prairie by a steam locomotive and two futuristic streamlined trains. For instance, Sternberg depicts Chicago’s stockyards where workers, such as the knocker poised with his sledgehammer, slaughtered livestock. By the first decades of the 20th century, the mural also tells us that Chicago was home to durable goods industries, such as steel and electronics, with welders, puddlers and a scientist dabbling in electricity inhabiting the sides and center of the painting.

Sternberg’s mural projects urban vitality and celebrates common workers whose hard work made the modern city prosperous. Conceived amidst the Great Depression, “Epoch of a Great City” suggests that the city, which once rebounded from the fire, will rise again because its people are industrious and its resources plentiful. More subtly, however, the painting’s existence as a consequence of a publicly-funded project created under the auspices of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal reveals the critical role that the federal government played in allowing cities like Chicago to rebound from the Great Depression. After all, it was not private business that pulled the U.S. out of the depression, but the government, marshaling its resources to invest in people and jobs when industry failed to do so. From infrastructure to arts to education, national

programs funded by American taxpayers left a lasting legacy in Chicago, broadening its public sphere, strengthening and realigning the Democratic party and demonstrating to future generations the benefits of a federal government actively responsive to the needs of its citizens.

Prior to the Great Depression, Chicago’s economy was built around private property and private wealth. Like many American industrial cities, Chicago experienced business consolidation, rising wealth inequality and an expanding and militant working class from the 1890s through the 1920s. As problems associated with poverty and pollution mounted, the city also became a hub of the early 20th century Progressive reform movement, a forerunner of the New Deal. By the 1920s, however, the ascendancy of the conservative wing of the Republican party at the national level slowed efforts to regulate business, protect workers and address the unequal distribution of wealth. Property rights trumped workers’ rights and public spaces were neglected or gobbled up by private investors. Consequently, when the Great Depression began in 1929, Chicago workers had few places to turn for assistance save under-resourced private charities, mutual aid societies and local government relief programs.

Nationally, durable goods industries — the backbone of Chicago’s economy — suffered much worse declines than consumer goods industries. Given the centrality of manufacturing to the city’s economy, these declines devastated Chicago’s working class communities. Between 1927 and 1933, the number of Chicago residents working in manufacturing fell by half. Particularly vulnerable were African Americans and Mexican Americans, who experienced unemployment rates sometimes in excess of 50%. In 1931, for instance, 55% of Black women in Chicago were without paid work.² Layoffs and wage cuts also hit the middle class, as Chicago public school teachers went nearly nine months without a paycheck and other city workers lost jobs because the city faced budgetary problems that began prior to the depression. So desperate were the city’s residents that school children and unemployed adults marched on the school superintendent’s office demanding free food in March 1932. Their pleas made little difference because

Above: “Epoch of a Great City” (1938) by Harry Sternberg. Lakeview, IL Post Office.



Underneath this bust of Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak is a quote often attributed to him after he was shot by an assassin aiming for President Franklin D. Roosevelt: "I am glad it was me instead of you."

ties to a large working-class meant that federal aid would be appreciated and rewarded with continued political support. Roosevelt, of course, also had a personal connection to the city, having accepted the 1932 Democratic Party's nomination for president at its convention there. Then, in February 1933, less than a month before his inauguration, the president-elect was with Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak in Miami when an assassin aiming for Roosevelt shot Cermak instead. Roosevelt held Cermak in his arms as they rushed to the hospital. Cermak died on March 6, two days after Roosevelt's inauguration. Finally, the new administration welcomed a group of Chicagoans as appointees in various posts, including Harold Ickes as secretary of the interior and Donald Richberg, Ickes' former law partner, as an advisor and National Recovery Administration official.

