

# Culver In the Depression Years, 1933 through 1941

The following is a review of the hard times called "The Great Depression". We wanted to see the accomplishments achieved during this time in Culver. One of the main goals of the government agencies was to help parents provide, although in a limited way, for their families. In the written material it sounds as if most work was made available for men.

There were many worthwhile projects accomplished in Culver. The town acquired assets we use and enjoy today. Most of the activities were noted in the Culver Citizen from 1933 to 1941. In the early years the projects of the government agencies were usually front page news. In the later years this sort of news moved to the inside pages, implying that the situation was not as desperate as it has been in the early thirties.

There was an alphabet soup of government agencies:

- CWA - (Civil Works Administration)
- PWA - (Public Works Administration)
- GCUR - (Governor's Commission on Unemployment Relief)
- WRP - (Work Relief Program)
- RRP - (Rural Relief Program)
- FERA - (Federal Emergency Relief Administration)
- WPA - (Works Progress Administration)
- FEPP - (Federal Emergency Education Project)
- CCC - (Civilian Conservation Corporation)
- NYA - (National Youth Administration)

## Streets and Sidewalks



Lights from the Chicago World's Fair in the Town Park.

Fifty-seven men were employed in Culver to work on the streets by the CWA in 1933. Ohio Street and Lakeshore Drive were being prepared for paving and the installation of curbs. Sewers along the school house street were put in place before the street was to be improved and widened. This project was completed in 1934. The American Legion made the decision to pay for the paving of Lake Shore Drive at Memorial Plaza. They borrowed the money to do so.

Ten men were working west of town connecting Jefferson Street with Highway 10, this to be a first class road. An oil mat applied in the spring.

Curbs on Ohio Street from Washington to Lake Shore were completed. Men were working on several roads around the town. Road 17 was improved between Culver and Plymouth.

The work continued on the streets. In 1935 School Street was widened along the school grounds.

The summer plans for 1935 included supplying free labor to property owners for building and repairing sidewalks, curbs and gutters. The cost to the home owner was 8 cents per foot for sidewalks and 17 cents per foot for curbs and gutters. This offer continued through 1937.

The WPA launched a new program the first Tuesday of September. Twenty-seven men reported for duty. Their assign-

ments were to build sidewalks, curbs and gutters, trim trees, grade streets, improve Vandalia Park and erect boulevard light poles. Culver received 60 light poles of reinforced cement when the Chicago World's Fair was dismantled in May, 1935. The light system resembles a dinner bell. On September 9, 1936, the Citizen announced "New Boulevard Lights Flash Into Service". These are still in use in the Town Park.

## Government Regulations

(These news items are dated as they appeared in the Culver Citizen)

December 6, 1933 - Colonel Walter M. Hand was CWA Chairman. He was limited in employment of men by restrictions laid down by the Federal and State governments. Once men were assigned to a job they could not be changed unless they quit or were discharged for incompetence. A report was to be made to the County Chairman and reasons for the change.

December 6, 1933 - The trustee was not allowed to alternate men on the workforce even though it would give part time work for more men.

January 24, 1934 - Workers were cutback. They could only work 24 hours a week.

March 7, 1934 - The wage scale was reduced, unskilled would receive 40 cents an hour instead of 50 cents. Skilled workers 75 cents an hour instead of \$1.20.

April 11, 1934 - Local relief work was placed under the state's jurisdiction following the closing of the CWA on March 31. Partial financing would be by the FERA. CWA projects continued under these programs. The FERA had designated the GCUR to be the administrating agency. Counties established an agency under the GCUR and the Township Trustee would administer local relief.

August 22, 1934 - Relief Workers must register in Plymouth.

May 29, 1935 - The citizens of Marshall County were asked to come up with ideas for construction projects for the recovery of Indiana.

June 15 - August 31, 1935 - Young men, unemployed, single, 18 to 23 1/2 years old, members of families who are on relief roles are eligible to register for the CCC.

June 19, 1935 - 700 men are expected to go to work in Marshall County on July 1 when the WPA takes over the function of the FERA, which expired June 16.

October 9, 1935 - WPA workers may only work 130 hours a month.

March 25, 1936 - "No work, No pay". Lost time must be made up within the payroll period or the next succeeding payroll period.

