

# \$796,000 Expended in Watauga County WPA Program

### "Boon-doggle" Becomes Boomerang, Says Cohn, as Results Are Calculated From WPA Activities in Watauga County; Comprehensive Review of Accomplishments of Federal Work-Relief Organization in This Territory

By FRED J. COHN  
(Director WPA Information Service)

"Boon-doggle" has become a boomerang in Boone and Watauga county. Remember "boondoggie"? The catch-phrase coined WPA work program enemies could not resist the pun.

They thickly laid the jest on WPA in Watauga's capital. WPA workers have been made the butt of many jokes.

A report just issued by G. C. McGinnis, state WPA administrator, gives the jokesters something to laugh off. The comprehensive routine report shows WPA activities and accomplishments in Watauga county since the inception of the program in August, 1935 to March 22, 1939.

At the latter date, 466 men and women in the county were working for WPA—at the only jobs available for them. The impressive total of one million two hundred thousand work hours have been provided the needy unemployed here, entailing an expenditure of \$796,119 in federal and sponsors' funds.

The endeavors disclosed by the report display a wide variety, from bringing books to rural homes to the massive native stone high school building with a gymnasium and auditorium in Boone. This building is one of the 49 completed or now progressing projects in the county.

Pass over the humor and the high school building and look at some of the other WPA projects.

A school has been mentioned. There is another one in Boone for that municipality's few negro children. A school bus transports other colored students from surrounding rural areas. There is another native stone school building at Mabel; still another at Valle Crucis and still another at Bethel and a six-room school addition at Blowing Rock.

Here are excerpts from a letter written some time ago by W. H. Walker, superintendent of Watauga county schools: "Our new school buildings of native stone are almost completed and I want to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Watauga county board of education and patrons of these schools, to express my sincere appreciation for the splendid co-operation extended by WPA officials. Only time can estimate the value of these modern structures."

"Our new 20-classroom high school building at Boone (sponsored by Appalachian State Teachers College), 12-classroom building at Bethel, 8-classroom building at Mabel, 6-classroom elementary building at Valle Crucis and two-room elementary building for colored children in Boone will replace fourteen antiquated frame buildings and will give about 1,300 pupils use of school plants equal to the best in North Carolina. In dollars and cents these schools are worth more than the money spent, about half of which was furnished by sponsors."

Approximately three miles of streets and sidewalks have been finished in Boone. W. H. Gragg, the town's mayor until last month, has commented on the street work: "We decided to start a project to improve the streets in the residential section, which were in very bad condition. Many of them could not be travelled in the wintertime and all very dusty. The project included surfacing one and one-fourth miles, building culverts, grading and building other streets. The work was done speedily and we really have a good job and good streets, which would not have been built had it not been for WPA. After mature thought and talking with a large number of people here, we are highly pleased with the project. WPA officials have been very co-operative in helping a town that needed help."

Water lines have been extended to sections which were not formerly possessed of such facilities essential to comfort and health. Water project was included in the "Boon-doggle" which distorted the facts to show the costs much greater than they actually were.

Also at Boone: The courthouse has been painted, a craft industries shop constructed. Nearby, helping to preserve our natural resources, the fish hatchery has come in for much development. Relief workers have also repaired the county home and improved the public park.

With county functions becoming greater, Watauga found itself with insufficient space in which to house the public health officer, county agent, the home demonstration agent, the public welfare department, school superintendent and other governmental agencies. The new county native stone structure now provides adequate offices. A street-level basement in the rear, besides containing the heating plant, is so arranged to serve as a school bus garage. This needed facility was built by 100 per

cent labor. As a further contribution to public health, a thoroughly modern hospital, started under prior federal work, has been finished by WPA.

In the same trend, many health hazards have been eliminated by placing 310 sanitary pit privies throughout rural areas not possessed of sewerage systems. Thus, dangers to water-well pollution have been erased.

The famed resort, Blowing Rock, has obtained from WPA workers, besides the school addition, a well-planned playground and over two miles of streets surfaced. The stone is quarried near the town, hauled to the street being repaired, crushed and spread on the job.

WPA critics will not derive much humor from another section of work done in the town which lent itself so readily to the satire. The report lists the accomplishments on the campus of state-owned Appalachian State Teachers College.

There have been landscaping, sidewalks and road improvements, enhancing the beauty and usefulness of this splendid educational institution.

