

Mr. Roosevelt Comes to Champaign County: An Examination of the New Deal

Fellowship Lesson 2009
Marshall Schacht (St. Joseph-Ogden High School)
Champaign County Historical Archives

Lesson 5: December 28, 1935

In this lesson, students get into pairs and examine a photograph taken by a photographer from the Urbana Courier on a single day in December 1935. Each photograph captures the image of workers for the Works Progress Administration. The photographs were published in a photo essay in a single newspaper along with a simple article with the headline "[1,471 at Work on County WPA Jobs Saturday](#)".

1. Dec. 28 1935 [Stump removal](#)
2. Dec 28, 1935 [Sewer Project NW Champaign \(Vine and Prospect\)](#)
3. Dec 28, 1935 [Storm Drain catch basins \(175 employed\)](#)
4. Dec 28, 1935 [Street Improvement \(Matthew Ave, Urbana\)](#)
5. Dec 28, 1935 [Crystal Lake Park \(pump and tile...connect lake with Saline branch\)](#)
6. Dec 28, 1935 [Reclamation Park \(Urbana\)](#)
7. Dec 28, 1935 [Repairing books at Urbana Free Library](#)
8. Dec. 28 1935 ["Riprapping Boneyard" 2nd and Springfield in Champaign](#)
9. Dec 28, 1935 [Relaying Brick Sidewalks \(Oregon St., Urbana\)](#)
10. Dec 28, 1935 ["Ditch Gang" Church St., Champaign](#)
11. Dec 28, 1935 [NW Champaign Sewer Project](#)

Additional pictures from other dates in 1935-6 show a greater variety of WPA activities. They could provide a wider view of life working for the WPA. ([WPA Pictures from Urbana Courier](#))

Students will be responsible for the following: (See [Dec. 28, 1935 Photo Interpretation Worksheet](#))

- Creating a caption for the picture. The actual captions can be provided, but it would be interesting to see how the students interpret the various activities. ([Courier Captions](#))
- Describing the entire project of which the workers are a part.
- Providing a wage for the workers. This must be justified given the skills involved in the work depicted in the photo.
 - See "[Relief Office Awaits Plans for PWA Here](#)" Urbana Daily Courier: July 8, 1935 (pg. 3)
 - The WPA also employed writers, historians, musicians and artists. How much should these workers have been paid in comparison? Was this a good use of government money? Today?
- Finally, the student pair must create a fictional narrative about the workers. Including:
 - A name, family background...who is at home depending on the worker?
 - Profession, educational background.....how did they get here?

- A personal reflection on what the job means to them.
- A perspective of FDR and of the future.

The students will share the resulting narratives either at the end of the hour or the next day. This lesson is intended to give the students an opportunity to explore the personal perspective of those living during the New Deal. The result will be a window into their own feelings regarding employment and the possibilities during an economic recession.