New Deal programs not only put Chicagoans to work, but also transformed the physical appearance of the city, providing residents with new or rehabbed parks, playgrounds, roads, sewers, and housing. As with the Sternberg Uptown Post Office mural, the New Deal made the arts accessible to ordinary Chicagoans. In no small measure, the New Deal enlarged Chicago's public sphere by offer-

ing spaces open to everyone, demonstrating the power of government to support the general welfare. The city received money and projects from a whole host of New Deal alphabet agencies, such as the Public Works Administration (or PWA, created through the National Industrial Recovery Act of June 16, 1933), Civilian Conservation Corps (1933-1942); Civil Works Administration (1933-1934), Federal Emergency Relief Administration (1933-1935), and Works Progress Administration (1935-1943). New Deal projects in Chicago significantly enhanced its transportation infrastructure, with federal dollars enabling the city to implement portions of a transit unity plan first drawn up in 1930. Similar to the Burnham Plan of 1909, the transit unity plan was designed to create a rational, comprehensive system of subways, elevated highways, streetcars and bus stations for better circulation of people and products through the city. After the launching of the New Deal, Mayor Edward Kelly, the mayor who succeeded Cermak, aggressively sought funds from the Roosevelt administration to build a subway at an estimated cost of \$41 million. A former chief engineer of the Chicago Sanitary District and president of the South Park Commission, Kelly intuited the value of large public works projects for the benefit of the city's residents. Despite a rather contentious relationship with fellow Chicagoan, Secretary of Interior Ickes, Kelly successfully lobbied for PWA funds to build the tubes of the Red Line subway under State Street, a project expected to employ ap-

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Portage Park Field House (1938), WPA.



Washington Park Refectory and Swimming Pool (1937).



Portage Park Pergolas, Fountain and Stonework (1936). WPA.



WPA dollars enabled Hull House to sponsor art classes as well as theatrical performances. Its Adult Education Program in theater featured productions by the Lazareff Group Players. They are shown here in a scene from the play, "The Good Hope."

proximately 7000 people directly and another 7000 indirectly. In September 1938, federal engineers approved construction, although the final project was scaled back from the original blueprint, which, for instance, called for four subway tracks so that streetcars and trolleys could also operate underground.³ Ultimately, only two tracks for trains were built. When it opened in October 1943, the Red Line subway substantially expanded public train lines north and south of the downtown loop. PWA furnished almost a third of the total cost: \$26 million of its \$75–80 million price tag.

Other projects facilitated air and automobile transit. In November 1937, for instance, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) allocated \$2.8 million for improvements to Chicago's airport, at the time the nation's busiest. Perhaps most notably, PWA and WPA money paid for portions of Lake Shore Drive (now DuSable Lake Shore Drive) from Jackson Boulevard to Foster Avenue, which included completion of the Outer Drive Bridge, at the time, the country's longest, widest and heaviest bascule bridge, a drawbridge using counterweights. President Roosevelt attended the dedication of the bridge on October 5, 1937. Speaking from the span, he gave his famous "Quarantine Speech," in which he warned Americans that fascist dictatorships, like infectious diseases, needed to be contained. On the centenary of Roosevelt's birth in 1982, the city named the bridge the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial bridge. Federal PWA and WPA dollars also enabled the city to improve roads through Grant Park and construct pedestrian walkways connecting beaches to the other side of Lake Shore Drive. By 1939, WPA had helped pay for 1700 miles of new streets in Chicago.

The New Deal transformed Chicago's sites for leisure, recreation and education. Building on Progressive Era concepts of urban beautification and public space as essential elements in the development of citizenship, the New Deal funded hundreds of projects focused on neighborhood parks, beaches, forest preserves and zoos. From 1935 to 1937, the WPA furnished nearly \$45.5 million for Chicago park projects, which included paving park roads, constructing and rehabilitating park buildings, repairing swimming

pools, building tennis courts, improving beaches and making other general updates. In Jackson Park, WPA money allowed the city to transform a 9-hole golf course into a baseball diamond, running track and picnic area, increasing daily usage from 300 people to nearly 2000. Wilson Park's field house, Lincoln Park's Lily Pool and the North Avenue Beach facilities all came into fruition thanks to WPA money. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) also focused on recreation, constructing numerous picnic grounds, forming the Skokie Lagoons, a system of waterways set along biking and hiking paths, and building a beloved (and now shuttered) toboggan run, in Chicagoland forest preserves. Public schools throughout the city similarly benefitted from New Deal public works as WPA furnished new stadiums for schools on the south side at 91st and Racine; 87th and Chappell; 82nd and Yates; and 60th and Karlov, and on the northwest side at Fullerton and Long as well as at Albert G. Lane Technical (known colloquially as Lane Tech) located at Western and Addison.⁴ Some schools also received new locker and shower rooms, running tracks, baseball diamonds and tennis courts.

