RELIEF AND REDISCOVERY:
THE WPA FEDERAL WRITERS PROJECT IN OHIO, 1935-1942

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Preface.

Although the title of this thesis might strike the reader as an advertisement for aspirin, I chose the words carefully. The terms relief and rediscovery capture the historical essence of the Federal Writers Project. The Project's chief function, as defined by its organizers, was relief—giving work to unemployed writers, poets, newspapermen, and editors. The FWP was only one aspect of the Works Progress Administration.* Unlike the manual labor projects, however, the Federal Writers Project (FWP) provided "white collar" work for unemployed professional and semi-professional groups of men and women.

The original objective of the FWP was to compile five comprehensive tour books of the United States. Each volume was to cover a separate region of America. This encyclopedia-like set of tour books, covering all facets of American life, was to be known as the American Guide Series. The five volume project, however, never got beyond the conceptual stage. Instead, the Washington office adopted a state guide plan, in which every state

*After September 1, 1939, it was the Works Projects Administration.
would have a separate tour book. A state guide now exists for 49 out of 50 states, (Hawaii lacks a guide), also Puerto Rico, and most major cities including New York, Washington, D.C. and New Orleans.

The unanticipated result of researching and writing the American Guide Series was to involve thousands of Americans in a rediscovery of their homeland. This unconscious or conjunctive consequence of the FWP and its works was the result of both external events—the resurgence of patriotism in the late 1930's—and of the FWP policy of community involvement and consultation.

My original purpose in researching the Federal Writers Project in Ohio (or Ohio Writers Project) was twofold. First, I wanted to subject the vast quantity of OWP material in the Ohio Archives to historical analysis. The result was to be an administrative history of the Ohio Writers Project. Since its achievements, failures and problems were typical of many state writers projects, I felt that a study of the Project in Ohio would aid in understanding the whole FWP. In a sense the Ohio Writers Project was a microcosm of the national project.

My second purpose was to conduct an oral history of the OWP under the auspices of the Ohio Historical Society. It has only been thirty-six years since the creation of the FWP and many of the writers and supervisors—I thought—would still be alive.

In April 1969, I began both efforts simultaneously with a great deal of energy and, unfortunately, naivete. By the summer, it was clear that I did not have the time to sustain both efforts.
After tracing a few of the former Project workers, it became more difficult to locate them. When I did learn of the whereabouts of former workers, it was in New York, California or Washington, D.C. Transportation costs became a problem.

At this same time I was also combing the numerous OWP files in the Ohio Archives. It soon became clear that much of the material composed manuscripts which were of more value to the antiquarian than to the historian. To write an administrative history of the OWP was going to involve more effort than I had anticipated.

By late August 1970 I realized I had to choose between an oral history project and the more conventional historical monograph. The Ohio Historical Society made this decision for me when budgeting problems made it impossible for the Society to finance the oral history project. Thus, I was left with several personal interviews of former Project workers and a great mass of notes about the administration of the OWP.

By necessity then, the thesis began to take its present form. I have divided this study into two parts. Section I is the narrative, describing the seven-year history of the Project in Ohio. Woven into this monograph are the recollections of key FWP personnel whom I have interviewed. These interviews include two of the four state directors, James G. Dunton (1935-37) and Dr. Harlan H. Hatcher (1937-39). I also interviewed the former Columbus District supervisor, Emerson Hansel, and a state office editor, Myron C. Flechtner, who stayed with the Project until its
demise. Ironically, except for Dr. Hatcher, none of these people are writers now. I did interview one practicing writer, Eleanor Moorehead, who is a newspaperwoman for the Columbus Citizen-Journal. Unfortunately she only worked for the Project for a year (1938) at the request of Dr. Hatcher, her former English professor. Her comments added very little to the understanding of the OWP.

In addition to these five taped interviews, I corresponded with several former OWP and FWP district personnel. Time and lack of money prevented me from interviewing them. However, they did complete a "Former FWP Employee Questionnaire." (See Appendix V) Their answers provided useful information about the relationship of the Ohio Project to the Midwest region.

All tapes, transcriptions and correspondence are now in my possession. In time, they will be deposited in the Ohio Archives at the Ohio Historical Center, Columbus, Ohio.

Section II of this study also draws on these interviews to develop a portrait of the Ohio Project. In the second part I attempt to give both actor (participants) and observer (historian) constructs of the Ohio Writers Project.
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I. THE STORY OF THE OHIO WRITERS PROJECT

A. The Washington Office.

Established by Executive Order No. 7034, the Works Progress Administration came into existence on May 6, 1935. President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Harry L. Hopkins as the federal administrator. Although the WPA was envisioned as a public-works program, its budget of $4,800,000,000 and its objective of employing 3,500,000 persons then on relief relegated it to a work relief program. Thus, it could not completely support those on relief yet it would not function as a "hole" or direct relief. Instead it would be work relief—the unemployed would work for the federal government on federally-financed projects.¹

Incorporated into the WPA structure in the summer of 1935 was Federal Project No. One or "Federal One." These were four relief projects, one for each art: actors, artists, musicians and writers.² All four of these projects were part of the Professional and Service Division of the WPA. This division was popularly described as "white collar relief." Earlier, in 1934, the Civil Works Administration under Harold Ickes had financed several work relief projects for painters and actors, and some states (New York and Connecticut) had employed artists. Federal Project No. One, however, was the first federal program designed to employ "all eligible persons" on cultural projects for which they were
"equipped by experience, training and ability." ³ For the next three years, until September 1939, the federal treasury supported unemployed artists, actors, writers and musicians. Drawn from the WPA relief rolls across the country, these people were placed on community projects where their talents could be used to benefit themselves and the community. Artists painted hundreds of murals in post offices, libraries and government buildings. Musicians conducted concerts in thousands of isolated communities and brought live music to people who only had heard music on the radio or phonograph. Actors and actresses toured the United States entertaining millions of men, women and children. It was the task of the writers on the FWP to research and write a history—community by community—of the United States. More than a history, it was to be an encyclopedia of information about the people, geography, flora and fauna, roads, rivers, monuments, battlefields, foods, cultures—a compendium of facts about America.

Like the other arts projects, the FWP was headed by a National Director, ⁴ Henry G. Alsberg, a former newspaperman and foreign correspondent. Described by Time magazine as the "survivor of a ‘helter-skelter career,’” ⁵ Alsberg was a Columbia University Law School graduate and a former editorial writer for the New York Evening Post, who became secretary to the United States ambassador to Turkey in 1916. After the Russian Revolution he served as the director of the Joint Distribution Company, a social agency which distributed food to starving Russian peasants. At first sympathetic with the Bolshevik regime, Alsberg was later appalled
at the suppression of civil liberties after the Russian Civil War (1919-1920). Upon his return to the United States in the early 1920's, he wrote articles exposing the dictatorial posture of the Communist regime. The Soviet Union never again allowed Alsberg to enter its country.

In the 1920's, Alsberg's career took another turn. He became interested in the theater and was the director of the Provincetown (Massachusetts) Theater for two years. Late in the 1920's Alsberg returned to his journalism career, representing various American newspapers in Europe and North Africa. Early in 1934, he came to Washington as the supervisor of reports for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), a forerunner of the WPA. His job involved him in the editing of an illustrated propaganda book, entitled America Fights the Depression.6 Because of his literary and administrative background, Hopkins appointed him the national director of the FWP in August 1935, where he served until 1939 when the Project was decentralized. For this position, his talents proved to be of a literary rather than administrative nature. His primary concern for the literary quality of the FWP publications eventually created a situation that worked to the detriment of the FWP state directors and their projects.

The Washington office also had an assistant director for administration and an associate director who was a general editorial manager. Reed Harris, also a former writer and newspaperman from New York, was appointed assistant director. Harris,
of a liberal persuasion, was a former Columbia University student newspaper editor (Daily Spectator) who wrote a provocative book while an undergraduate. The book, King Football, created such a protest among football-loving alumni that Harris was expelled from Columbia. Harris then wrote for various New York City newspapers before joining the FERA in 1934.

For the position of associate director the novelist George Cronyn was selected. Like Alsberg, his career was a varied one: graduate of the University of Montana and Columbia, English teacher, rancher, writer, apple grower and plumber. According to historian William McDonald, "he had purposely cultivated a catholicity of experience in order to fit himself for the profession of novelist." A small staff of writers and editors gathered around this triumvirate. Most had writing experience and had come to Washington in the early years of the New Deal to work for various relief agencies, especially the FERA. The staff became the "Washington office." Administrative burdens of correspondence, policies and regulations and the editorial demands of turning out publishable manuscripts weighed heavily on the staff. Fifty-one "state" offices looked to Washington for administrative direction and editorial support. At the same time it was Alsberg's responsibility to staff the state Project offices with a director and supervisors. Immediately after becoming national director, Alsberg ordered the Washington staff to solicit state director candidates from WPA state administrators.
B. The Early Years, 1935-37.

In Ohio, the WPA state administrator was Dr. Charles C. Stillman, a professor of social work at Ohio State University. It is not clear how the Ohio WPA at first reacted to the organization of the FWP (as well as the other three art projects) in the state. According to McDonald, the WPA state administrators generally were not sympathetic to the WPA art projects, for the Washington office controlled them directly. McDonald quotes one regional director:

I saw evidence everywhere that the Writers' Project was regarded by the State Administrators as a New Deal whim--something a few crackpots in Washington wanted, but that didn't amount to anything, something that would be dropped at the first opportunity. 9

When a former Columbus district supervisor was asked about the FWP fitting into the WPA structure, he exclaimed, "rather awkwardly . . . we were neither fish nor fowl." 10

Yet the Ohio WPA office cooperated with Washington FWP officials in a search for a state director. The problem, like in many states, was to find a man with both administrative experience as well as editorial and writing talents. Complicating this search was the sense of urgency, of doing something right now. It seemed terribly important to have the state FWP offices operating quickly and providing work for hungry, unemployed writers and newspapermen.

The Ohio Democratic Party controlled the state administration in these formative years under the leadership of Governor George
White. Although the WPA was prima facie non-political, the selection of state directors for various projects hardly escaped the influence of state politics. By late November 1935, a man was found who satisfied the national office’s criteria of having administrative as well as editorial skills, and who, coincidentally, was a Democrat.

James Gerald Dunton, a native of Circleville, Ohio, had just celebrated his 36th birthday when he was appointed state director of the FWP in Ohio.*

The son of a local physician, Dunton, his two sisters and one brother grew up in Circleville before World War I. After graduating from high school he went to Canada where he enlisted in the Wagoner Ambulance Corps prior to United States entry into the war. He was sent to France where he remained in the corps until the 1918 Armistice. In 1919 he went to Aberdeen University in Scotland, shortly thereafter returning to the United States and enrolling at Harvard University. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1924 and a Masters in Education in 1928. At the same time he was supporting himself by teaching high school English and writing fiction.