The college's athletic teams, dubbed the "Mountaineers," have a class one field on which to display their prowess. Naturally, the main item is a 2,500-seat steel and concrete stadium. No, the college is not an adjunct to its football team. The sport is just a normal college activity here.

On a hill immediately back of the stadium is the nearly completed 65-room boys' dormitory. Well designed rooms, latest type heating, plumbing will place the brick building at par with the best student housing.

Unique in the manner in which Dr. B. B. Dougherty, Appalachian's president, has taken advantage of WPA workers in the faculty's interest. Always an acute dwelling shortage there, fifteen up-to-date brick or native stone homes for faculty use comprises the project. Nine houses are completed. Work soon commences on the other six.

President Dougherty, evaluating WPA in Watauga, including the school, said, "These buildings were splendidly designed and have been built in the most substantial way, attracting attention and commendation of all those who see them. The money that has been spent for these buildings will have a value for those yet unborn. Our people are greatly pleased."

"It is better, vastly better, to have a work program than to have a dole system. Many of our people have learned to be good rock masons and carpenters and will be able to stay on their feet in the future. These people will be better citizens and more independent than the men who receive something for nothing."

"We are planning for even better things in Watauga and we would be greatly disappointed if the works program should be discontinued."

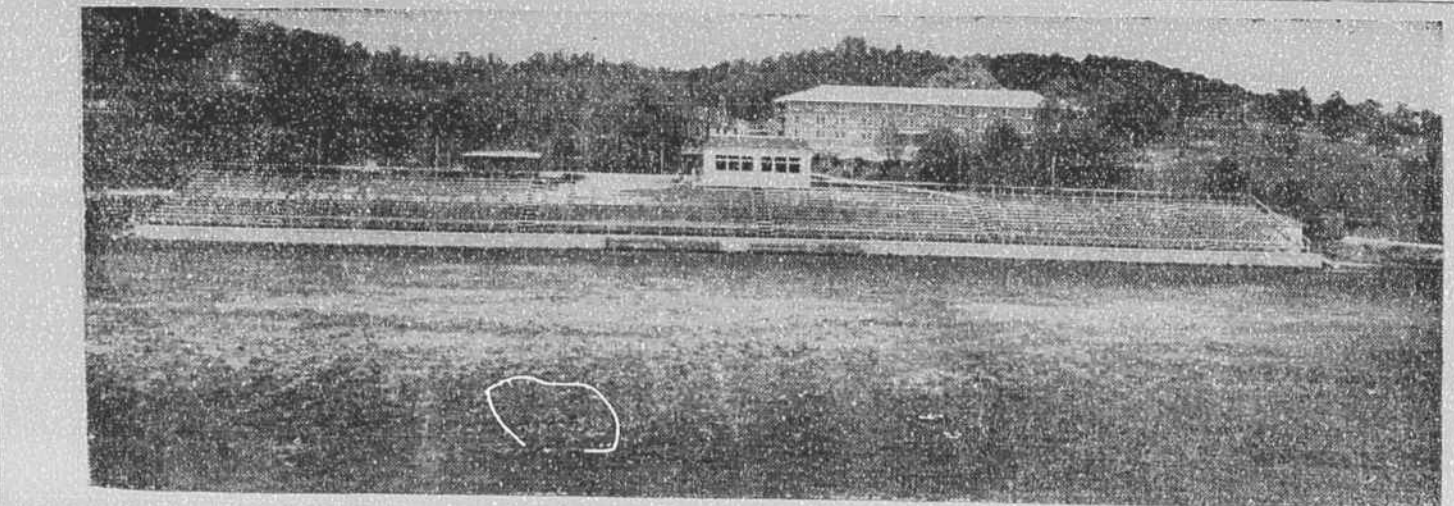
The most money spent and the most employment given on any work type has been the construction of secondary or farm-to-market roads. The mountain country folk have never had enough all-weather roads. The majority of WPA workers are unskilled and live in the sections where the roads are built. They have been lifting themselves and their neighbors out of the mud. School buses, mail carriers, produce hauling to market may now go forward uninterrupted, all year around on the 102 miles of farm-to-market roads completed in Watauga. The roads are of crushed rock. Bridges and culverts are placed where needed. This enterprise, sponsored by the state highway and public works commission, has used the best methods of road building, grading and draining included.