Housing and infrastructure projects represented a visible expansion of the public sphere in Chicago, giving residents tangible evidence of government at work for the people. With aid from the PWA and Federal Housing Authority, Chicago built the Jane Addams, Julia Lathrop, Trumbull Park, Ida B. Wells and Cabrini Green Homes for low-income families, addressing a real need for the third of a nation "ill-housed." Some projects were less visible, but crucial to building and maintaining basic infrastructure in the city, not to mention vital to the livelihoods of many previously unemployed Chicagoans. Mayor Kelly's 1939 report to Congress on the WPA included a tally of projects undertaken in Chicago:

- 1700 miles of new streets
- 5300 miles of new sewers
- 500 miles of water pipe rehabbed and laid
- 100 field houses rehabbed
- 200 schools repainted
- 2500 unsafe buildings demolished (with play lots and playgrounds built on the empty lots)
- 12 parking lots
- 279 tennis courts
- 1500 new curb corners
- 70 miles of sidewalks
- 100 park lighting systems installed⁵

As he noted, many of the projects, such as the demolition of unsafe buildings, helped cut down on fires, and others, such as recreation centers, had the benefit of giving people outlets for their free time, thus decreasing crime, including juvenile delinquency. The city also used refurbished field houses for WPA-funded "Toy Centers" that distributed toys to impoverished children and the agency provided money for nursery schools and a sewing project at 510 W. 51st street in which 90% of the employees were Black women, who had suffered extremely high rates of unemployment in the city. Indeed, Kelly indicated that in 1937, fully one-third of all WPA workers were Black. Two years later, he told federal officials that one-fifth of every Chicagoan — 650,000 people in total — depended



Eleanor Roosevelt dedicating the South Side Community Art Center, May 7, 1941. Also pictured Peter Pollack, Alain Locke and Patrick Prescott.

on public assistance. Some 83,000 families, he stated, were receiving WPA relief.

WPA's Federal One Project brought the arts to ordinary people and employment to the city's creative workers through its Federal Art Project (FAP); Federal Writers' Project (FWP); Federal Theater Project (FTP); and Federal Music Project (FMP). Headed by Increase Robinson (1935-38), George Thorpe (1938-41), and Fred Biesel (1941-43), the Illinois FAP hired about 775 artists and administrators. Some 95% of the artists lived in Chicago and by 1940 they had produced nearly 5000 easel paintings; 750,000 posters; 563 sculptures; and over 320 murals (about 150 of which are extant). The project divided its work into units, such as easel; mural; sculpture; diorama; graphics; photography; poster; and design.

Any tax-supported institution, including libraries, schools, hospitals, park district buildings (such as field houses), zoos, government buildings, and museums could apply for artwork. The demand far outstripped the capacity of WPA-FAP to fulfill requests and those organizations lucky enough to receive commissions worked with the artists on topics for these pieces. The Brookfield Zoo, which opened in 1934, welcomed a team of WPA artists who spent several years working with the zoo. Among other projects, they designed formica tables inlaid with animal figures (artists John Winters and Ralph Graham) and a fountain sculpture (Louise Pflasterer Ross). Some schools received multiple murals. Edgar Britton painted "Epochs in the History of Mankind" and Mitchell Siporin "The Teaching of the Arts" (1938), a four-part panel, for Lane Tech High School. The school also received sculptures from Peterpaul Ott. Britton's work was well known in Chicago as he had participated in the short-lived Public Works of Art Program (PWAP) in 1934. Decades later, his nine-panel "Scenes of Industry" (1934) mural painted under the PWAP for Highland Park High School would help spark New Deal preservation efforts in Chicagoland. WPA-FAP artist Edward Millman painted "Women's Contribution to American Progress" (1940) at Lucy Flower Technical High School, and Nettelhorst Elementary School on the north-side became home to Rudolph Weisenborn's abstract mural,



Painting Class at the South Side Community Art Center, April 1942.

"Contemporary Chicago" (1936), and Ethel Spears' "Horses from Children's Literature" (1936).