Between 1925 and 1933, Dunton wrote several novels, which he himself described as “very light fiction.”11 His best known

*Because of the awkwardness of that term, hereafter it will be shortened to the “Ohio Writers Project” (OWP), which conforms with terms used at that time.
work was *A Maid and A Million Men*, (1928), a war story which drew on his own experiences in France. It remained a popular paperback title until the early 1940’s.

Although he continued writing novels until 1933, Dunton returned to Columbus in 1930 when his father died. In 1932 he began working for the Democratic Party, campaigning for George White. Acquiring friends in local Democratic Party circles as well as a publicity position in the party, made Dunton a prime applicant for the position of state director of the Ohio Writers Project. (According to Dunton, however, he was one of three candidates for the position and said “he didn’t know why” he was chosen.)

One possible reason for his appointment was the support given by an Ohio Congressman, a U.S. Senator and a former Ohio Governor. Representative Moll G. Underwood (Democrat), Senator Robert J. Buhlley (Democrat) and former governor Vic Donahey all wrote letters to FWP officials in Washington urging the appointment of Dunton and citing his literary background.

A Western Union telegram on November 15, 1935 informed Dunton that he was appointed state director. In this capacity Dunton was responsible for both the organization of the OWP and the Historical Record Survey (HRS). His first task was to hire district supervisors and obtain writers from the WPA relief rolls to staff the district and county offices. Sixteen Ohio Writer Project districts were drawn up with smaller “feeder” offices in almost every county. (See Appendix IV.)
Within two weeks, according to Dunton, "I had 360 people on the payroll." Because he spent two months' budgetary allotment in the first thirty days, Dunton began a period of juggling personnel, from the OWP to the HRS and then back the next month. This budgetary juggling continued for several months until more funds were appropriated and state organizational guidelines were formalized. One result of Dunton's haste was that people on WPA relief rolls who were not really qualified as writers were placed on the OWP. The state directors had wide latitude in applying the criteria of "writer" to prospective Project personnel. Teachers, librarians, researchers, advertising executives—people who were literate and had obtained a high school diploma and often a college degree—were the majority on the FWP. Actual writers with published books (except newspapermen and editors), however, were a very tiny proportion of the OWP personnel.

In Ohio, as well as many states, much of the literary talent had left for New York, Chicago and other cultural centers. Earlier writers, those of the post-war era and 1920's, were also gone—many to Paris, London or some other European capital. Talented writers who had remained in Ohio were not on relief. They were able to find work or continue writing in spite of the Depression. In the summer of 1937, Ted Robinson, the literary editor for the Cleveland Plain Dealer, wrote an article for the Saturday Review of Literature, entitled "Claims of the Buckeye." Not one of the sixteen Ohio writers he discussed was working on the OWP. Yet there were literate, educated Ohioans—teachers, librarians, college
graduates—who were unemployed. It was they who staffed the OWP.

But in the last weeks of 1935, in the rush to ease the economic plight of many unemployed men and women, WPA certifying officials allowed many uneducated and unqualified people on the OWP. It was the dilemma that plagued the OWP continually: need or ability. What should determine whether a person was employed by the OWP? Should it be economic destitution or writing ability? Dunton's answer was, 'I tried to keep the criteria low.'\(^{19}\) Thus, need was placed before ability. This decision was to have long-term ramifications for both Dunton and the OWP. In late 1935, however, with winter's onslaught coming and millions of Ohioans unemployed, there was little time for certification. The money was there and people needed work.

Dunton remained state director for two years. In that time the Project began operating in every county in the state. Researchers scoured state and county records, interviewed local figures, read numerous books about the state's history, geography, peoples, cities, transportation and industries. Rough field notes were sent to district offices which were rewritten and sent to the state editorial office in Columbus. Dunton's editorial staff would check authenticity, re-write the copy and send it to the regional office in Indianapolis. (This office later moved to Chicago.) There, it was again checked, edited and re-written before going to the national office in Washington.

What was first a trickle became a stream, a flood and finally a deluge of words which inundated the Washington editorial
staff. Directives were constantly coming to the OWP editorial office requesting that copy be reduced and re-written. The Ohio office attempted to limit the flow, but the longer research continued the greater the amount of copy. Gradually, however, as the basic research was completed the small districts were consolidated into larger districts. The district offices began to center in the major urban areas in Ohio—Cleveland, Cincinnati, Toledo, Columbus and Akron. The smaller offices in Zanesville, Mansfield and Coshocton were closed.

One example of this contraction was the Sandusky district. In the spring of 1935, Myron C. Flechtner, a native of Tiffin, Ohio, and former bookstore salesman in Cleveland, read about the formation of the FWP. He had been "bumming around" since 1933, working at odd jobs, writing magazine articles for The Thinker and Popular Biography and living off the "bounty" of his parents in Tiffin. Flechtner recalled:

It immediately interested me because it sounded like something I could fit into. So I wrote a letter to the Sandusky district, regional district of the WPA, applying for a job on the Writers Project.

Although Flechtner was not on the relief rolls, he was hired as a supervisor under the 10 percent (later 25 percent) non-relief exemption. This clause in the FWP hiring directives allowed state directors to draw a certain percentage of their supervisory or editorial staff from other sources than the WPA relief rolls. Again this was the result of the dilemma of uneven distribution of qualified, unemployed persons certified for relief and the pressure
to employ needy writers not on the WPA rolls. In Flechtner's case, the decision was made to employ him in spite of his non-relief status. This proved to be a fruitful decision for both the OWP and Flechtner. For Flechtner remained with the OWP as an able editor until its demise in 1942.

But such events were in the murky future in December 1935 when Flechtner became supervisor of the Sandusky District (OWP District #8). At first Flechtner's area was only seven counties. His responsibilities included interviewing and selecting personnel for the OWP.

In most cases there were only a few people actually assigned to the Project and quotas were set up for every county for the number of persons who would be allowed on the Writers Project in each county, based more or less on population...So there were a lot of interviews, a lot of hiring and transferring.

When asked what his criterion for hiring was, Flechtner responded that it was basically "native intelligence . . . and interest in reading." Most of his personnel were older women; many had been to college. Almost all had an interest in the local history of their town or county. None of them were from other counties, but were indigenous to the area.

As the research progressed, Flechtner's district was expanded to include six more counties. (See Appendix IV.) Then slowly the OWP became centralized. This appeared to be more of conjunctive result of OWP research than one that was anticipated.

"I would say events forced that structure . . . because as the years went by things got better . . . and the economy slowly improved,
area by area," Flechtner recalled.

In July 1937, another consolidation took place and the western half of the Sandusky district was incorporated into the enlarged Toledo district (District #12). Flechtner was transferred to the Toledo office of the OWP where his work was strictly editorial—"trying to make something of the Toledo Guide which existed in manuscript form." Four months later Flechtner moved again, this time to the state office in Columbus. This was part of a shakeup which resulted in the resignation of Dunton and the appointment of a new state director.

To explain why the OWP deteriorated as a productive unit during 1936-37, it is necessary to discuss two important aspects of the FWP, the American Guide Manual and the concept of community consultation.

One of the very first publications of the Washington Office of the FWP was The American Guide Manual, which was sent to all state FWP offices. This was the "bible" for FWP researchers and writers. Over half of the book, 86 pages, was devoted to questions about geography, history, culture, social and recreational facilities, industry and commerce and government. Researchers used these questions as a basis for developing factual material about their locality. Researchers were expected to go beyond these questions in their work, but only after they had covered these five classifications. This would give the American Guide Series a certain uniformity but also allow for state and regional diversity.
Also in the Manual were examples of town and city descriptions. These descriptions, or "treatments," were excerpts from the Connecticut Guide of 1935 which was a forerunner of the American Guide Series. Unfortunately, the passages reprinted in the Manual were dull, disjointed descriptions which illustrated the worst results of "cooperative writing." There was no flare or style, just a flat, factual essay that would probably be easier to read in a chart form.

All too often the state director and his editors took the Manual's examples as the model for their own city treatments and essays. It became an end in itself rather than the basis for interesting, solid explanatory writing. At the same time the Washington office became aware that commercial publishers would not accept such wooden, dull prose. Their standards were higher; their editors more demanding. This left the Washington office in a predicament. Their editors must either re-write the material—a solution that became terribly unrealistic as the deluge of state copy began pouring in—or the staff had to return the material to the state offices for further editing and re-writing. Such was the Ohio situation where relatively unskilled writers and editors found their manuscripts red-penciled and returned from Washington.

Unfortunately, the editors in the Ohio office did not perceive the situation in the same way as the Washington office. Returned and "hacked-up" manuscripts were a continual problem which led to antagonism toward the Washington office. Further cause of hostility is expressed in the final OWI report.
Perhaps the greatest delay in completing The Ohio Guide was caused by the Washington Office itself; it insisted, during the period from 1936 to 1938 upon a great variety of copy submitted in the interest of national publication—most of which never saw the light of day.  

Even by December, 1936, this was a very sensitive point with Dunton. When one Guide manuscript was returned with extensive editing, Dunton wrote a staff memorandum announcing that the manuscript "was crucified" in Washington. Then he announced a tougher policy:

There will be no place for boonduggers, time-chisellers, lazy research workers, unreliable reporters, careless clerical workers, or other inefficient producers of unsatisfactory copy.

If this had been the only major problem of the OWP, it could have been worked out as the state editorial staff became more experienced. The time required to staff and train a productive unit such as the OWP was longer than anticipated. Because of the lack of writing talent in Ohio (on relief) and the 10 percent limitation of non-relief personnel, the OWP editors were often not as qualified as the situation demanded. Or, they were old, individualistic newspapermen who found it difficult to conform to the Guide "style." As Dunton emphasized, "the trouble with the Washington office was that they took a very bureaucratic approach to work that was done in the field." They attempted to make all copy fit a national pattern. In time, however, and patience by both Washington and Columbus, the problem of good, publishable copy resolved itself. Yet another major difficulty developed.
between Washington and Columbus which in late 1937 resulted in Dunton's resignation.

Again, the *American Guide Manual* was involved and also the FWP's policy of community consultation. Alsberg made it very clear in the opening pages of the Manual that community consultation should be solicited by the state director: "Following the settling up of the State Office, the Supervisor [State Director] should make every effort to secure Volunteer Assistants and Consultants for the state project."³²

There were two important reasons for this, one practical and one political. The former was the fact that active participation by local people would make a more factual, complete Guide. Local historians and antiquarians were sought for their knowledge of their communities. By engaging the local populace as much as possible, the Guide would be a true representation of the people, a *vox populi* of America. Also, because tight FWP budgets allotted very little for transportation, it was believed that local historical societies and government bodies could provide material assistance such as transportation and office space. This support would also benefit the community, the Manual explained, for they would profit from "any influx of tourists."³³

The second reason was politically motivated. Since New Deal work relief programs were often met with hostility by the local press, WPA officials attempted to preclude any criticism by appealing directly to the people. For the FWP this meant knitting in as many people as possible—giving them a sense of participation
in the writing of their community's past. In doing this, it was believed, local media or political hostility would be muffled or at least ineffective in persuading readers and voters that the FWP was a waste of their tax money.