April 22, 1936 - The management of the WPA in Culver was praised. They kept below the estimated cost of all projects completed. The district board praised the Town Board who have gone beyond the letter of agreement to assist in carrying out projects.

September, 1936 - Harry Menser was the WPA foreman.

September, 1937 - Poor Relief was decreasing in the township. It was 40% of what it had been. Now, there were only 3 families on relief.

October 13, 1937 - The State CCC membership were to be selected the following Friday.

March 15, 1939 - A coupon system for relief was being planned by the Federal Government.

## Fish Hatcheries

The Maxinkuckee Fish and Game Club was organized in 1911. Their purpose was not only to protect the lake and the surrounding area, but to enhance it, as well. In 1933 they built fish ponds on the west edge of the Academy grounds for the purpose of stocking Lake Maxinkuckee. Each of the 357 members of the organization paid a 25 cent fee per year. \$700

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was raised through donations and with volunteer labor the fish hatchery was built. 'Outdoor Indiana' published an article about these successful efforts in the October 1934 issue.

The following spring relief workers added a third pond. They also enlarged the original two ponds and increased the water supply which solved some problems at the hatchery.

Jeanne Epley told that the children of that day called this area "The Jungle". It was an exciting place to play. Spring time would come and the children would pick violets in the jungle.

## "One Township's Yesterdays"

Edwin R. Corwin was given permission by the CWA in January of 1934 to gather and publish the history of Union Township for the past 100 years. He was to have it completed in five weeks. He requested persons having copies of local papers prior to 1903 to leave them at the Culver Citizen office. He also asked, for any other historical papers and guaranteed their return to the owners.

On March 8, Mr. Corwin was told to stop his research. Although he was no longer receiving income from the project he continued to complete the work. The compiled history of families and events, which he called "One Township's Yesterdays", was ready for distribution the first week of September, 1936, and sold for 25 cents. Much of the history was published in the weekly newspaper.

## Post Office

Although the building of the Post Office was done through normal government procedures, it was helpful to the community to have it built during this time. It was announced in June 1934 that Culver was to have a new Post Office. There were 302 post offices needed in the state. Culver was fortunate to be one of the six to be started soon. The construction was begun the following March. Two houses were removed on what was called the Walker corner for the building. The new Culver Post Office opened for business on December 4, 1935. The building cost \$62,000.

## Post Office Mural

In the 1930's the U.S. Treasury Department commissioned artists to personalize newly built post offices with murals that related to the various communities. Artists would submit sketches to a selection committee. The artists were identified only by a number. In choosing an artist for an earlier post office the judges were surprised to find the first and second place winners had the same last name. They were a married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Hendrick Mayer. Mr. Mayer won that commission. Mrs. Mayer was told she would be given the opportunity to do the mural in the next Post Office to be built. Therefore, in 1938, she was commissioned to do the mural for the Culver Post Office.

Mrs. Mayer received a BFA degree from Yale in 1932. The year before beginning her paintings for the Culver Post Office she made many studies of the area. She chose to include the lake, camping, swimming, CMA, horsemanship, and agriculture in her work. This was done with one large panel and smaller panels on either side.

## Education

In December of 1934 the Culver Citizen informed the public of the upcoming Adult Education Program sponsored by Federal Emergency Education Program. Edwin R. Corwin was given the responsibility of setting up classes. Since he had recently completed a history of the area, one of the subjects he would teach would be local history.

A survey was made through the newspaper for citizens to suggest classes they would like to have available. In early January the classes to be offered were announced as follows: English, Spanish, literature, local history, art, music appreciation, psychology, typing, piano, criminal law and architectural drawing. The latter two classes would need at least 10 students since teachers would come from outside the community.

On January 30 the newspaper listed the three teachers, Mr. Corwin, Elizabeth Hubbell and L.F. Hildebrandt. The time and place were given for seven classes.

In the first week of March the announcement was made that most of the classes were being discontinued because of lack of promised funds from county and federal administrations. Mrs. Hubbell announced, "I will continue the class in the rudiments of music on Tuesday morning". Mr. Corwin retained his English class. The classes in Spanish and psychology met only one hour a week.