Filling school buildings with art signaled to children their worth, inspired in them an interest in art and conveyed to them the notion that artists were an integral part of civic life. WPA art education programs similarly promoted these ideals. The South Side Community Art Center, one of 102 centers established nationwide, offered art classes to all ages and provided space for exhibitions, gallery talks and demonstrations. Dedicated by Eleanor Roosevelt in 1941 and under the leadership of Margaret Taylor Burroughs, it became a hub for Chicago's south side and particularly for the Black community. Indeed, the Black community raised the funds for the purchase of the building and supplies as well as payment of utilities, while WPA furnished money for building renovation, and salaries for staff and art faculty. Artists such as Charles White taught there, giving ordinary people an opportunity to learn from accomplished professional painters, and well-known photographer Gordon Parks had a studio in the basement. During its first year, the center staged two dozen exhibitions that drew 28,000 visitors and attracted some 12,000 students to its art classes. The center's work contributed to a flourishing Black cultural life, later referred to as the Black Chicago Renaissance, a movement that centered the experiences and dignity of the Black working class. Federal dollars also allowed the WPA-FAP to run educational programs through the park district and art classes at Hull House, a famous west-side settlement house founded in 1889 by Jane Addams. Those wishing to view art could also partake of the numerous exhibitions staged by the WPA-FAP, which featured artists on its payroll. A WPA-FAP gallery at 211 N. Michigan in the heart of downtown staged exhibitions for the benefit of Chicagoans of all backgrounds.

While New Deal programs provided jobs, made a mark on the physical landscape of the city, and permanently tilted the city's working class to the Democratic Party, memories of the New Deal's impact faded in the post-World War II era. For instance, an emphasis on destruction and new construction rather than preservation and rehabilitation guided economic development in Chicago during the 1960s and 1970s, destroying some New Deal structures and maligning others as outdated. Efforts to commemorate New Deal programs appeared sporadically, such as Barbara Bernstein's 1976



LEFT: "Teaching of the Arts" (1938), Mitchell Siporin, WPA-FAP, Lane Tech High School. MIDDLE: "Scenes of Industry" (1934), Edgar Britton, Highland Park High School. RIGHT: "Evolution of the Book" (1936), Peter Paul Ott, WPA-FAP, Lane Tech High School.

documentary *Silver Lining*, completed as part of Chicago's bicentennial celebration. It featured discussions of WPA art, including murals and interviews with the artists. Another Chicago icon, oral historian Studs Terkel, who had participated in the WPA-FWP and WPA-FTP, also worked to keep the history of the New Deal alive. Other Chicagoans similarly began to notice and research New Deal art. Indeed, in the 1990s, a student history project and dedicated art teacher inspired a revived interest in New Deal works.

In September 1994, Chicago public school student Hana Field elected to write a research paper on WPA art for entry into the Chicago Metro History Fair. She discovered the work of artist Edgar Britton and came across references to his "Scenes of Industry" mural at Highland Park High School. Reaching out to the school, she learned that the murals had disappeared. Connie Kieffer, director of Highland Park's fine arts program, heard of Field's interest and sent out a school-wide voicemail asking for information about the Britton mural panels. A longtime school technician recalled seeing the murals in the attic in the mid-1970s, which is where Kieffer found them, propped up against a support panel. Painted on wood, the nine panels were numbered and marked "property of the U.S. Government." Kieffer arranged for their restoration and placement in the school library, but more significantly, she became intensely interested in New Deal art. She joined the National New Deal Preservation Association (NNDPA), then being organized by Kathy Flynn, became NNDPA's treasurer and networked with other Chicago groups dedicated to similar efforts. For instance, the Center for New Deal Studies at Roosevelt University, founded in 1995, worked to promote the legacy of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt and their New Deal. Kieffer joined its advisory board. As well, she connected with a major initiative led by Barry Bauman and Heather Becker of the Chicago Conservation Center to restore Chicago Public School (CPS) murals painted during the Progressive era and the New Deal.

Kieffer's work dovetailed with the CPS initiative. The conservation project had been jump started by another school's murals, which had also attracted the attention of a staff member. In 1984, Flora Doody, who worked with students with disabilities at Lane Tech High School, noticed the Siporin and Britton murals and their need for cleaning and restoration. A decade later, with the help of

principal David A. Schlichting, ten students from the National Honor Society and the Student Council, Doody established the Mural Preservation Project at Lane Tech. Bauman, then a conservationist at the Art Institute of Chicago (who then founded his own company, the Chicago Conservation Company) assessed the murals and devised a plan for their restoration. Doody also elicited the aid of local art historian, Mary Gray, who helped with research for the project, and the two worked on extensive lesson plans for Lane Tech teachers to incorporate the murals into their curriculum. In the meantime, Bauman's company contracted with CPS to restore murals in other schools, a program done in phases throughout the 1990s. The effort also included the development of arts curricula for the schools.