R. C. Rivers, newspaper publisher, observed last week: "I have heard so much said about WPA shovel leaning, I decided to find out about it for myself. An excellent opportunity presented itself. Across the street from my plant is a job being carried on by a private contractor. The WPA is constructing a sidewalk which runs in front of my door. Watching both groups carefully, I would emphatically say that those receiving relief wages work as competently and as industriously as those on the private job."

The work in Watauga has not been exclusively for men. Nor has all of it been construction. Worthwhile, socially useful work has been carried on by the professional and service division, employing 86 women.

That brings up the essential difference between the WPA work program and ordinary public work programs. The average work program does not take into consideration that if women, who are economic heads of needy families are not given work, the families become just as hungry as if a male were the household head.

In return for economic security, the women have worked and done the following for Watauga: In a sewing room, women, mostly trained through WPA instruction, have been making garments with efficiency and at a productivity rate of which a private employer might be proud. The 30,000 articles made during nearly four years operation have been distributed to underprivileged families,



who have never had sufficient clothing. School officials have said this has been the means of keeping in school many formerly inadequately clothed children. Besides stretching lean family incomes, so morale and responsibility have been maintained. Sewing room by-products are equally important. The women have been taught how to sew for their own families, how to budget small incomes, the rudiments of sanitation and personal hygiene.

Eight teachers on the adult education project have taught scores to read and write. Conserving human resources, these teachers now have a class enrollment of 427 adults taking advantage of an opportunity which for various reasons was not had by them in their youth.

Also, among the so-called "white collar" group, eleven especially trained women are conducting various library service units. Four school and public libraries have WPA assistants. In the bookmending unit, discarded volumes are repaired and returned to circulation. A WPA "Bookmobile" is making county rounds this month, bringing books to rural homes and demonstrating the value of such service.

In another important social welfare branch, 13 recreation leaders direct leisure time activities with a 3,228 monthly attendance. Teaching young and old the art of living together. In a craft center, weaving and other handicraft is taught so that many may while away spare time interestingly, profitably.

Still in humane, practical trend, WPA women workers prepare and serve hot school lunches to children, who otherwise would remain in (or more than likely, away from) school with empty stomachs. The food is donated by civic organizations and local governmental bodies. Many certified as eligible for work relief know how to farm but have no land to till. They have been assigned to the gardening and canning project which raises and preserves foodstuffs to supplant school lunches.

Clerical workers have improved county records, and janitorial service was furnished.

The most recently inaugurated woman's activity has been matron service in girls' high school rest rooms.

Other women have been assigned to jobs at the only "trade" they know. Carefully selected, they are called housekeepers' aides. When illness strikes the housewife in an underprivileged home, there is no money with which to hire help to do the household duties during the wife's incapacities. The aides are sent to help "bridge over" the distressed family, do the cooking, washing, and all chores.

Several noteworthy statistics are contained in Administrator McGinnis' schedules. Watauga has contributed 46 per cent of the total project costs. The sponsors have so well considered the work, which they selected to be done, that they have contributed to it substantially.

Nearly 85 per cent federal money spent has gone into the pockets of workers, the balance for supplies and materials.

This money has been immediately turned loose into trade channels. The material, supply and equipment money went to private industries, making other jobs. The money paid WPA workers has been termed the fastest spending dollar in the country. All must go for food, rent, clothing and the like, helping local merchants and farmers for produce, and property owners.

The vast majority of needy employees, about 74 per cent, are unskilled. Fitting the project to the labor types in Watauga is the reason why nearly one-third of the money has gone on farm-to-market roads. It also accounts for higher sponsors' funds on construction projects.

The county is in WPA area ten, headquarters in North Wilkesboro, with C. M. Crutchfield, area chief engineer, in command. Mr. Crutchfield examined the McGinnis report and commented, "Watauga has received its money's worth," but he continued, "All of the accomplishments listed are the direct result of supplying jobs to the needy unemployed there. The workers have shown their appreciation by giving

(Continued on page six)



(Top to bottom) 1. Athletic field, stadium and boys' dormitory in background at Appalachian College. 2. A few yards of the 102 miles of WPA farm-to-market roads. 3. County office building. 4. Faculty homes at Appalachian College. 5. Mabel grade school building. 6. Bethel high school. 7. Boone high school.