## Airport

The airport project was begun in Culver in January 1934 under the CWA. There were 13 airports to be built in the state at this time. Two were to be built in Marshall County, Culver and Plymouth. According to the authorities all airport projects are to have precedence over all other plans. Ten men began clearing the land of under growth and rocks on January 17. Progress was speeded up with the coming of a steam shovel and the manpower increased to 20 men. Leveling the ground was an enormous project. The total of 60,000 yards of dirt has been moved. A.E. Wennerstrom was the unpaid superintendent and engineer of the project.

A barn on the airport property was removed. It was found to have been constructed entirely of walnut and put together with wooden pegs. The work continued until June when an announcement was made that all airports were put on hold. Officials from Indianapolis inspected all of the new airports in the state. A week later work resumed under the FERA. The workforce was increased to 63 men. The goal was to complete the two 300 foot wide, 2,600 foot long runways in three months. The runways were covered with hardy grass. 7,000 pounds of grass seed were used.

A final inspection was made by officials in December as the airport neared completion.

The July 17, 1935 Culver Citizen reported the cost of the airport was \$53,005 federal dollars and \$540 local dollars.

In early 1936 CMA deeded the land of the airport to the town of Culver, since according to regulations, the government projects could not be built on privately owned land.

It was decided the airport needed some additions in 1937. The runways were not built according to the original specification so 100 feet were added to their width. In 1937 it is reported that the runways were increased to 300 feet and drainage was improved. It was said that these corrections would allow planes to land in any kind of weather. The cost would be \$49,000 and the work would be finished in about a year.

## Air Show

In the summer of 1936 the State Aviation Tour entertained area citizens with an Air Show. The pilots called themselves the "Linco Flying Aces". Linco was a brand of gasoline and motor oils. It was the 8th annual Indiana Air Tour, the first for Culver to host, perhaps, in celebration of the recently completed airport. It was reported that 50 planes flew in the evening before the event. The pilots were treated to a dinner at the Maxinkuckee Inn followed by a dance at the "Shack" with a local band providing the music.

The Tour organizers had supplied the Culver Citizen with diagrams of the air stunts the pilots would perform. These were printed in the previous week's edition, so all knew what to expect. Two thousand spectators attended the show. They saw everything from skywriting to barrel rolls, according to the Citizen. In the edition of the Citizen following the air show they spoke of several pilots who were unable to perform in the show. A local pilot, Byron Spangler did not take part in the tour because of an accident with his plane in Fort Wayne. Another pilot had to make a forced landing in LaPorte and ran into a fence. A Kokomo man escaped injury when he crashed into a farm field. Mr. McIntyre was forced down at Donaldson with engine failure. The cause: the radiator was filled with gasoline instead of water.

A large crowd was at the airport to see the takeoffs the morning after the show.

## Town Buys Park Site

### The Pennsylvania RR Sells Vandalia Park.

These were the headlines in the Culver Citizen on February 20, 1935. The announcement was made by W.O. Osborn, attorney for the town trustees. It was accomplished after several months of negotiation. Citizens of Culver were delighted. The sale price was \$6,500. The town board had appropriated the money the previous December. Included in the sale were 3.2 acres of park land, with buildings, and the site of the old water tower on Bunker Hill. This added another 2.2 acres.

Fire claimed the boathouse, which was in the park, soon after the purchase had been completed. The wooden structure, built in 1886, had been considered an historic landmark. The reporter of the Culver Citizen considered the peak time for the boathouse was when Captain Morris was in the boat business.

The planning for a new boathouse began immediately. The trustees considered various architectural designs. Approval from the FERA for the project was received, only to find it had been replaced by the WPA. The



approval process had to be repeated. On August 7 of that year it was reported that the town filed a request with the WPA for aid in rebuilding the bathhouse. The notice from the Federal government was received on December 11. The request had been granted. Also included in the agreement were improvements which would be made in the park. It was estimated the building of the beach house would employ 37 men and the cost would be under \$19,000, with the major portion being borne by the government under the WPA. The town would pay nothing for labor and only a part of the material costs.

The excavation was done for the beach house in January of 1936 and the wait began for the building materials. Finally, the footings for the new building were put in place the end of May. Bunker Hill, west of the park, was cut down and the dirt used to create parking space and picnic areas at the east end of the park. The beach was enlarged and improved, as well.