Recognizing Chicago's deep ties to the New Deal and the breadth of interest in reviving this history, Kieffer sought to bring these dynamic initiatives together by organizing the Midwest chapter of the NNDPA. With a request for \$10 and a promise of lunch, she convened the first meeting on the cusp of the millennium — November 11, 1999 — at Highland Park High School. At the meeting, she told the assembled group about the history of the NNDPA, showed Bernstein's documentary, *Silver Lining*, and launched the Midwest chapter. Kieffer took on the role of executive director, Heather Becker served as president; Robert Eskridge, as vice-president; Mary Gray as secretary; and Flora Doody as treasurer. Bob Sideman agreed to head up membership.

Under the leadership of Kieffer and Becker, the Midwest chapter grew quickly and undertook a number of ambitious tasks. In early meetings they spoke extensively about their mission and role. Participants asked if they should be focused on the entirety of the New Deal, or merely a part of it, and if only a portion, which one? They discussed whether they should be a study group, a group devoted to educating the public, and/or a preservation group? Ultimately, they agreed to focus on the WPA and given the interests of the officers and early members, especially on art. According to meeting minutes, their mission would be to "locate and archive items and events pertaining to the WPA in the Midwest, and to use this information to educate the public and to preserve the legacy of the WPA and similar New Deal programs." Members also expressed a desire to make New Deal items

accessible and network with other groups to promote an understanding of the New Deal's legacy. To expand that network and solidify their partnerships with various organizations and institutions, the location of meetings rotated with the group meeting at Lane Tech High School, Chicago Conservation Center, Roosevelt University, Art Institute and Harold Washington Public Library, among other venues.

Over the next two years, chapter members worked to collect information and share it widely. During this period, they sought to educate themselves on the location and use of archives; the laws and regulations governing New Deal art and projects; and best practices in oral history. For instance, they invited the director of the Chicago Architects Oral History Project, which was run out of the Art Institute's Department of Architecture, to speak to them about the ins-and-outs of conducting oral histories, from the structure and length of an interview to the type of equipment needed to the legalities and costs involved. Simultaneously, they reached out to museums, archives and other organizations that held New Deal items or had New Deal affiliations. Additionally, a representative from the Harold Washington Public Library gave a talk on the library's extensive archive of Chicago artists. These guests provided leads and practical information as the chapter sought to identify living New Deal artists and participants to interview, a time-sensitive task given the age of many of these individuals.

Others in the chapter brought their skills to bear on the task of informing and publicizing New Deal artworks and programs. Nancy Flannery, who had strong media skills, offered to build the website, given that she had already started one on WPA mural art (www.wpamurals.org).⁶ She had become interested in the 1930s and New Deal when she learned about Eleanor Roosevelt's efforts to open New Deal programs to women and African Americans through the use of quotas and other measures. Similarly, she found Harry Hopkins' desire to support young artists laudable. Subsequently, she and her husband began a three-year journey to locate and visit every New Deal post office mural in Illinois. As the Midwest chapter's focus sharpened, its membership and audience expanded (by December 2000, some 157 people were on its mailing list). While awaiting confirmation of its formal legal status as an incorporated non-profit, it elected to channel its energy into hosting a major NNDPA conference in Chicago in spring 2002.⁷ In addition to the Midwest chapter and national NNDPA, 19 organizations would contribute to the effort.

As discussed in "Kathy Flynn and the NNDPA," the NNDPA conference, "The New Deal: Past, Present and Future," took place May 3 and May 4, 2002 at the Art Institute of Chicago and Roosevelt University, with off-site gatherings at the South Side Community Art Center, Goodman Theater, Chicago Conservation Center, Lane Tech High School and Lucy Flower Career Academy. On May 2, participants had the opportunity to attend two pre-conference sessions: a curated tour of the exhibit, "To Inspire & Instruct: Art from the Collection of the Chicago Public Schools," led by Executive Director of the Art Institute's Department of Museum Education and NNDPA Midwest vice-president Robert Eskridge (held at the Art Institute), and in the evening a viewing of the exhibition, "New Deal Artists and Their Work" accompanied by a reception, at the South Side Community Art Center. It was hosted by the center's board

president, Diane Dinkins-Carr. A small group from the NNDPA Midwest chapter also gathered at the Italian restaurant, Spiaggia, to honor the keynote speaker, art historian Francis V. O'Connor, editor of the seminal work on New Deal art, *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project* (1975). The next morning, the conference kicked off at the Art Institute with a welcome provided by Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, granddaughter of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt and chair of the Center for New Deal Studies Advisory Board at Roosevelt University. O'Connor followed with his keynote address "Researching the New Deal Cultural Projects: Early History and Present Challenges."