Although there was a basic agreement on the usefulness of community consultation between the Washington and Columbus offices, definite disagreement on procedures developed. For Alsberg and the Washington-office the publication of state guides became the primary objective. This would be the visible, useful result of a work relief program. It would be practical evidence that New Dealers could show Congressmen to persuade them to continue voting funds for Federal Project Number One. A state guide was also a published volume which received serious treatment by book reviewers and newspaper literary editors. It was good public relations which gave the FWP a "practical" reason for continuing. The flaw—or blind spot—of the Washington Office, however, was their unrealistic expectations of sound, publishable copy from untrained, limited researchers and editors such as the Ohio editorial staff. It was demanding too much too soon.

Conversely, Dunton perceived the idea of community participation as a proliferation of town guides and small, mimeographed publications. From 1935 to 1937 the OWP wrote and published 14 publications. All but four were less than 15 pages. (See Appendix I.) This took time and diverted talents away from the production of the state guide. Not only was editorial talent diverted but Dunton's administrative role was stretched. Besides directing the
OWP and the HRS in Ohio, he had to solicit sponsorships for the minor publications being written by the OWP. WPA regulations forbade the printing of FWP manuscripts at federal expense because this was considered unfair government competition with private enterprise. Thus, all FWP publications required a sponsor—some organization or local governing body—to pay the cost of printing. Finding a sponsor for OWP material was one of Dunton's hardest responsibilities. Few historical societies, Chambers of Commerce or City Councils were wealthy enough to sponsor OWP publications in 1936-37. Yet Dunton believed this was an important aspect of the Project. “The Washington Office encouraged us to use our ingenuity and develop as much rapport with public officials as we could... we found that this paid off... in publicity, goodwill and cooperation.”

Yet it is questionable whether the Washington office saw the Ohio situation this way. Alsberg wrote Dunton twice in October 1936 concerning the minor publications. On October 22, he wrote:

> While we are gratified by the folders and brochures now being prepared in Ohio, we feel that for the present, work should be concentrated so as to have the principal city guides and the State Guide ready for publication within a few weeks. This will be the "final stamp of approval."

And five days later, Alsberg wrote, "While we consider the publication of local guides of great importance, the State Guide should not be allowed to lag."

Yet there seemed to be no question of Dunton's administrative
abilities or sincerity. In August 1936, at the request of the Ohio WPA state administrator, Dunton's salary was increased from $3200 to $3600 a year, which equaled that of a regional administrator. Also in December 1936, Dunton was requested to assume a quasi-advisory/administrative position in the Indiana Writers Project. Personality clashes on the Indiana staff appeared irreconcilable and it was believed an outside person—from a "neighboring state"—could bring some order to the Indiana Project. For the next six months Dunton made frequent two-to-three-day trips to Indianapolis.

By the spring of 1937, however, the OWP was badly disorganized. The editors in the state office were still inexperienced. Manuscript output for the state guide was way behind the production schedule. In a "progress report" for the entire FWP, Alsberg summarized the Ohio situation:

The State Guide is progressing better. The State Director is a very poor editor and has been unable to get the best writers to work. The State Guide will probably not be out for several months. I believe there will be no trouble about sponsorship, since the State Director is a very good contact man, etc., and the state officials have expressed their interest in the guide.

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Mr. Dunton, State Director, has a great many plans and a big program for books, but his editorial work is very bad, and until that improves we cannot really count on any good books from Ohio ... Dunton has gotten out a great number of small leaflets for various local celebrations ... These are not badly done, but they don't really help our project much, although they give him a great deal of advertising locally.
Then on October 9, 1937, Alsberg telegraphed Clair Laning, FWP regional director for the Midwest, in Chicago. Laning was directed to Columbus immediately. The Ohio WPA administrator, Dr. Carl Watson, recommended the dismissal of Dunton because of "personal trouble." It was a "very serious situation."  

In an interview in 1970 Dunton was vague in discussing his resignation. He said, "I wasn't too satisfied with what we accomplished." He added that he was interested in the upcoming 1938 elections and the gubernatorial campaign of Charles Sawyer. Also the Federal Northwest Territory Sesquicentennial Celebration Committee at Marietta had offered him the position of Advance Representative. He added, "Oh, a few little things happened in Columbus." 

In discussing the reasons for Dunton's resignation, Flechtner offered additional information:

He had only one fault as director of the Writers Project. Every two months or so he would go out on a monumental bender. He would disappear for a week. Nobody could find him. Then he would come back and go to work and be strictly on the water wagon for the next two months.

When asked if Dunton's intemperance was the result of the sheer pressure of directing the OWP, Flechtner added:

Well, could be that too. I don't know what pressures he was subjected to, but I am sure he had them. Since he had to report to a number of people higher up... in Ohio and also... in Washington, D.C.

In no official correspondence is it recorded that over-indulgence was a factor in Dunton's resignation. He resigned
November 15, 1937, and in the same month took the position of Advance Representative for the Federal Northwest Territory Celebration. In 1938, he returned to the Democratic State Headquarters, campaigning for Charles Sawyer. Dunton worked for the Ohio Democratic Party until he re-enlisted in the U. S. Army in 1942. He remained in the service until his retirement in 1961.

On Laning's same trip to Columbus to investigate the situation with Dunton, he was also scouting for a new state director for the OWI. His search led him to the Ohio State University English Department and the office of Professor Harlan H. Hatcher.

C. The Middle Years, 1937-1939.

The second state director, like Dunton, was a native Ohioan. Dr. Hatcher was born in Ironton, Ohio, September 9, 1898. Unlike Dunton though, he served briefly in the military during World War I. After the war he attended Ohio State University, graduating in 1922 with a B.A. Degree in Literature and receiving an M.A. Degree in 1923.

Dr. Hatcher continued his academic career by obtaining a Ph.D. in Literature from the University of Chicago in 1927. He then returned to Ohio State and became an English instructor, then assistant professor and in 1932 a full professor. By the fall of 1937, Dr. Hatcher was a seasoned professor as well as the author of three novels and two books of literary criticism. Well known and respected in the local community, Dr. Hatcher embodied many of
the qualities necessary to enhance the position of OWP state
director.

According to Dr. Hatcher, Laning's offer came as a complete
surprise:

I was sitting in my office in Derby Hall one
afternoon . . . when, unannounced, there walked
in Mr. Clair Laning . . . and after a brief
introduction-discussion said that he had come
specifically to ask me to become state director
. . . and undertake the editing of the copy that
had been collected and was in a . . . first
draft.46

At first Hatcher demurred, claiming he "had other plans"
for his life than directing the OWP.47 However, a second FWP
regional director and close friend of Hatcher's, John T. Frederick,
urged him to accept the position. "I knew of Mr. Hatcher as a
writer," Frederick has written, "and I made a trip to Ohio, and
persuaded him to take the job. He speedily made order out of what
had been chaos.48

Once he accepted the position, Dr. Hatcher plunged into
the rewriting and editing of the state guide, making that the
sole objective of the OWP. Hatcher was not burdened with the
administration of the HRS as Dunton had been. Nor did Hatcher
bother with the administrative details of the OWP. Ronald O.
Sims, a 37-year old former advertising executive, became assistant
state director. His chief function was to handle the OWP adminis-
trative details which freed Dr. Hatcher to devote his full talents
to The Ohio Guide. Also, with a new state director now in charge,
the Washington office advised Dr. Hatcher to stop many small publi-
ocations and concentrate on the state guide. He readily concurred.

Even with these policy and personnel changes, Hatcher later exclaimed, "I labored as hard as I've ever worked in all my born days, administering the Project." The OWP in 1937-38 was at the height of its activity with over 220 people spread throughout the state. Balancing the problems of work for the unemployed with the demands of editing a book confronted Hatcher, just as they had Dunton. And like the first state director, Hatcher believed the OWP was a "relief program first and a literary project second."

By taking a humanitarian approach rather than an artistic one, Hatcher's original plan of working only one year to complete The Ohio Guide proved inadequate. Instead he was there almost two years, giving his full attention to the editing of the state guide. To the state office Hatcher brought several trained editors and supervisors. Flechtner was transferred to the Columbus office in November 1937. Harry Graff, the Cincinnati district supervisor, was brought to Columbus to become state supervisor. Emerson Hansel, supervisor of District #5 and part-time employee of the Federal Northwest Territory Celebration Committee, came to Columbus as district supervisor of District #10. Columbus had both an OWP state office and the Franklin County District #10 office. (See Appendix IV.)

To upgrade the quality of the state editorial office, Hatcher also hired OSU English and journalism graduates to work on The Ohio Guide. As Flechtner recalled the Columbus situation:
And within a certain... budgetary limit, the state director could exercise quite a bit of freedom acquiring personnel. So at times the state editorial staff had quite a sprinkling of college graduates... ten or twelve of them actually... most of them from Ohio State. Anyway they had a pretty good staff.53

Not as quickly as Hatcher had anticipated, but within a year the quality of the OWP manuscripts improved considerably. A report entitled "Status of State Guide Copy," dated September 15, 1938, reveals the following:

ESSAYS: We have only seen 2 since Hatcher was Director. They were very good.

CITIES: Nothing has come in since Hatcher has been Director. He will probably have them redone.

TOURS: Hatcher is rewriting, checking facts, and enlivening the part previously done. 3 tours reviewed from Hatcher which are among the best ever received here.54

Almost three years after its inception, the OWP was developing a cadre of trained editors and writers. A certain number of the OWP personnel, such as Flechtner, perceived the Project as more than just relief, or as something to do until one obtained an "honest job." They began to identify with the Project and view the publication of The Ohio Guide as a worthwhile goal. Centered in the state office, this small group of writers became somewhat professionalized. When asked about how he saw his role on the Project, Flechtner responded:

... the Writers Project was more than a job with me... on and off for over forty years I've been working and I suppose I put in more time at my job on the Writers Project than I ever put on any job I have ever had in private industry. That's because I identified with it... I enjoyed it... I felt I was expressing myself, functioning.55
While the writing and editing expertise of the OWP improved under Dr. Hatcher's directorship, the organizational relationship with the Washington office remained the same. Alsberg and his staff still maintained overall administrative and editorial control. The state Writers Projects looked to Washington for direction. All copy leaving the OWP went first to the regional office in Chicago and then to the Washington office. Final approval rested in Washington. This led to charges of censorship.

Writing in the Saturday Review of Literature, Blair Bolles of the Washington Star claimed that "at the suggestion of Harry Hopkins she Ellen S. Woodward, assistant WPA administrator for Federal Project No. One keeps an editorial assistant in the FWP's Washington office closely watching manuscripts for signs of politically dangerous remarks." Former Minnesota state director Mabel S. Ulrich publicly claimed that the Washington office rewrote much of the state submitted material, implying that this was a form of censorship. Writing for The Nation in December 1938, Jared Putnam described the task of the "special policy editor." He was to review "all copy and remove all material deemed impolitic and offensive."

Unlike other state directors, Dr. Hatcher recalled that the relationship with Alsberg and the Washington office was excellent.

Alsberg himself was ... top flight person, who had a wonderful grasp, both of the artistic, technical aspect ... and the relief goal of it ... There was never any friction of any kind. It was the most delightful experience ... the relationship with these people was a high, professional, human relationship.
Whether his opinion was shared by other OWP personnel is
doubtful. Flechtner and Hansel, who also worked in Columbus, were
more critical of the Washington office. Regardless of the possible
friction and censure, however, Dr. Hatcher was able to send a
completed, publishable manuscript of The Ohio Guide to Washington
in the fall of 1939.

Dr. Hatcher believed his task for the OWP was finished when
the complete Ohio Guide manuscript was sent to Washington.
Although the Guide was not published for another thirteen months,'
Dr. Hatcher resigned from the OWP September 28, 1939 and began
teaching that fall quarter at Ohio State University. Except for
a two-year interruption of military service in the U.S. Navy (1942-44),
Dr. Hatcher continued a long and distinguished academic career. He
remained at Ohio State until 1951, serving as professor, Dean of
the Arts & Science College (1944-48) and finally vice president
(1948-51). From 1951 until 1967 Dr. Hatcher was president of the
University of Michigan. He is now retired and living in Ann Arbor.

Replacing Dr. Hatcher as state director of the OWP was Harry
Graff, formerly the state supervisor. A graduate of the Univer-
sity of Cincinnati (B.A. and M.A.), Graff began working for the
OWP in 1936. Dr. Hatcher brought him to Columbus in 1937 as the
state supervisor to "develop and edit manuscripts and also nego-
tiate with local groups for sponsorships and with publishers and
printers for publishing the books and pamphlets."59 Graff was
state director for the next three years of the OWP. In these
years the OWP enjoyed its greatest editorial freedom and published
more works than any other time: yet its very existence was open to serious question.

D. The Last Years, 1939-1943.

In the Reorganization Act of 1939, the WPA and several other federal agencies were consolidated into the Federal Works Administration. John M. Carmody was appointed administrator, and the "P" of WPA now stood for "Projects" rather than "Progress." Although this did not affect the operation of Federal One, the WPA appropriations act for fiscal year 1940 ended the WPA Four Arts Project as a federal program: No project was to be sponsored solely by the WPA. The act also abolished the Federal Theater Project. The FWP, like the three remaining projects could remain if a minimum of 25 percent of their funds came from local and state sources.

Bureaucratic and funding changes were not the only ones affecting the WPA Four Arts program in 1939. There were also personnel changes. Alsberg, like other liberal art project administrators, came under attack from an increasingly reactionary Congress. Congressman Martin L. Dies of Texas conducted special hearings, charging that the FWP and especially the Federal Theater Project were subverting American morals, institutions and economic practices. Alsberg as well as three other national directors resigned in 1939. Replacing Alsberg was Henry G. Newsom, the former Director of the Michigan Writers Project.
Newsom was praised by the press as a tough, no nonsense administrator who would make the FWP run efficiently. "This is a production unit, and its work that counts," he told a *Time* reporter. "I've never been for art for art's sake alone." Newson saw his primary objective as the completion of the American Guide Series. As McDonald succinctly phrased it, "After 1939, therefore, the emphasis of the FWP was not upon innovation, but upon consummation."

In Ohio, however, the effects of the national changes were not immediately apparent. There was a name change from Writers' "Project" to Writers' "Program" in accordance with national policy, but no change in structure or emphasis. "I don't recall any real serious disruption that occurred at that time," Hansel remembered. The editorial aspect also remained the same. Flechtner recalled that they were "still doing the same kind of work . . . that . . . had been done in the past."

The Washington emphasis on production and returning national prosperity are apparent when one analyzes the OWP publications of 1940 and 1941. In those 24 months more publications were finished than in any other two-year period. Thirty different publications, including *The Ohio Guide*, special interest books and pamphlets and a quarterly magazine (*The Notice*) were written, sponsored and published. Unlike the 1937-38 gush of publications which averaged 33 pages, the 1940-41 publications (excluding *The Ohio Guide*) averaged 75 pages. (See Appendices I and II.)
Many of these publications had been completed for some time, but because of the Depression, lacked a sponsor. Few government or civic bodies could afford to defray printing costs for a guide to their city or county. With the gradual return of prosperity, however, more money was available for these ventures. Emphasis on production by the Washington office and the increasing prosperity made it possible for more OWP manuscripts to be published.

Perhaps even more indicative of the return of "good times" was the change in subject. Only eight of the thirty 1940-41 series were city or county guides. An equal number were devoted to describing parks, zoos, recreation and vacation areas in Ohio. By contrast, in the 1937-38 period only one similar publication, an Ohio camp directory, was sponsored and published. Increasing prosperity and greater mobility allowed Ohioans to take advantage of recreation and vacation facilities throughout the state. Thus, the OWP seemed to be fulfilling one of its original function—describing local attractions so that the business interests would benefit from the increased tourist trade.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, however, there was a sudden change. On December 12, 1941, Director Newsom wrote that the Writers' Program could be of "immediate assistance in the present war emergency." The Program was to play a supporting role by informing and explaining national policies to local communities. Concurrently the Program was to provide information about "grass roots" conditions to Washington. By early 1942, Washington ordered that all county histories and local guides be
curtailed and all publications of a non-defense character already
written finished as quickly as possible. Although the state
Writers Programs were editorially autonomous, they were still under
the state WPA directors. Washington policies were still binding
on the individual states. For the Ohio Writers Program this meant
scrapping 23 writing projects. Included in these projects were
guides to counties, zoos and parks, a play about Marcus A. Hanna,
two ethnic studies (Negro and Polish) and two military histories.
(See Appendix III.)

It is not clear, however, how successfully the OWP functioned
as an information gathering and disseminating body during the
early war years. According to Emerson Hansel, there was an atmos-
phere of suspicion between New Deal and wartime federal agencies.
Protecting one's organization and area of authority was more common
than cooperation between old and new agencies. 69

Yet there seems to have been many personnel crossovers
from the OWP to wartime government agencies. Hansel himself left
the OWP in 1942 to join the Columbus Office of Price Administration
for the duration of the war. Graff, the next to last OWP state
director, also left in 1942 for the Office of Civilian Defense
as an Assistant Regional Director for Information. Ronald D.
Sims, assistant state director under Dr. Hatcher and the last
state director, went to work at the Columbus General Depot writing
instructional and training manuals. 70 Flechtner, one of the last
to leave the OWP, went to work at the newly constructed Curtis-Wright
aircraft plant in the spring of 1943. 71 He remained there as a
material control supervisor until 1945.
One by one the writers and administrators left the OWP for defense plants, wartime government agencies and, for the younger men, the armed services. The final publication of the OWP was Cincinnati: A Guide to the Queen City and its Neighbors, printed in May 1943. In the Preface, Graff wrote-

This book . . . is the last big volume of the American Guide Series and this preface is being written as State Writers' Projects are folding up all over the country under the command of war and shortage of manpower in essential industries.\text{sic}\]

By the time these words were being read by Cincinnatians, Graff was a U.S. Navy Officer.

Thus, the OWP, a child of a national calamity, was a fatality of an international disaster. Useful as a work relief measure, the OWP proved ineffective as a wartime agency. Its main function of providing work was not needed due to the wartime economy and its function as the "public writer of the State of Ohio" appeared irrelevant during the war years.

But what of its second and less obvious purpose, that of rediscovery? Answering that question leads to a discussion of the OWP's largest publication effort: The Ohio Guide.

E. The Ohio Guide.

In 1904 Karl Baedeker completed his Guide to the United States. This famous European tour book writer, whose name was synonymous with travel books, never wrote a second edition. Thirty-two years later the FWP continued this effort of a national tour book with the American Guide Series. Alsberg conceived the series as five regional
guides encompassing the entire United States. The regional conception, however, proved unworkable for two reasons. A state office proved to be a better administrative unit than a region. (The WPA bureaucracy was already an on-going body structured along state lines.) Also, Cronyn, the assistant national director, argued that except for New England and perhaps the Old South, other regions of the United States represented more diverse than common characteristics. After several months he convinced Alsberg of this. The regional concept was abandoned in favor of a state guide plan. 75

The state guide, however, was to be more than a tour book. It was to be a multi-purpose volume that would serve the traveler as well as the student, the light reader as well as the researcher. This was to be America's first attempt at a publicly sponsored self-portrait.

The immediate precedent for the state guide was the aforementioned Connecticut Guide, written by unemployed writers under the FERA in 1934-35. That project demonstrated that writers on relief could be utilized for a common effort that would be beneficial to the community. In other words, a work relief program for writers producing non-fiction publications was feasible. The Connecticut venture was also popular with the reading public.

The Connecticut book provided the basic format for all the state guide volumes. The state guide was divided into three parts: essays, city descriptions and tours. Each required a different kind of research and writing skill. The Ohio Guide follows this
three-part pattern but differs in one sense. In the city treatment section, the cities were chosen "not for their size alone, but because they are representative of the wide diversity of the state." Nineteen cities are described in detail in this section. This includes the industrial cities of Cincinnati, Cleveland, Akron, Lorain, Canton, Youngstown, and Toledo; the older, pioneer towns of Chillicothe, Marietta, Steubenville and Zanesville; the semi-agrarian towns of Columbus, Mansfield, Oxford, Sandusky and Springfield; and other diverse cities and towns such as Dayton, Hamilton and Newark. All treatments include travel information, points of interest and historical background. For the larger cities there is a street map. City descriptions are brief and concise with the length of the treatment determined by the size of the city.

Part III of the Guide is the Tours. Thirty-one separate road tours which criss-cross Ohio are described at length. Included in the "road" tours are side excursions to Kelley's Island and Put-In-Bay in Lake Erie and Blennerhassett Island on the Ohio River. Also in the Tour Section is an excellent photographic essay of small-town life in Ohio. Artist/photographer Ben Shahn made this "portrait" while working for the Farm Security Administration. When asked how this photo essay happened to be included in The Ohio Guide, both Dr. Hatcher and Flechtner said the Washington office was responsible for its inclusion.

Although Part I is titled "General Background," it is actually the history of Ohio. Not the narrow political definition of history, (there is one sub-section headed "History") but the
broad definition of history: the economy, people and ethnic
groups, religion, education, architecture and culture. Beginning
with the geography of Ohio (the "Natural Setting" essay) and ending
with the history of the theater in Ohio, the essays offer a broad,
superficial portrait of the state. There are sixteen essays,
b brief but well researched. Taken separately they do not give
much of a picture of Ohio, but all together the 166 pages of essays
offer the reader a well defined portrait of Ohio... as it was
in the late 1930's.

It is not the purpose of this study of the OWP to criticize
extensively The Ohio Guide or any other Project publication.
Instead, it is hoped that a better understanding of the OWP can
be gained from discussing how the Guide was seen at the time by
book reviewers, OWP writers and supervisors. Also, as Section II
of this study will illustrate, it will be beneficial to know how
the Guide is seen now by former OWP workers after thirty years.

The published guides and books of the OWP will only be
mentioned when they are important in putting the OWP in an his-
torical context. They will not be discussed extensively.

The Guide was reviewed by one national newspaper, The
Christian Science Monitor. The reviewer said little about the
usefulness of the guide, except that it was a "fact book." He
was critical of the New Deal orientation of the writing, criticizing
the statement that government spending "brought good times again."
The reviewer appeared to be more sensitive to the political impli-
cations of The Ohio Guide than to its merit as a tour book.
Ironically, the most critical review came from the pen of a man closely connected to the HRS. William D. Overman, HRS technical supervisor in Ohio, reviewed The Ohio Guide in the Ohio Archaeological & Historical Society Quarterly. He claimed the "most valuable section was the tours" and said the Guide would be useful for the motoring tourist. But as a scholarly work with reference value, it failed because of the factual errors—"too many to be tabulated in this review." Overman cited misspelled names, incorrect dates, erroneous attribution and a faulty index as examples. A more serious error, he wrote, was the poor coordination between architectural styles discussed in the Architecture essay of Part I and their absence in the Tours (Part III). "About a dozen" examples were not mentioned in the various tours where the examples existed. Ohio readers deserve to see as well as read about their architecture, Overman exclaimed.


Oxford Press was not alone in its belief that more editions of a state guide might prove profitable. In 1949, Hastings House published a one volume tome entitled The American Guide, edited by Alsberg. It was a summary of all fifty "state" guides. According to one historian, this book "exaggerated the flaws of the 1930's state guides." These flaws, he wrote, were a lack of interpretation of the compiled data, wooden prose and unimaginative treatment.
The latter was especially true of many Midwest and Mid-Atlantic states where projects were "handicapped by inexperienced staffs."82

Appearing in the same issue of the Quarterly, was a review of another work about Ohio by the former OWP state director, Dr. Harlan Hatcher. The reviewer admitted that "some eyebrows were raised" when it was known that Hatcher's book, The Buckeye Country and The Ohio Guide were published in the same month.84 However, the reviewer wrote, these books do not compete but complement each other. The Buckeye Country "might be thought of, in a sense, as the soul that had been left out of an assembly belt book like the Guide. It is a book of stories not of statistics."85

This reviewer, like so many who criticized the Guides, attacked a commonly perceived flaw of the Guides: the wooden, flat prose. Adjectives like "assembly belt," "cooperative writing" are used to describe this style. In its conception by Alsberg the writing was to be a collective rather than an individual effort. It was to be a collaborative effort of many hands and minds to achieve the best possible essay or tour. "From the first field notes to the final copy, there was a steady process of criticism, revision, and rewriting, involving copyreading . . . cutting . . . and improving the style . . . to conform to the character of the subject."86 Alsberg's plan, however, failed to consider regional variations, the uneven spread of writing talent and the individuality of many professional writers and newspapermen. Bureaucratized literature was alien to America's perception of a writer as an individual. When work relief for writers was first raised in 1934,
the Washington office of the FERA was inclined to give writers a direct relief—this would give them "a subsistence . . . and plenty of time to do their writing." 87 Alsberg and the FWP administrators had a different plan, that of collaboration, and they made it part of the FWP's national policy. How this was perceived and accommodated by the writers and supervisors of the OWP is discussed at length in Part II.

Before passing on, it should be noted how OWP writers and supervisors reacted to the publishing of The Ohio Guide. Ironically, it generally did not have any significant meaning for them. They could not recall any sense of accomplishment. When Dr. Hatcher, the chief architect of the Guide, was asked if there were any public reaction to The Ohio Guide, he recalled, "I don't remember the comments on it; in fact, I guess I didn't pay much attention to them." 88

Emerson Hansel, the Columbus District Supervisor in 1940, said there was no excitement in the office when the Guide was published and reviewed. He added that the book was "poorly promoted—needed much more publicity."

James G. Dunton, the first state director, was working for the Democratic Party's 1940 campaign when the Guide was published. He was not sure that he had ever read the Guide completely. He recalled that it was out of date when published. When asked if it were useful as a tour book, he responded, "I don't know." 90

Another OWP writer who was still with the Project in 1940 was Flechtner. His writing contribution to the Guide over the
years was considerable. When asked what he felt when the Guide was published, he answered:

Well, I had some feeling of accomplishment in that . . . my handwork was there . . . here and there throughout the Guide . . . 81

Flechtner went to say that the feeling was shared by the professionals (his emphasis) on the staff. Yet, Flechtner compared The Ohio Guide to a guide of Cape Cod written by one Massachusetts Writers Project worker, 92 Josef Berger. He said Berger’s book was superior to the collaborative writing. "It was the kind of work involved where . . . one man did all the writing . . . it bears the imprint of the author’s sensibility, much more completely than a collective effort ever could get." 93

Given the parameters of the Ohio Writers Project—the need for massive research, employing over 200 people in all parts of the state and continuous flow of copy from desk to desk and office to office, it is not surprising that the writers and supervisors felt very little sense of accomplishment when the Guide was published. It was hard to feel proud of a work that so many people over five years had researched, written and edited. How the Guide was received by the writers themselves is perhaps indicative of how they perceived the whole OWP and what it meant to them.

Part II of this study is an attempt to answer these questions of perception. In doing so, it is necessary to describe as accurately as possible from the interviews and data a picture of how the participants saw themselves in relation to the OWP and to their world. How their work in the OWP was seen by them; what part it
played in their conceptual framework; how they perceived their situation and responded to it.

Following this "actors' portrait," will be an objective view of the OWP from the historical perspective of thirty years.
II. A PORTRAIT OF THE OHIO WRITERS PROJECT

A. Participants.

The description of the organizational history of the OWP fails to portray the most important component of the Project - the writers themselves. After all, it was individuals - the researchers, clerk, writers, editors and supervisors - whose collective endeavors to research, write and solicit guide sponsorships made the OWP a productive unit. The participants' view of the OWP was much different from that of the chronicler. Now that the larger, seven-year history has been blocked out, it is necessary to color in the day to day activities of the actors. To do this we begin with a description of how the participants viewed the Project.

An essential distinction must be made between the "relief" and "non-relief" workers on the OWP. Non-relief workers were hired directly by the state director. The former and by far the majority were unemployed and already on WPA relief rolls and had expressed an interest to work for the OWP. Since the entire FWP was created to give employment to unemployed white collar workers, their perspective will be treated first. The non-relief workers will be described later.

Once a WPA relief worker was made available for the OWP, he
was interviewed personally by the local OWF supervisor. Generally, an attempt was made to employ the worker in the Project office closest to his community. Not only was this convenient for the employee, but it also allowed the OWF to utilize his knowledge of the area for the projected local guide or history. During the interview the supervisor ascertained the applicant's background, writing and research experience and educational attainment. Very few of the applicants were writers. Some were former newspapermen or had acquired some sort of literary training in advertising, librarianship, or non-technical research. A great many more were former school teachers, salesmen, business executives or some other occupation that relief officials considered a "white collar" position.

By the time these people faced an OWF supervisor in a dingy Project office, they were in a desperate situation. They had probably been out of work for a year or more; often they had handicaps or weaknesses that kept them from steady employment. Incompetence, alcoholism, laziness or other human failing, which had been tolerated during more prosperous years, cost them their jobs during the grim Depression years. The economic jolts of the 1930's exacerbated these weaknesses and left them without steady work. Turning to the WPA relief office was the final realization that they could not compete and would have to accept government aid. For many this caused severe emotional strain.

Unlike the music, art and theater projects, it was difficult to distinguish a writer from a non-writer. It is hard to fake musical ability or pretend to paint a mural, but many literate persons can
pass as a researcher or writer. Also, when it came to the final decision, the Ohio supervisors usually placed need above ability. The OWP was primarily a relief effort, not a writing project. Once accepted, the applicant was assigned to a distinct function in the local office, depending on his or her talents.

Those with little or no writing experience were assigned to research staffs. They reported every morning to the local office, checked with the all important timekeeper and received a field assignment for the day. The assignment varied from poring over dusty books and crumbling documents in the local county courthouse or library to traveling the bumpy country roads compiling mileage charts and field notes. At the end of each day the researchers returned to the local office, gave their field notes to various editors and checked again with the timekeeper before going home. Every month they received a "security wage" of $87.00 or more, depending on how many people they were supporting.

Those who had some writing or editorial experience or who had worked as a researcher for several months held editorial positions. They were assigned as tour editors, city treatment editors or some other specific area depending on the characteristics of the district. The larger offices, Cleveland, Cincinnati and Columbus, divided these editorial functions into even smaller units. The editors would receive pages and pages of field notes, related newspaper clippings, photographs and information from county libraries and local historical societies. It was their task to make some sense out of this conglomeration and write a first draft. This draft
traveled across many desks and underwent numerous revisions as it was passed from local editor to local supervisor, on to the state office editor and finally to the state director. At any one point it might be returned with a request for more information or suggestions for serious and more detailed editing. The editorial burden was generally heavy and the more dedicated editors, such as Flechtner, often returned to their desks late in the evenings or on Saturday mornings. Because of their experience, the editors were classified above the researchers and paid a few dollars more per week.

Besides the supervisory personnel and the timekeeper, the only other workers in the local offices were the secretaries, typists and file clerks. They too came from the relief rolls, often from a WPA secretarial pool.

Except for a few dedicated writers, the average worker saw the OWP as a temporary expedient. The work demanded little and it provided enough money to eke out an existence for them and their families. Because they were "working for the government," many did not believe it was necessary to do their best, whether it be writing or research. Even though an employee might be removed from the OWP to a different WPA project, he was rarely discharged for incompetence or slackness. As long as the researcher checked with the timekeeper and the editor produced literate copy, their positions were safe.

Yet this by no means gave them a sense of security. There was always the fear that Congress would fail to appropriate funds
for the WPA or that budget cuts would mean a reduction in the security wage. Writers and editors in small Project offices, such as Newark, Zanesville and Sandusky, were particularly vulnerable. As the field research for The Ohio Guide ended in 1938 and 1939, these smaller offices were shut down and the employees transferred to other WPA projects. If there were no openings, however, the workers were put back on the relief rolls. This caused economic hardship as well as severe emotional strain.

In the larger cities (Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati), the OWP workers could safely assume that the offices would not close. Yet there were other fears. First, there was more serious competition for OWP positions. Unemployment was higher in the urban areas; thus, the struggle for WPA jobs was keener. Office supervisors and timekeepers had greater authority over the workers and often exploited this power. An unsympathetic timekeeper who was supported by the office supervisor, could cost a writer or researcher valuable hours in disputes over tardiness or slacking.

A second problem in the larger offices, which was often a result of dictatorial supervisors, was pressure to join the Workers Alliance of America. This was a loose national organization of scattered WPA employee unions. It attempted to organize local WPA art projects workers. The WA of A was stronger in New York and Chicago than in the Midwest. At one time, however, it organized a local in the Cleveland office of the OWP. Dr. Hatcher, state director, was so appalled by such action that he personally went to Cleveland to settle the dispute.
"I can still recall the difficulty I had in adjusting to the statement from the leader that they had been on the payroll for eighteen months or more and they felt they were due for a raise in pay..."94

Organizers for the WA of A came to Columbus but were unable to interest the Columbus OWP staff in organizing a local. The WA of A did organize other government employees in Franklin County, especially among the National Youth Administration employees.95

The most serious problem of the OWP workers was their desperate financial situation. They were middle-class, professional or semi-professional workers who had never experienced unemployment before the Depression. All their lives they had worked hard, stayed in school, saved their money—yet they still found themselves out of work. In spite of the white collar designation, accepting WPA relief work was a bitter experience. For some "going on relief" became a crushing psychological burden which they could not bear.

As Dr. Hatcher described it:

... people who had no food, couldn't even afford a toothbrush and toothpaste... who wondered where... how they were even going to make it... some of them broke down... people who simply couldn't stand the strain and actually broke down. One or two of them went right into mental hospitals right out of the office there on South High Street..."96

A former Columbus District Supervisor related that one evening after work a researcher came up and said this was the last time he would be seen. When the supervisor smiled and asked, "Oh, you have a job?" the researcher replied to the contrary. "We got in this conversation," the supervisor continued, "tears started to
come—he was going to blow his brains out and he let me know it." 

However, suicide and mental problems were not common; more often OWP workers turned to the bottle as an escape from the mental strain and economic burdens. Alcohol and newspapermen are often linked together in the public mind, and it would have been hard for an organization which employed former newspapermen to escape such an identification.

It is interesting to note that the novel, *You Get What You Ask For*, which used the FWP as its setting, describes an alcoholic's attempt at self-rehabilitation. Gordon Graham, the protagonist, is a writer for the New York City Project, who slowly comes to realize that his excessive drinking is costing him not only his girl and family but also his health. Ironically, it is only when he quits the Project and finds another writing position that he is able to control his terrible drinking habit.

The identification of the OWP employees with alcoholism can be over extended, however. Many workers had neither the time nor the money for liquor. After a day's work they would not be in a bar but in the local library scrutinizing the classified section of the local newspaper for employment possibilities. There was a tremendous drive on the part of many to acquire an "honest job" and leave the OWP.

Supervisors and timekeepers were generally sympathetic to this desire. Supervisors scheduled research assignments to benefit the researchers going for job interviews. Timekeepers overlooked a writer's tardiness if he knew the writer was investigating employment opportunities.
Seeking steady work was consistently promoted and encouraged in the OWP; whereas in New York, Chicago and other cultural centers literary expression was encouraged. Members of the OWP never contributed to the FWP collection of short stories and poetry. The OWP never published its own collection of creative work as many state projects did. Of course, this was partly due to the lack of literary talent, but mostly it was due to the emphasis given to seeking steady, secure private employment. "We were all middle of the road people," one district supervisor recalled, "that figured, by God, maybe tomorrow I'll get a job!" 99

Generally, the workers eventually accomplished their primary goal. They found steady jobs . . . and left their research materials, field notes, cluttered desks and "disorganized" filing cabinets. Often there was no one to relieve the fortunate worker who had secured a real job. The position was not filled until later, and when it was, the person was inexperienced or untrained. This resulted in delays, many mistakes, and a general waste of time and effort.

The average time a worker was with the OWP was a year to eighteen months. Often they left when they had just become useful to the Project and were producing or editing good material. For Dr. Hatcher this was especially frustrating:

... I would be training ... a person to the point where he was a first-class editor of the specialized copy that had to go into the Guide, and then, fortunately at the same time, he might get a job. So the turnover was high, but it was very gratifying in one respect ... "100
There were a few dedicated workers, usually non-relief personnel who remained with the CWP for several years or more. Often these men were supervisors of the various districts in Ohio. They were not taken from the WPA relief rolls but hired directly by the CWP state director for their administrative skill or—during Dr. Hatcher’s years—for their writing talent.101

Before the non-relief supervisors were officially employed, they came to Columbus for an interview with the state director. (Dunton, the first state director, hired most of these supervisory personnel.) If acceptable to the director, they were assigned a district (encompassing a certain number of counties) and given the names of prominent members of the community to contact for assistance.

It was the district supervisor’s first responsibility to obtain an office for his staff... rent free, if possible. Then he had to acquire office furniture and supplies. This was often supplied by local bankers, newspaper editors or businessmen.

Once this was done, the supervisor could select local, qualified people from the WPA relief rolls to staff the local Project office. At the same time the supervisor was establishing local contact with businessmen, government officials, civic groups, historians and antiquarians. All of these people or groups could help, offering local historical lore, providing assistance (such as transportation), or, most important, sponsoring the publication of a local guide.
The supervisor was also responsible for the payroll, paperwork and the final editing of all copy before it was sent to the state office in Columbus.

In the urban areas of Cincinnati, Cleveland, Toledo and Columbus, the supervisor had one or more assistants. The best arrangement was for one person to be responsible for the editorial function and the other to look after the administrative and personnel details. This "partnership" was achieved after much trial and error, and throughout the seven years the arrangement was subject to transfers, resignations and the general consolidation of OWP districts.

Somewhat distinct from the dedicated supervisors was a small group of editors who staffed the state OWP office in Columbus. (Columbus had both a district office and the state office. They were moved about the downtown area frequently, depending on the availability of office space. Over the years a sharp rivalry developed between the district writers and the state editors.) During the seven years of the OWP these writers, especially Flechtner, became experienced, knowledgeable professionals in their specific writing area. Unlike other talented writers and editors, they did not leave the OWP at the first job opportunity. They remained in the state office, working for the various state directors, Dr. Hatcher, Graff and finally Sims. A sense of comradeship developed that extended to evenings and weekends. Flechtner recounted this camaraderie:
When I was here in Columbus, four or five or six of us all lived downtown, rented rooms, down on High Street, usually within walking distance of the office. Since we were altogether in lodgings, we almost always went out together for dinner in the evening, a little socializing.

These writers identified with their work and put in far more than the required forty hours per week. Flechtner recalled that the day was not necessarily over at five o'clock. There were always manuscripts and supplementary material to read. It was important to secure more information about certain topics so that a better essay could be written. This kind of work was often taken home by these writers.

Slowly, however, even these dedicated workers left the OWP for private employment or other government agencies. After Pearl Harbor, it was only a matter of time before the last of the OWP workers left the Columbus office and the Project was disbanded. In one instance this sense of responsibility remained even after the OWP folded in the winter of 1942. Several months after Flechtner began working at the Curtis-Wright aircraft plant, he was still reading the last of the galley proofs for the Cincinnati guide.

A serious weakness attributed to the FWP is that communists and other left-wing groups infiltrated various state projects. Once in positions of influence they were able to exploit the Project for propaganda purposes. The original objectives of the FWP became perverted and the doctrine of Marx, Lenin and other communists were written into the state guides—at taxpayers expense! There is some validity to the belief that members of the Communist
Party or fellow travelers obtained leadership positions in New York and Chicago. In New York, Orrick Johns, a Party member, was director of the New York City Writers Project for about ten months.\textsuperscript{103} In Chicago, "proletarian writers" like Nelson Algren and Jack Conroy wrote for the Project. Negro writer and Party member Richard Wright also wrote for the Chicago project. Yet there was hardly the massive propaganda campaign that conservative congressmen charged. However, there was enough "evidence" to give Congressman Martin L. Dies a reason to conduct a special investigation in 1938 and 1939. This, of course, was faithfully reported by the Ohio newspapers, especially the Republican press, such as the Columbus Dispatch.

How did this affect OWP workers? Former employees generally responded that it had no effect whatsoever. New York and Chicago Projects were staffed with a completely different kind of people. Workers on the OWP in Columbus and other towns were "middle of the road people" who felt no identification with the writers in the urban centers. "Reading about the charges of Communist and propaganda in New York did not bother me a bit," Hansel said, "that was not here, not in Columbus.\textsuperscript{104} Flechtner corroborated Hansel:

\textit{We didn't have enough political passion here, in Columbus, at least... Big cities like New York and Chicago, the Writers Projects... they were altogether a different animal than what we had here in Ohio.}\textsuperscript{105}

Even in Cleveland, where Flechtner had known Party members, he doubted if there were many Party members working for the OWP... and their influence was non-existent.
Generally, the average OWP worker was apolitical. If he were politically conscious, it was a deep faith in President Roosevelt and a belief he would get the country out of the Depression. "There was a bedrock optimism then," Hansel concluded. 106

Just as the OWP workers were not perturbed by charges of communist propaganda, neither were they excited by the possibility of a permanent FWP. Liberal congressmen, backers of the Coffee Bill (to establish a Department of the Arts) and writers for the New Republic and Saturday Review of Literature frequently promoted a permanent government subsidization of artists. Ohio Project workers took no interest in this movement. They perceived the OWP as a temporary relief expedient, which should be disbanded after the Depression crises of unemployment had passed. The OWP was consistently viewed as a temporary work relief agency for the professional or non-manual worker throughout its seven-year existence.

What is the final portrait of OWP workers?

They were white (only a few Negroes "qualified"), Ohioans who had held some sort of professional or semi-professional position but were presently unemployed and had been for some time. Often they lost their job due to a physical weakness or handicap which rendered them unable to compete in the shrinking employment market. For some, going on the WPA relief rolls stripped away the last vestige of pride and self-respect. A few went mad. Most, however, adjusted to the psychological shock of welfare and did everything possible to find a steady, secure job. Few workers were
really writers but most of them were literate and - more important -
able to learn the techniques and skills necessary for writing a
state guide. Even fewer workers had any artistic inclination.
Besides, such potential was not encouraged. State directors and
supervisors emphasized finding gainful employment for all those on
relief.

Events which developed on the New York Writers Project or
in Washington had little effect on the OWP workers. They were
neither politically inclined or dedicated to a permanent Writers
Project. The majority of workers remained with the OWP to secure
financial relief and then left as soon as a better opportunity
appeared. They turned from their desks, typewriters and research
books without regrets and did not look back.

Now, though, it is necessary for the observer to look back
at the OWP, its relief efforts and published works, and evaluate
its contribution to American society.

B. Observer.

Looking at the results of the Ohio Writers Project from a
perspective of almost thirty years tends to minimize its achieve-
ments. As a relief agency, it probably aided no more than three
thousand unemployed Ohioans. The OWP publications have little
practical use now. The state and local guides are obsolete. The
pamphlets and special interest books describing parks, zoos and
campgrounds are useless as tourist information. No worker for
the OWP ever achieved a significant reputation as a writer. The
FWP's goal of developing and sustaining literary talent was a total failure in Ohio. Some workers returned to newspaper or advertising positions, but none achieved any artistic distinction.107

The OWP achievements appear rather insignificant when compared to the massive WPA construction programs or the talented Project writers of New York, Chicago and San Francisco. Perhaps this is an unfair comparison. Instead, let us look at what the OWP did for the men and women who staffed the local offices.

Essentially the OWP provided work relief without the stigma of being "on relief." It provided a subsistence income as well as placating the middle-class anxiety of not being an individual. The fact that an OWP worker could not get an "honest job" and was existing at public expense was consistently de-emphasized. The workers were able to maintain a minimum standard of living as well as keep their self-respect. (It would be very difficult to decide which was more important.)

The OWP director and supervisors went to great length to maintain this aura of respectability. Dr. Hatcher frequently emphasized the productivity of the OWP. The relief problem, as he envisioned it, was how "to find an occupation for them [the unemployed], which would enable them to be . . . productive and not solely on relief in the sense of a handout."108

For district supervisors, such as Hansel, the problem was even more sensitive. There was often an underlying tension between relief employees and the exempted non-relief employees, who received more money. "We [the non-relief workers] rarely spoke of any
acquisitions we made. At that time all non-essential consumption looked conspicuous to those who had less.

What the relief worker did not realize, however, was that, except for the first couple of years of basic research, he was not a productive unit. His efforts were not essential to the completion of the state guide. After 1938, especially after 1939, there was a small core of dedicated, trained writers who could write publishable manuscripts with little help from other less experienced writers and researchers. Those who came to the OWP late in the 1930's or early 1940's contributed very little to the project. The OWP could have functioned quite well without them as the basic research for the state guide was completed. The smaller city and county guides (except for the mammoth Cincinnati guide) did not require large research staffs. Small, trained editorial staffs could research and write a better guide than large, unwieldy groups of researchers. The reason why the OWP did not decrease its total number of workers in the latter years is due to the peculiar nature of bureaucracy.

Although the OWP state director consolidated the districts in 1937 and 1938, he maintained the larger offices in Cleveland, Toledo, Cincinnati and Columbus. These four centers, along with several sub-offices, were able to entrench themselves in the state WPA bureaucracy. The OWP state organization remained separate from the WPA state structure, but it depended on the latter for payroll, applicants and overall direction. The editorial function was separate, but the OWP depended on the WPA state director,
Dr. Carl Watson, and Professional and Services Division Director, Mildred Thrasher, for administrative services. State WPA officials had a vested interest in keeping all its relief agencies open. It would have been terribly difficult for the OWP state director to refuse applicants from the WPA relief rolls by saying that the Project could function without more workers. After all, from 1935 on, the OWP officials stated that the Project was a relief agency first and a literary project second! Thus, the OWP personnel level remained the same after the need for so many people declined.

A partial solution to the problem of too many workers was the development of city and county guides and specialized publications. Dr. Hatcher described the problem of utilizing a large staff after the material for the state guide had been collected. "While we were in the process of refining and getting ready for press . . . we had this large staff, you see, so we turned to more localized projects and produced books on Cincinnati, Cleveland . . . ."

Thus, the OWP like many relief agencies, became self-perpetuating rather than self-eliminating.

At the same time the OWP was creating work relief projects for its over-staffed district offices, Congress and WPA national administrators were unintentionally increasing the mental anxiety of many OWP workers. Both President Roosevelt and his WPA administrators abhorred the idea of a large, permanent group of Americans existing on federal funds. To discourage any feelings of complacency about the security of WPA relief work, no long-range planning was
formulated. Instead a sense of instability was instituted to encourage relief recipients to find more permanent, secure employment.

For instance, workers were never certain how long the WPA would exist. Often the federal projects operated on a six to twelve month basis. Then every year there was the inevitable congressional dispute over funding the WPA for another fiscal year. This constant feeling of instability did compel many to look constantly for work. Supervisors and timekeepers, as previously mentioned, were highly sympathetic to such activity.

Ultimately this systematic uncertainty proved counterproductive. OWI workers met failure after failure in their attempts to secure employment. Their "security wage" grew in importance as employment opportunities declined. In late 1937, an economic recession jolted the already fragile job market. At the same time President Roosevelt was attempting to cut the number of Americans on the WPA projects. For the OWI worker each government check brought a monetary sense of relief, but also the inevitable question: how long will it last? The result was a severe mental strain, often manifested by alcoholism, sometimes by insanity or suicidal tendencies. None of this was conducive to doing thorough research or writing publishable manuscripts.

Thus, it could be said that what the government gave with one hand it took away with the other. The OWI did provide a livable wage. It had an image of middle-class respectability and de-emphasized the stigma of government relief. Yet in the most
crucial aspect, that of providing a sense of security, the OWP failed. The realities of politics and the unstable policies of the WPA administrators increased the tensions and mental strain of the OWP workers. It is only now, as a younger generation of Americans provides a distinct contrast to those who endured the 1930's, that it is possible to observe this conjunctive result of WPA policies. The incessant drive for security and predictability by middle-aged Americans is in sharp contrast to the less futuristic orientation of their children.

It is only now, from this 30-year vantage point, that two other aspects of the OWP can be observed differently than the participants saw them. One is the policy of community participation, which was discussed in Part I (pp. 16-18). The second is The Ohio Guide which is useless in its intended form, but is a valuable historical document.

Participation by the local community was a consistent policy of the FWP. The American Guide Manual emphasized this for practical reasons. Local antiquarians and historians were often consulted about their community. OWP researchers relied on local sources so much that considerable space in The Ohio Guide Tour Section is given to descriptions of eccentric local characters, strange houses, secret tunnels and generally unique local personalities. Reviewing the American Guide Series in 1939, Robert Cantwell wrote that the guides reflect an "accidental, capricious America."

Although The Ohio Guide was not published until 1940, it easily falls within his description. The Tour Section is rife
with stories of local eccentrics. Charles Bedell, a village (North Benton, Ohio) agnostic, according to local history, "on his deathbed . . . challenged God to prove His existence by placing snakes in his grave." Tourists have come from all over the United States to see snakes coming out of his grave, but have been disappointed. "Twice irate tourists have shot at the bronze statue of Bedell." 114

Another example is the biography of J. N. Free, better known as the "immortal J. N." to his hometown friends of Tiffin, Ohio. Free (1828-1906) went insane when he was 22 and wandered through the country for the remainder of his life. "He never paid for anything - clothing, meals, hotel accommodations, train rides, - he took them as his due." Considered an oddity at first, in time his eccentricities became an asset. He attracted crowds, thus potential customers for enterprising hotel and restaurant managers. Often Free was ejected from trains by unsympathetic conductors when he announced "I am the immortal J. N." However, by the end of his life, "he had received life passes from nearly every railroad system in the United States." 115 Such was the influence of local historians.

There was, however, a more important aspect of community participation which aided the OWP tremendously. Sympathetic response by local people helped the OWP in establishing its small offices. Republican strongholds, such as Coshocton, Marietta, Mansfield and Zanesville, where an art project, especially a New Deal project, would seem highly suspect politically, generally aided the
local OWP supervisor. Businessmen provided an office and fur-
niture; local civic groups offered transportation for the research-
ers. Local newspaper coverage was generally favorable.

Part of the reason for this positive response was that OWP officials had the good sense to hire only local people for the Project. Often the supervisor was from the same WPA district too. Flechtner, a native of Tiffin, supervised the Sandusky district. Hansel, from Logan, organized and ran the Athens district office. Both men later came to Columbus.

Indicative of how important these regional OWP offices were to the local populace can be seen in the reaction to the closing of these smaller offices in 1938 and 1939. The National Archives' FWP records contains hundreds of letters, often addressed to one or other of the Roosevelts, protesting the closing of these small Ohio offices. Mostly they are written by OWP workers who faced a transfer to a less enviable WPA project. Some, however, are from local people or their congressional representative requesting that the smaller OWP offices remain.

Probably the most important result of community involvement was that The Ohio Guide, regardless of literary merit, is so com-
plete in its portrayal of Ohio in the late 1930's. Hundreds of local people across Ohio gave their time, personal documents and memoirs to OWP researchers and in return The Ohio Guide reflects many peculiar traits.

The most prominent feature of the guide (I am writing only about The Ohio Guide, but these remarks could describe most state
guide books) is that it was written for touring and seeing the state. The book is built upon a mobility orientation, more specifically, highway movement. Except for two Lake Erie tours and one Ohio River side tour, everything is described in terms of the automobile - not walking or bicycling. All distances have been meticulously checked and re-checked. The mileage between each site or city is given to the nearest tenth. Critics have often pointed out that the distances are often more accurate than the descriptions.

A second and less obvious result of the tourist orientation is the superficiality of the descriptions. There is little interpretation of the history that has been researched or the facts that have been compiled. Like the photographic sections in The Ohio Guide, depicting industry, education, cities, architecture and agriculture, the tours give the reader a picture of the city or town, but little depth.

Although The Ohio Guide provides today's reader with little interpretation and is practically useless as a tour guide, it does provide "a benchmark," as Dr. Hatcher described it, to determine how both urban and rural Ohio have changed.

By superimposing the Interstate Highway net over the 1940 Ohio map on the Guide's endsheets gives dramatic evidence of the changes wrought in the landscape. Almost all the older state and national routes are obsolete. In many places the newer interstate highways have obliterated the older roads.

The city treatments read like quaint biographies. Sections of the city are inhabited by certain ethnic groups. Information
about recreational accommodations, such as swimming pools, or
golf courses, often has "Negro" printed after the description.¹¹⁸

The city descriptions also offer a sense of uniqueness. Each
city has a peculiar personality depending on how it was built and
the immigrant or ethnic group that dominated it. Again, like
the highways, there is a dramatic contrast of the heterogeneous,
polyglot cities of the 1930's with their homogeneous "plasticized"
counterparts today. The restriction of immigration has caused much
of this homogeneity, but by far, mass industrialization and technology
has rendered the most dramatic change. As Dr. Hatcher eloquently
described it:

It is a sense of rapid and dramatic changes . . .
which overloaded the even adequate system of the
1930's . . . We've increased the population so
greatly since the 1930's and [increased] the in-
dustrialization which helped produce the prosperity
. . . and the impact on the cities and the country-
side, for which we were unprepared, has been more
nearly disastrous than it has been happy.¹¹⁹

Happy or not the changes are a reality and in no way can
America "go home again." Yet, it may be that there has not been
that much change. Perhaps the impressionistic, personal recollec-
tions of this survey are fragmentary and inconclusive.

What is needed is a systematic thorough research effort of
the United States. A state-federal venture to create - not
re-write - a new set of state guides. This program should combine
the older FWP's zeal for thoroughness and accuracy with a sense
of immediacy and interpretation of the American experience. Only
then can historians accurately survey the past three decades and
pinpoint the real changes. Perhaps at that time we will, as T. S. Eliot has written,

...arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. 120
FOOTNOTES


2. These were titled the Federal Theater Project, Federal Music Project, Federal Art Project and the Federal Writers Project. Later a fifth project was added. It was the Historical Records Survey (HRS).


4. The other four projects' national directors were: Hallie Flanagan, Federal Theater Project; Nikolai Sokoloff, Federal Music Project; Holger Cahill, Federal Art Project; Luther H. Evans, Historical Records Survey.


7. Reed Harris, King Football, the Vulgarization of the American College, (New York, 1932).


9. Ibid., p. 673.

10. Interview with Emerson Hansel, Columbus, Ohio, May 13, 1970.


12. His other novels are: Wild Asses, 1925; Murders in Lovers Lane, 1927; The Counterfeit Wife, 1930; Honey's Money, 1933; The Queen's Harem, 1933.

13. Dunton interview.
14. Donahay to Alsberg, September 27, 1935, National Archives; Record Group 69, Records of the WPA, Records of the FWP, Box 38. Hereafter cited RG-69.

15. RG-69, Box 38, "Ohio Correspondence" file.

16. Although the HRS and FWP were often combined on the local level, the HRS was actually a separate project which provided employment by having researchers survey and catalog state and local respositories of legal documents.

17. Dunton interview.


19. Dunton interview.

20. Interview with Myron C. Flechtner, Columbus, Ohio, May 19, 1970.

21. Flechtner's former employer at the Cleveland bookstore was also helpful in obtaining Flechtner his position. Hoyt Kline, the employer, was also a friend of George Cronyn, FWP assistant national director. When requested by Cronyn to send him names of potential writers to staff the FWP in Ohio, Kline included Flechtner's name. Cronyn, in turn, sent the information to the Columbus office. (Flechtner interview.)

22. Flechtner interview.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.


27. Civil Works Administration, Connecticut: A Guide to its Roads, Lore and People, (Boston, 1938). This was a program initiated by the CWA in 1934 in Connecticut and completed by the Emergency Relief Commission in that state.


29. Anonymous, "Statement of Programs and Accomplishments, Ohio Writers Program, WPA in Ohio," RG-69, (Box 10), Final State Reports, WPA Service Division. (The report is undated as well as unsigned but was probably written in 1943.)

31. Dunton interview.


33. Ibid., p. 11.

34. Dunton interview.

35. Alsberg to Dunton, October 22, 1936, RG-69, Box 116.

36. Alsberg to Dunton, October 27, 1936, RG-69, Box 116.

37. Watson to Alsberg memorandum, August 1936, RG-69, Box 116.

38. Alsberg to Harry Hopkins, March 31, 1937, RG-69, Box 50, Alsberg correspondence, "Miscellaneous" file. Although this report is not directed to any particular official, the correspondence before and after it led me to believe the report was for Harry Hopkins, WPA national administrator.

39. Dr. Carl Watson, the Democratic Party state chairman, replaced Dr. Charles C. Stillman in 1936 as the WPA state director.

40. Telegram, Alsberg to Laning, October 9, 1937, RG-69, Box 38.

41. Dunton interview.

42. Flechtner interview.

43. Sawyer defeated the incumbent, Gov. Martin L. Davey, in the 1938 Democratic primary election but lost to Republican John Bricker in November.

44. Because of his background Dunton became a Public Information Officer. Stationed in Tokyo after the war, he was placed in charge of the writing of the Eighth Army's Pacific campaigns. "Many of the same operating procedures that were used on this project [OWI], I used in editing the material for the history of the Eighth Army," Dunton recalled. Transferred to the Public Affairs Office, Secretary of Defense, in 1950, he served in this capacity until his retirement in 1961. Remaining in the Washington D.C. area, Dunton now "represents various national organizations in Washington." (Who's Who, 1950-51; Dunton's "FMP employee questionnaire"; Dunton interview.)

46. Interview with Dr. Harlan H. Hatcher, Ann Arbor, Michigan, May 2, 1970.

47. Hatcher interview.

48. Frederick to Webber, July 28, 1970. Frederick was the first state director of the Illinois Writers Project and later the Midwest regional director, with the "chief duty" of finding "new and efficient state directors." (Frederick to Webber, June 2, 1970.)


50. Hatcher interview.

51. Ibid.

52. Flechtner interview.

53. Ibid.


55. Flechtner interview.


58. Hatcher interview.


60. Federal Art Project, Federal Music Project and Historical Records Survey.


63. "WP Achievement," *Time*, August 12, 1940, p. 64.

64. McDonald, *Federal Relief*, p. 687.

65. Hansel interview.

66. Flechtner interview.


69. Hansel interview.

70. The Columbus General Depot is now the Defense Construction Supply Center.

71. Curtis-Wright is now North American Rockwell Aviation.


73. Anonymous, "Statement of Programs and Accomplishments, Ohio Writers Program, WPA in Ohio," RG-69, Box 10, Final State Reports, WPA Service Division, 1941.


80. Ibid., p. 201.

82. Ibid., p. 8.


85. Ibid., p. 174.

86. McDonald, Federal Relief, p. 743.


88. Hatcher interview. This is rather contradictory since Dr. Hatcher was the Columbus Citizen's literary critic from 1936 to 1942.

89. Hansel interview.

90. Dunton interview.

91. Flechtner interview.


93. Flechtner interview.

94. Hatcher interview.


96. Hatcher interview.

97. Hansel interview. Fortunately, the supervisor was able to calm the researcher and persuade him not to take his life.


99. Hansel interview.
100. Hatcher interview.

101. As late as March 1939 the FWP Regional Director wrote Alsberg recommending that two professional writers be assigned to the OWP "in the event Hatcher is unable to find people within the state." Frederick to Alsberg, March 25, 1939, National Archives, RG-69, Box 116, "Miscellaneous File."

102. Flechtner interview.

103. Orrick Johns, *Times of Our Lives, the Story of My Father and Myself*, (New York, 1937). The directorship proved to be somewhat hazardous for Johns: A former seaman, whom Johns had rejected from the Project as illiterate, caught Johns in a darkened apartment hallway one night. After knocking him down and loosening several teeth, this sturdy member of the working class poured whiskey over Johns' body and attempted to set him afire. Fortunately, Johns was rescued before he caught fire. Afterwards, Johns, in his cavalier manner, put down the episode as a "boss hazard," (p. 349).

104. Hansel interview.

105. Flechtner interview.

106. Hansel interview.

107. One young man, who worked a year or so in the Columbus District Office, later achieved some distinction as a novelist. He was Burt (now Bart) Spicer; his best known novel is *Act of Anger*, (New York, 1962).

108. Hatcher interview.

109. Hansel interview.

110. Hatcher interview.

111. Probably the most dramatic illustration of how the FWP went beyond its relief function is the writing of the *Alaska Guide*. After the basic research was completed, one man, Merle Colby, wrote the book. He was not on relief but a talented novelist and assistant state supervisor for the Massachusetts Writers Project. The *Alaska Guide* project provided very little in the way of work relief. The funds spent compiling the *Alaska Guide* could have been diverted to more clearly defined relief projects within the FWP, but the necessity for a guide outweighed the demand for relief.
112. See footnote #33 and p. 16 of Part I.


115. Ibid., p. 411.


117. The photographic essay on small town life made by Ben Shahn differs from the other photographic sections. Shahn's camera gently probes the surface of Ohio's small towns. The photographic essay projects a languorous mood, a certain small town sleepiness. See Margaret R. Weiss, Ben Shahn, Photographer, (New York, 1970), for a lengthy description of Shahn's work in Circleville and other small towns in Ohio.

118. The Ohio Guide, Columbus swimming pools, p. 246; Dayton golf courses, p. 266.

119. Hatcher interview.

120. T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," Four Quartets.
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<td>Northwest Territory Celebration Commission</td>
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<td>They Built a City: 150 Years of Industrial Cincinnati</td>
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(Appendix I)
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(Appendix II)
UNCOMPLETED PROJECTS OF THE OHIO WRITERS PROGRAM

Burial Places in Ashland County
Early Ohio Inns and Taverns
The Electric Interurbans
First 83rd Division, The
Guide to Health Service in Greater Cleveland
Guide to Mansfield and Richland County
Guide to Meigs County
Guide to Parks of Toledo and Environs
History of the Negro in Ohio
History of Norwood
Index to Pictures in Periodicals
Mark A. Hanna (a play)
National Groups in Cleveland
National History of the Army and Navy Union, USA
Official Guide to the Cincinnati Zoo
Official Guide to the Toledo Zoo
Ohio Atlas
Ohio's Constitution
Ohio Health Almanac
Ohio's Interurbans
Poles of Cleveland, The
Toward Maumee Missions
Yours to Enjoy (Guide to Cincinnati parks)
FORMER FWP EMPLOYEE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: 

Place of birth:

Date of birth:

Education prior to working for the FWP:

What kind of work were you doing prior to working for the FWP (include unemployment periods)?

How many years did you work for the FWP?

Describe your position(s) in the FWP and the kind of work you did (administrative, editorial, clerical, etc.). Please list specific publications that you worked on, such as The Ohio Guide, city and county guides or other publications.

When and for what reasons did you leave the Project?

Describe your areas of work since leaving the FWP.

What were your opinions of the FWP, its purposes and accomplishments when working for it in the 1930's?

Looking back after almost thirty-five years, how would you evaluate the FWP now?

Can you offer any information as to the whereabouts of the people listed below?

(List of former FWP employees)

Do you know any other FWP personnel who are still living? If so, do you know where they are living now?

If it proves feasible, would you consent to a taped interview about your experiences in the FWP?

(Appendix V)

75
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Flechtner, Myron C. interview, Columbus, Ohio, June 8, 1970.

Hansel, Emerson C. interview, Columbus, Ohio, May 13, 1970.

Hatcher, Harlan H., Dr., interview, Ann Arbor, Michigan, May 2, 1970.

Moorehead, Eleanor interview, Columbus, Ohio, June 3, 1970.