A park road was extended south along the lake so trucks would not have to cross the railroad tracks. The road ended at the viaduct at Washington Street. The dirt from Bunker Hill was used for this project.

A five foot wide sidewalk was laid from the freight house to the round stand and then to the boat house and beyond. A retaining wall was built which became a convenient place to sit and look at the lake.

In July the WPA workmen were treated to a picnic in the park. Merchants donated prizes for the games. Forty-five families were expected to attend.

In September Harry Menser, the local WPA foreman, made the announcement that he intended to push the work on the boathouse. In December the WPA added another \$9,603 for the project. The order to build was given one year ago but the WPA spokesman said it would be finished in three months. They reduced the men to be employed from 37 to 14.

On May 30, 1937 the Beach House was opened to the public. The Culver Citizen described the opening, "Oliver Shilling has leased the building from the Town Board. It is to be called 'The Culver Beach Lodge'. Mr. Shilling furnished the place. The third story has five living rooms, complete with beds, etc. Each room has a closet. There is a bathroom for the use of those occupying the rooms. Rooms will be rented by the day or by the week.

The second floor is for bathers dressing rooms, showers and bathrooms with glazed buff tile. The first floor has a soda fountain and a lunch room." The restaurant opened in June with Mr. and Mrs. G. Cultice the operators. Their previous restaurant had been the "BusyBee".

## Piano Lessons

"Music classes are to be formed for those over 16 who are desirous of making the summer musically profitable. The beginning music class with Mrs. Elizabeth Hubbell is sponsored by the FERA. The class will meet Tuesday morning throughout the summer."

This notice appeared in the Culver Citizen in the spring of 1935. There were also advanced classes for those who had lessons the previous summer. Donna Edgington spoke of being a part of these lessons. As she said, "Students were given a cardboard replica of a keyboard. This was laid in front of each person to practice the fingering of the piece of music being taught that day."

These lessons continued to be offered for several years. In the spring of 1940 registration for lessons was at the library. May 21-26 was declared to be "Music Week" and mothers and friends were invited to attend classes during that week. There was also a sign up time in the fall for winter classes. In January of 1940, 65 people were taking piano lessons with Mrs. Hubbell under the WPA grant. The lessons were given in the assembly room at the library and were sponsored by Indiana University with the local school as sub-sponsor.

## Lake Maxinkuckee

In 1937 spring cleaning fever spread to Lake Maxinkuckee as a crew of 15 WPA workers were ridding the lake of predatory fish. The seining revealed a new fish, the Quillback. It weighs 2½ to 3 pounds and is impossible to catch. It is good eating but harmful to more desirable fish. The clean up crew made 2 to 3 hauls a day for six weeks. Desirable fish were thrown back.

## Art Exhibits

In 1939 the Federal Art Project, under the WPA, brought art exhibits to the citizens of Culver. These were displayed at the Academy. The first was a watercolor exhibition by New York artists. The second was a compilation of 8,000 renderings of native arts and crafts from the Colonial and the late Victorian periods. Some reproductions of museum pieces were included. Photography was the subject of the third exhibit. The photographers of this creative display were from California and New York. A fourth exhibit of watercolors were painted by artists from every part of the United States.

## Sewer System

In March 1940 the WPA announced it would give grants to build sewer systems, with a considerable savings to the communities. The Culver town board visited several towns to learn about sewage disposal plants.

A major expense was digging the ditches. This would be done with WPA labor. The WPA would pay 75% of the cost of pipe. This would include connections ready for property owners to hook on at their property line. The sewage disposal plant would be built with a private contractor, who would be an expert workman. In April an engineer was hired to make a preliminary study.

In late June the proposal was made to the citizens of Culver for their approval or disapproval of a bond issue of \$40,000 to pay the town's share of the costs. For the next several weeks the newspaper had articles about the advantages of a sewer system for the town. One of the main talking points was a pollution free lake. The bond issue would make the payments of the tax payer to be \$2.00 on every \$1,000 dollars of assessed value of their home. With the majority of the citizens agreeing to the project the Town Board was ready to submit the application to the state by mid August.