Over thirty scholars and experts contributed to panels and sessions during the two-day conference. In addition to New Deal art, topics included New Deal political history, the WPA Federal Theater Project, and New Deal art curriculum projects. Friday evening (May 3), conference goers convened at Roosevelt University for a book signing and reception hosted by the Center for New Deal Studies, with depression-era music performed by Bucky Halker. On the morning of May 4, participants also had the opportunity to take a mural preservation project tour led by NNDPA Midwest chapter president Heather Becker and chapter member Flora Doody, who was still on the staff at Lane Tech High School. They made stops at Lane Tech, Lucy Flower Career Academy and the Chicago Conservation Center. That afternoon, the conference culminated with a lively and touching gathering of CCC alumni facilitated by Chicago oral historian and former WPA-FWP and WPA-FTP participant, Studs Terkel.

The completion of this dynamic and rich conference provided the Midwest chapter with significant momentum at the dawn of the 21st century. By the time of the conference, Roosevelt University art history professor Susan Weininger had taken over duties as secretary and art historian Liz Seaton (a specialist on the history of New Deal printmaking) had become treasurer. Kieffer remained executive director, Becker, president and Eskridge vice-president. Over the course of the next several years, the chapter sponsored an array of programs, from talks, such as "The Radical in New Deal Printmaking" by Mark Pascale, with commentary by Seaton (March 2005); "Illustrating Social Justice: Leftist Artists, New Masses and Politicized Visual Culture" by Dr. Helen Langa (November 2005); "Women, Citizenship and the City: Women as Artists, Patrons and Subjects in Chicago's School Mural Movement" by Dr. Sylvia Rhor, Carlow University (May 2007) to tours of artist Edgar Miller's house to attendance at events focused on preservation of New Deal works.

Preservation continued to be a focal point for the chapter. Flannery, for instance, was active in the effort to restore a WPA mural at Oakton Elementary School in Evanston, IL. Of particular concern to the chapter was the fate of the animal court sculptures by WPA artist Edgar Miller, which held place of pride in the courtyard of the Jane Addams Homes. As the city of Chicago undertook a radical transformation of its public housing program, it slated the Addams homes for demolition, leaving the fate of the sculptures unknown. With leadership from Becker and assistance from the city, the Chicago Housing Authority, Chicago Park District, Chicago History Museum and others, a group devised a plan to refurbish the sculptures and relocate them to Roosevelt Square on the west side near the University of Illinois Chicago. While the plan stalled for some

time, the National Public Housing Museum (incorporated in 2007) became involved and efforts to raise funds for the restoration restarted in the 2010s. With funding finally secured in 2023, the museum contracted with the Conservation of Sculpture and Objects Studio to complete the sculptures' final restoration and placement at the museum, which is also developing a unique oral history and audio tour project around the sculptures.⁸

Although not specifically a publication of the Midwest chapter, Heather Becker's book, *Art for the People* (2002) documented and explored the rich WPA art present in the city's school buildings.⁹ With contributions from many NNDPA Midwest chapter members, including Barry Bauman, Flora Doody, Robert Eskridge, Sylvia Rohr, Liz Seaton and Susan Weininger, and chapters on WPA murals and the art project generally, the book showcased the breadth and depth of research undertaken by the chapter and the expertise of its members. It also presented a wealth of information about individual WPA artists as well as murals in other public facilities, including those painted under the Treasury Department's art program.

Kieffer remained committed to the chapter for several years after the 2002 conference. She retired from her teaching and administrative position at District 113 in 2001 and then served for four years as chair of the secondary education department at National Louis University in Chicago. Nearing full retirement, she then moved to Delaware and thus disengaged from the NNDPA Midwest chapter and the Center for New Deal Studies Advisory Board. In Delaware, she became an associate professor in a doctoral program on leadership at Wilmington University before sadly passing away in 2010. While the Midwest chapter was viable for a number of years after her departure from Chicago, its membership began to fall and by the 2010s it had ceased to be an active organization,

although Flannery continued work on the WPA murals website, which is still live.

