

WPA Get

By a Special Correspondent of the Illinois Magazine.

BENEFITS of WPA to urban and metropolitan communities have been sufficiently stressed to establish the conviction of community betterment through government sponsored undertakings. Less spectacular but equally important have been the benefits accruing to essentially rural communities.

Major benefit in these communities has been not only the improvements themselves with the attendant opportunity for otherwise idle persons to obtain employment but rather the ending of the semi-isolation which has prevailed in agricultural hamlets, villages and towns slightly off the main line of travel.

Money has always been scarce in these rural communities. Jobs even in good times have been at a premium. There was little enough money for the admitted and obvious necessities of life much less for improvements which everyone admitted were "nice."

Effect of the WPA on these communities has been to loosen the economic strictures which were gradually strangulating the community. Working as far as possible with materials at hand, following out a well defined program, providing jobs for the able as well as the needy, rural communities seem to have realized definite immediate advantages from WPA.

TAKE the case of Dewitt county, essentially a small rural community in Central Illinois. By most standards Dewitt county is a wealthy farming community. And it is true there are acres and acres of fertile farming land. Two main trunk highways cross it north and south and east and west. Other arterial highways clip corners off the boundaries of the county or run close to them. The county community seems to be well balanced—Clinton the county seat of 5,000 population, represents a blending of the purely agricultural county seat community and an industrial city. The railroad—Illinois Central—with its shops and operating facilities is the city's biggest industry.

Clinton is the only industrial city in the county. The remainder of the communities are rural villages, trading centers for their immediate vicinity, self contained and for the most part economically isolated.

No small part of the isolation has been due to lack of secondary roads—solid substantial all weather roads which would link these communities together, a system of highways independent of the network of concrete pavements concerned with travel between distant terminals.

So much for the background of Dewitt county, which is as we have said, a rich farming community.

What is there to do in the line of public works in such a community?

Let's look around.