After a long delay the state officials approved the local sewage project in April 1941. The construction awaited the WPA's approval and issuance of a grant. In June the Culver Sewer Project got Federal approval. Actual work now awaits the signature of the President. A week later a telegram was received with the news that Franklin D. Roosevelt had signed the request. Nine miles of sewer were to be built. The government grant would be \$181,682.

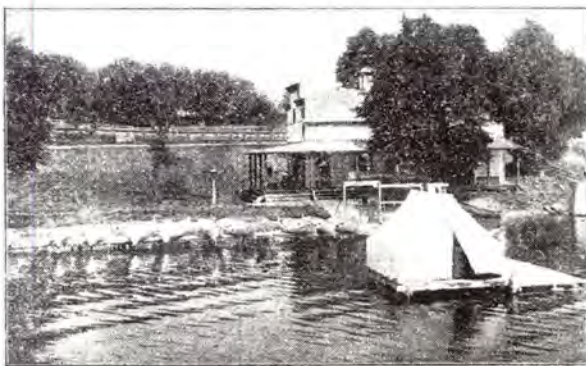
December 7, 1941 changed the focus of the U.S. Government from the Depression to the winning of the war and thus all pending projects were left undone.

*Thanks to the Culver-Union Township Library for having the past issues of the Culver Citizen that we may learn about our past. Also, thank you to Donna Edgington and Jeanne Epley who remember.*

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FALL, 2002  
NEWSLETTER

Antiquarian and Historical Society  
P.O. Box 125  
Culver, Indiana 46511-0125



## August Meeting

Dana Groves, Field Coordinator with the National Landmark Office in Indiana in South Bend, was our guest at the August meeting, which was held at the Depot. She gave us a short history of the bungalow and then talked about the bungalows on Forest Place, which was recently placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Ms. Groves said that Forest Place may be the smallest district on the Register.

We learned that the bungalow is not a style but a type of architecture, which can be designed in many styles. There are Tudor style, mission, craftsman, colonial revival, prairie school, and others, almost always built with low pitched roofs, front porches, overhanging eaves, exposed rafter tails, 1 to 1 1/2 stores high, and with dormers. There is even a Chinese pagoda style bungalow across from the fairgrounds in Argos.

She showed slides of many different bungalows across the country and then the pictures she had taken of the bungalows on Forest Place. Forest Place was platted in 1916 with 14 properties on land bought from the railroad by Samuel Medbourn. The homes were completed by 1922 and owned mostly by Academy faculty. Ms. Groves emphasized that the district has maintained its integrity, which seems to be a requisite for a listing on the National Register. The pictures were lovely and several residents of the street told us the history of their homes. Many have been renovated but all retain their original character, thus maintaining integrity.

It was a most interesting meeting and will certainly give us a new perspective when driving down Forest Place. The handsome plaque displayed at the South end of the street was installed by the Antiquarian Society. It is another sign of the pride we have in our area and the work we do to preserve it.

## House of 1000 Candles

The September 28 meeting will begin at 3:30 p.m. instead of our usual morning time. Professor Craighton Hippenhammer, a professor of Information Technology at Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais, IL, has done extensive research into the background of his home, The House of 1000 Candles, and its connection with Meredith Nicholson, a popular Indiana author in the "olden" days. If you haven't read the book yet, you're in for a treat. It pictures the town of Culver, Lake Maxinkuckee, and the Academy as it was in the 1800's, tells a quaint love story, and unravels a mystery as well. It is thought that Nicholson wrote the novel, or at least was inspired to write it, while visiting the house at 762 East Shore Drive, subsequently named The House of 1000 Candles.

Dr. Ralph Gray, Retired Professor Emeritus from Indiana University and Purdue, will join Professor Hippenhammer, but could not be there until the afternoon, which is why we are meeting at 3:30. Dr. Gray is a historian with published articles about Meredith Nicholson and his connection with Culver. He will answer questions after Prof. Hippenhammer's program, which will include clips from the movie made from the book.

Prof. & Dr. Hippenhammer have invited us to stay for a wine and cheese reception after the program. You won't want to miss the chance to hear about one of our famous authors and the book so familiar and loved in many of the homes around the lake and in the area. The address is: 762 East Shore Drive, the date: September 28th, and the TIME is: 3:30 pm.

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