As reflected in local organizations that continue to evoke the New Deal, many Chicago residents value the concept of public goods, recognizing the ways in which government, partnered with social movements, can build communities with strong infrastructure, a rich cultural life, and equitable access to decent schools, housing and other necessities. In 2011, for instance, Hot House, a local cultural institution, launched a two-year series of humanities-centered programs it named WPA 2.0, A Brand New Deal. Events included a centennial celebration of the music of Woody Guthrie, a talk by Heather Becker on WPA Art and a lecture co-sponsored by the Center for New Deal Studies at Roosevelt University featuring economist Dean Baker speaking on the Great Recession. Fittingly, nearly all of the events were free and open to the public.

Although Chicago has lost much of its manufacturing base, its working-class character remains in a vibrant labor movement centered on service industries. Partly in response to the Great Recession, unions, such as the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), UNITE Here, Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), have resisted the privatization of public goods and mapped out ambitious plans to broaden Chicago's public sphere in ways similar to the New Deal of the 1930s. Mobilization at the grass-roots level led to the election of former CTU organizer and Cook County Commissioner Brandon Johnson as Mayor in 2023, along with a growing cadre of socialists to the City Council. In these developments, Chicago's Democratic party has recaptured some of its New Deal spirit from the 1930s. Marching into the mid-21st century, the city of Chicago looks to the blueprint of Roosevelt's New Deal to frame yet another "epoch of a great city."



Animal Sculptures, Edgar Miller, WPA-FAP. Courtyard of the Jane Addams Homes.

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Suggested Readings

Becker, Heather. *Art for the People: The Rediscovery and Preservation of Progressive and WPA-Era Murals in the Chicago Public Schools, 1904–1943*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2002.

Biles, Roger. *Big City Boss in Depression and War: Mayor Edward J. Kelly of Chicago*. Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984.

Cohen, Elizabeth. *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Kimble, Lionel. *A New Deal for Bronzeville: Housing, Employment and Civil Rights in Black Chicago, 1935–1955*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015.

“The New Deal in Chicago and the Midwest.” Newberry Library. <https://dcc.newberry.org/?p=14380> [accessed October 25, 2023].

“New Deal Art During the Great Depression.” Wpamurals.org [accessed October 26, 2023].

Reed, Christopher Robert. *The Depression Comes to the South Side: Protest and Politics in the Black Metropolis, 1930–1933*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011.

Thompson, Mary Emma. *A Guide to Depression Era Art in Illinois Post Offices*. Westfield, Illinois: Mary Emma Thompson, 2005.

NOTES

1. Unlike the Federal Art Project under the Works Progress Administration, which employed almost exclusively artists on relief, muralists for the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture, were chosen through competition. For his Uptown commission, Sternberg traveled to Chicago to study the city's history, architecture, industries and workers. He then painted the mural in his New York studio. He included a self-portrait; Sternberg is the scientist on the left. Sternberg also painted murals for post offices in Pennsylvania. For a discussion of New Deal post office murals in Pennsylvania, see the chapter by David Lembeck.
2. Stanley Lieberman, *A Piece of the Pie: Blacks and White Immigrants Since 1880* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 244.
3. Rather unusually, the proposal went to President Roosevelt for final approval, perhaps because of the scale and political bickering that surrounded it.
4. Construction on a new, relocated school building for Lane Tech began in 1930, but a lack of funds halted construction. It was finally finished in 1934 with funds from the federal PWA.
5. Chicago's Mayor Edward Kelly made an extensive report on the WPA to Congress in 1939. See House Committee on Appropriations, *Investigation and Study of the Works Progress Administration: Hearings before the Subcommittee*, 76th Cong. 1st sess., 1939, 401–406.
6. Flannery's WPA website has background information on New Deal programs, current ownership of the art, research tips and much, much more. It still has a link to the homepage of the NNDPA Midwest chapter, which is no longer active.
7. The NNDPA Midwest chapter received its FEIN # from the IRS on July 1, 2001; incorporated with the State of Illinois later that year; and received its 501(c) 3 status from the IRS on January 12, 2004.
8. Construction on the National Public Housing Museum's permanent home at 1322 W. Taylor Street on the near west side is scheduled to be completed in 2024. The museum is located in one of the buildings preserved from the original Jane Addams Homes.
9. Heather Becker, *Art for the People: The Rediscovery and Preservation of Progressive and WPA-Era Murals in the Chicago Public Schools, 1904–1943* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2002).

PHOTO CREDITS

1. “Epoch of a Great City” (1938) by Harry Sternberg. Lakeview Post Office, 1343 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago. Photography by Jane Rosenbluth Baldwin.
2. The Cermak bust is part of the Center for New Deal Studies collection of Roosevelt artifacts held at Roosevelt University, Chicago, IL: www.roosevelt.edu/centers/new-deal-studies. URL: <https://cdm16818.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/ChicagoParks/id/9285>
3. Washington Park Refectories and Swimming Pool (1937). WPA. Chicago Public Library Special Collections and Preservation Division. Chicago Park District Records. URL: <https://cdm16818.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/ChicagoParks/id/9285>
4. Recreational facilities proliferated in Chicago due to the availability of federal WPA funds. These facilities included gymnasiums, swimming pools, bowling alleys, libraries, meeting spaces, and much more, all for the benefit of the general public. Portage Park Field House (1938). WPA. Photo located in Chicago Public Library Special Collections and Preservation Division. Chicago Park District Records. URL: <https://cdm16818.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/ChicagoParks/id/7399>
5. Portage Park Pergolas, Fountain and Stonework (1936). WPA. Photo located in Chicago Public Library Special Collections and Preservation Division. Chicago Park District Records. URL: <https://cdm16818.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/ChicagoParks/id/7465>
6. WPA dollars enabled Hull House to sponsor art classes as well as theatrical performances. Its Adult Education Program in theater featured productions by the Lazareff Group Players. They are shown here in a scene from the play, *The Good Hope*. Hull House Photographic Collection, University of Illinois Chicago Special Collections and University Archives. Photo available online at Chicago Collections Consortium. URL: <https://explore.chicagocollections.org/image/uic/250/9c6tp2w/>
7. Eleanor Roosevelt dedicating the South Side Community Art Center, May 7, 1941. Also pictured Peter Pollack, Alain Locke and Patrick Prescott. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, National Archives and Records Administration.
8. Painting Class at the South Side Community Art Center, April 1942. Jack Delano, photographer. Photo from Library of Congress, Farm Security Administration-Office of War Information Collection. URL: www.loc.gov/item/2017829183/
9. “Teaching of the Arts” (1938), Mitchell Siporin, WPA-FAP, Lane Tech High School. Photo from New Deal Art Registry. Barbara Bernstein. URL: www.newdealartregistry.org/map/LaneTechCollegePrepHighSchool/Chicago/IL/#
10. “Scenes of Industry” (1934), Edgar Britton. Painted under the Public Works of Art Program (PWAP) for Highland Park High School. Once they were recovered in the early 1990s, the mural panels were placed in the school library. Photo from New Deal Art Registry. Barbara Bernstein. URL: www.newdealartregistry.org/map/HighlandParkHighSchool/HighlandPark/IL/#
11. “Evolution of the Book” (1936), Peterpaul Ott, WPA-FAP, Lane Tech High School. Photo from New Deal Art Registry. Barbara Bernstein. URL: www.newdealartregistry.org/map/LaneTechCollegePrepHighSchool/Chicago/IL/#
12. Animal Sculptures, Edgar Miller, WPA-FAP. Courtyard of the Jane Addams Homes. Photograph from 1950. University of Chicago Photographic Archive, apf2-09171, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library. Photo available online at Chicago Collections Consortium. URL: <https://explore.chicagocollections.org/image/uchicago/94/9020073/>

Election Day, November 8, 1932...the day it all began.



This joyful gathering of well-wishers surrounds the Democratic candidate for president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, as he leaves the polling station on the arm of his son Elliott and with his wife, Eleanor. This photograph was taken in Roosevelt's hometown of Hyde Park, New York, on Election Day, November 8, 1932. Roosevelt would go on to win this and a historic three more presidential elections.

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Amy L. Basketter and Chad S. Jones in memory of Thomas N. Baskette.



NATIONAL NEW DEAL PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION