

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

2006

Relief for Wanderers: The Transient Service in Kansas, 1933-35

Peter Fearon

University of Leicester

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Fearon, Peter, "Relief for Wanderers: The Transient Service in Kansas, 1933-35" (2006). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 62.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/62>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

RELIEF FOR WANDERERS

THE TRANSIENT SERVICE IN KANSAS, 1933-35

PETER FEARON

Located at the crossroads of America, Kansas had long experience of interstate migrants. For many decades armies of workers had entered the state to pursue the harvest of a number of crops, or to pick up whatever work was available on their way west in pursuit of a more rewarding life. The U.S. population was highly mobile and migration played an essential role in a vigorously expanding economy. Ailing transients, especially tubercular cases, had as their destination the pure, dry air of the Southwest.

Key Words: Kansas, migration, New Deal, relief, welfare

Peter Fearon is Professor of Modern Economic and Social History at the University of Leicester, UK. He has held visiting positions at the University of Kansas Hall Center for the Humanities, at Clare Hall and Sidney Sussex College at the University of Cambridge, and at the Institute for Advanced Study, La Trobe University in Australia. His most recent book, Kansas in the Great Depression: Work Relief, the Dole and Rehabilitation, will be published by the University of Missouri Press in 2007.

To these we can add indeterminate numbers of seasonal workers, ex-veterans, homeless boys, peddlers, beggars, and rootless individuals, some of who had recently been discharged from prisons or from other institutions.

People on the move usually traveled by horse-drawn prairie schooner, by rail, or made their way by hitchhiking. In the 1920s low-priced used autos enabled many families to travel with relative ease over considerable distances.¹ Migrants, however, were often unprepared for the rigors of their journey, and they inevitably presented a local welfare problem when their resources were totally exhausted and they were forced to seek public relief.²

Before the New Deal made federal funding available, poor relief in the United States was firmly based on the principle of local delegation, and in most states responsibility for assisting the poor was delegated to the county in which they had legal settlement.³ For example, in Kansas, legal settlement was gained by residence in a county for a minimum of six months, but it was lost if there was a deliberate absence of six months or if settlement was gained elsewhere. Local responsibility was considered an important means of targeting relief to those

who deserved it and of safeguarding against excessive expenditure.⁴ Nonresident destitutes who were forced to ask for assistance got little help from Kansas counties, which, before 1929, allocated less than 1 percent of their annual relief expenditures to supplicants who had no legal settlement.⁵ Spurned by county officials, migrants often had to rely on private charities for emergency assistance to avoid extreme hardship.

Even before the Great Depression began to squeeze the national economy, the scale of interstate migration was significant. A survey of sixty-three Kansas cities, undertaken in 1929 by the League of Kansas Municipalities in cooperation with the Kansas Conference of Social Work, reported 6,949 transient cases. These cases included nearly two thousand families who traveled with approximately four thousand children whose education was severely disrupted and whose health was at risk. In addition, 13,437 single men and 1,388 single women were assisted. The figures seriously underestimated the total, as only one prison was included in this survey, yet city and county jails played a very important role in providing shelter for single migrants.⁶

Once the national economy went into a steep decline, the numbers of transients rose but no systematic attempt was made to record their numbers across the state. Pockets of information, usually from centers where trained social workers were trying to cope with the situation, provide evidence of a mounting welfare problem that was replicated throughout the nation. For example, during the winter of 1931-32, the shelter maintained by the Topeka Provident Association was filled each night to its capacity of twenty-two. When the temperature dropped to levels that created a danger to rough sleepers, the local prison housed an additional forty. For the calendar year 1931, the Provident Association provided 13,142 meals and 4,373 beds, a big increase when compared with 7,222 meals and 1,826 beds that had been needed during the previous year.

Throughout the state it was increasingly evident that welfare provision for residents

was grossly inadequate and that the additional problem posed by migrants was becoming more acute.⁷ Evidence of this mounting welfare crisis was provided by the Family Welfare Society in Wichita, which could only offer shelter to between ten and seventeen homeless people each night during the severe winter weather of 1930-31. There were very few dedicated shelters for the homeless; for those who could not find a place in dorms run by charities or in boiler rooms or grain elevators, the usual escape from the weather was the local jail. Homeless unemployed men and boys found on the streets by the police were often "vagged," that is, arrested, kept overnight in the cells, and then sent on their way next morning without charge. In December 1930, police in Wichita arrested 450 persons for vagrancy but virtually all of them were released without charge after a night in jail with an injunction to leave town. During the winter of 1931-32 the police rescued similar numbers.⁸ Prison accommodation was overcrowded, uncomfortable, and unhygienic but preferable to spending a night on the street in subzero temperatures. However, although newspapers and a cardboard box were the summer choice of many rough sleepers, that was not true for all. Over 650 migrants spent the night in Wichita's jail during June 1931, the overwhelming majority having been arrested for vagrancy.

All Kansas residents were aware of the growing strain that the depression was imposing on their county's relief budget, and the overwhelming majority of taxpayers believed that charity begins and ends at home. Strangers were often regarded contemptuously as "bums" or "scroungers" if they asked for assistance; however, if they sought work they were accused of stealing scarce jobs from locals who should always have priority.⁹ This prejudice was widespread, even though in 1930 45 percent of the residents of Kansas cities and 27 percent of the state's farmers had migrated from another state.¹⁰ According to contemporary sociologist Robert S. Wilson, counties dealt with interstate migrants in a variety of ways. The majority of them favored "Passing On,"

where in an emergency transients were given a small allocation of gas and a little food but no offer of accommodation; recipients were then urged to leave for somewhere, indeed anywhere, else. "Threatening On" involved a more aggressive approach, usually on the part of the police. Transients were threatened with imprisonment or some other assault on their civil liberties if they did not leave town immediately. "Indiscriminate Haphazard Relief" was kindly meant but fundamentally unwise. Retail stores and private individuals gave handouts to all the seemingly needy that called, and private charities gave assistance without coordinating their activities or engaging in any social investigation of applicants.¹¹ Skilful mendicants were able to exploit the system and inform the likeminded of the easy pickings available.

There were few examples of a fourth approach, "Constructive Assistance and Centralized Responsibility." Only the family welfare societies in Wichita, Topeka, and Kansas City, Kansas, together with the Red Cross agencies at McPherson, Dodge City, Independence, Parsons, and Atchison, employed the full-time trained social workers that could provide the professional welfare service that transients required. In these centers, social workers attempted, through a series of interviews, to construct a plan that would either return the transients to their place of origin or help them move on to a suitable destination.¹² These isolated examples of excellent practice were crucial in framing the plan that Kansas submitted to the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) to secure funding for the establishment of a State Transient Service.

Unemployment, inadequate relief, the catastrophic fall in farm prices, drought, and the inability of marginal farm families to secure the part-time work that was necessary to prevent utter destitution were the key factors pushing migration.¹³ The prospect of a job in a distant place, or the security of being close to relatives, were significant elements pulling travelers toward a new life.¹⁴ It was inevitable that some would have to beg for assistance while

on the road or when they reached their final destinations but were not entitled to resident relief. There was a clear need for a federal program that would offer assistance to vulnerable travelers who had no legal claim to local assistance. This lifeline was provided by the FERA through one of its special emergency relief programs. The FERA was the key New Deal relief agency during the period 1933-35 and it was responsible for distributing over \$3.0 billion in grants to the states to assist the needy. This sum represented approximately 70 percent of the entire expenditure on emergency relief during these years.¹⁵

Because of this New Deal initiative, for the first time in U.S. history federal grants became available for the relief of needy people who had no legal residence in any one state or community.¹⁶ A Transient Division was created within the FERA in order to establish a nationwide program to assist transients, defined as persons who had resided for less than twelve consecutive months in the state where they applied for relief.¹⁷ In order to secure funding, all states were required to cooperate with the federal government in the creation of a specially designed administrative structure that would help stabilize the lives of needy migrants who fell into this category. The provision of public assistance for needy people on the move who could not meet this minimum residence requirement was a radical departure from past practice and it was a farsighted and bold experiment.

By analyzing the provision of aid to transients in Kansas, this article provides a fresh insight into a neglected New Deal initiative. Indeed, the transient program is ignored in virtually all the texts used in university history courses.¹⁸ The aims of the transient service, how it operated, and how effective it was in meeting the demands placed upon it are significant issues that can be effectively explored at the state level. Other crucial questions include: Did this initiative encourage interstate migration rather than curtail it? How effective was the transient program in identifying the causes of transiency and resolving them? Were families

and single migrants successfully stabilized, and if so, how many fell into this category? Did the work undertaken by transients, especially those living in camps, adequately equip them for private-sector employment? If the Transient Service was effective, why was it terminated in 1935?

Kansas provides a particularly interesting political framework for a case study. Between 1933 and 1936 the state had in Alf Landon a Republican governor who, in 1936, was Roosevelt's principal opponent in the race for the White House. There was also a Republican majority in the state legislature. Kansas Republicans strove with all their might to attract federal funds that accompanied the key New Deal initiatives.¹⁹ However, not only did the Republicans manage New Deal relief policies in the "Sunflower State," they did so remarkably effectively. During the period in question, experienced federal field officers frequently testified that Kansas had one of the most efficient relief administrations in the country.²⁰ The testimony of federal field officers has to be taken seriously. These agents were highly experienced professionals who provided their Washington masters with a frank assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the relief administrations in the states where they exercised responsibility.²¹ The praise the Kansas relief administration attracted for managing the FERA and the Civil Works Administration (CWA) was clear and unambiguous.²² An examination of the Transient Service in Kansas provides a microcosm of best practice that New Deal officials hoped to see in every state.

THE KANSAS TRANSIENT SERVICE

In July 1933 the FERA invited states to register their plans for the establishment of a transient service. Each plan had to provide detailed information on the extent and the nature of the problem that migrants posed, indicate how these problems would be tackled, and also give an estimate of the cost of the proposals. The federal government indicated

that states should establish a central facility for the registration of transients, where they would immediately be assigned to a social worker who would provide full casework facilities. Bona fide transients could expect food, shelter, and clothing to be provided according to their needs. They would also receive medical attention. Transport would be available to take them either to their place of legal residence or to another location that would be decided on after consultation with a social worker. It was stressed that "passing on" was a thing of the past. A return to a place of legal residence would take place only with the cooperation of the migrants and within the framework of interstate agreements. There would be no undue pressure on transients to return from whence they came, as the care given to them would not have a time limit. Finally, suitable employment provided through local work projects, or resulting from registration with employment bureaus, was an essential part of the plan. Seasonal migratory workers were not considered transients, and nor were intra-state migrants or the state's homeless; all were judged a local responsibility.²³

Although the relationship between the FERA and the states was a partnership, the states were obliged to fulfill certain conditions before they could claim their cash grants. For example, each had to start collecting statistical information that could be transmitted to Washington in the form requested. This data eventually made possible the creation of an accurate picture of the transient problem across the nation, whereas previously, estimates of the numbers of migrants had varied considerably and most were wildly inaccurate.²⁴ It also provided the basis for several valuable and innovative empirical studies on the causes and the effects of transiency.²⁵ The FERA had great faith in the benefits of social casework, and states were urged to transform wanderers into clients. We can also note the New Deal horror of dole payments, which, it was believed, would lead to dependency.²⁶ Where possible, those fit for work were supposed to perform useful tasks rather than luxuriate in idleness. Transients

were excluded by law from employment in the Public Works Administration (PWA) and CWA programs, but officials hoped that transients would find sufficient work, or work relief, locally. New Deal officials were in no doubt that assistance for transients through a program specifically dedicated to them was essential if local prejudice was to be avoided. However, they were also anxious to avoid the natural resentment that would arise if migrants were judged to be treated too favorably. The assessment of their need by trained social workers was the means by which equality of treatment could be assured.²⁷ It was not anticipated that distress-induced migration would be curtailed solely by the activities of the Transient Service but as a result of various New Deal programs, some of which were designed to assist farmers, others to generate more jobs through economic recovery, and for the less fortunate, to provide more generous relief to those who remained at home.

There was little enthusiasm in Kansas about extending care to transients, on the grounds that the inevitable result would be even more wanderers applying for assistance.²⁸ However, the state relief administration, encouraged by the prospect of federal funding, acted quickly. Using as a guide the "Alabama Plan," one of the few that had already been approved by the FERA, the state's submission was dispatched on September 7.²⁹ Within two weeks the FERA had approved the plan and had agreed, initially, to provide a monthly grant of fifteen thousand dollars. A week later, Gerard F. Price was appointed as state supervisor of the Transient Division of the Kansas Emergency Relief Committee (KERC).

Price first instituted a survey in order to determine the number of transients, their location, and the facilities currently available for their care and rehabilitation. The next step was to establish the new administrative structure that had been agreed with the FERA, which required the creation of two types of service centers and also camps that would form part of a national network. Reference Centers were established in each of the state's 105 counties

under the direction of the poor commissioner, who was made responsible for the direct supervision of resident cases. Reference Centers became the first port of call for transients. After registration, each migrant received immediate but temporary care, which included food and lodging, and had the opportunity to meet a social worker. The next step was the referral of families, single men, and boys to a treatment center where the process of rehabilitation would begin. At the treatment center, families and individuals received a medical examination, accommodation was provided, and work began on a plan that was intended to bring their wandering to a halt. The rehabilitation of each client to the point of self-sufficient stability was seen as an essential part of the service offered by the Transient Division.

Reference Centers offered primary help at the point of registration without requiring the transients to travel immediately to a treatment center.³⁰ Verification by the State Registration Bureau that the family or individual qualified as bona fide indigent interstate transients was necessary before relief could be offered on other than a temporary basis. Like all New Deal relief programs, assistance to transients was means tested. On the receipt of a clearing return from the Registration Bureau, transients who had a legal settlement elsewhere were urged to return to their homes and offered assistance with transport costs to make this option more appealing. Or they would be given help to plan their onward migration, which would involve identifying the transient help available in other states. If neither option was possible, they, and those who had lost settlement, were referred to a treatment center. Transport to the center could be provided but only after an agreed amount of work had been undertaken to cover the cost. The information gathered by the transient survey instituted by Gerard Price was used to determine the location of each treatment center, where care was organized while social workers and clients worked together on a stabilization plan.

Separate treatment centers were established for both families and single males, though

single females and boys less than fourteen years of age were accommodated in family centers. The family centers were supervised by trained social workers but the transient families were lodged in houses in various parts of the towns in which the centers were located. The laudable aim was to integrate transient families with their neighbors and to avoid segregation that would make transition to a stable life more difficult. Unattached males, on the other hand, were lodged in single buildings near places where they might find work. Strenuous efforts were made to find appropriate, continuous work for all transients who were considered fit for employment. The significance of regular work in the path toward a normal life was stressed by the FERA and was echoed by all Kansas officials. Indeed, the FERA proposal was that all able-bodied transients should perform thirty hours of work each week in exchange for their subsistence and a small cash allowance.³¹ The first family treatment center was opened in Wichita on November 1, 1933, and others followed it in Kansas City and Topeka. Single males benefited from the opening on November 22 of the Railroad YMCA building in Topeka, a gift of the Santa Fe Railroad, and soon afterward, that of another center at Fort Scott.

The general principles and aspirations of the Kansas Transient Division were clear. There would be no more "passing on," nor would there be a limitation to relief arbitrarily imposed by untrained and unsympathetic officials anxious to appease local taxpayers. It was now recognized that the key to successful work with transients was stabilization, which could mean a return to their place of legal settlement or a move to a new location where the chances of economic and social survival seemed good, or if all else failed, care within the state of Kansas. Stabilization, however, was not viewed as an easy option; it was only possible if clients gave their full cooperation and if they had the assistance of skilled caseworkers. Kansas welfare professionals hoped that other states would provide at least as high standards for the care of their residents on relief as was made available to travelers by the Kansas Transient Division so

that the incentive to take to the road could be minimized.³²

At the close of 1934 there were nine treatment centers for unattached males, of which four were work camps, located at the Wabaunsee, Howard, Sedan, and Gardner Lake projects. When the program ended in September 1935, the three family treatment centers were part of a sixteen-center operation, which included a transient's hospital in Topeka. In January 1934, a total of 310 families and 3,737 unattached men and women were assisted by the state Transient Service. These numbers swelled to an annual peak in December of 1,436 families (of which 1,322 were assisted by the three family treatment centers) and 11,523 unattached persons. During 1935 a monthly average of 14,523 nonresidents were cared for. Monthly figures show marked fluctuations because of the influence of the weather, the onset of school vacations, which influenced family travel, and of course, the closure of the program in September 1935. However, the number of families assisted reached a 1935 peak of 2,475 in July, while the unattached, at 16,824, were at their most numerous in March.³³ These figures, and those collected nationally, understate the number of transients because they are limited to travelers who registered at centers. It is not possible to calculate the numbers of migrants who for various reasons refused to ask for assistance from the Transient Division.

By October 1934, all states with the exception of Vermont were participants in the Federal Transient Program. One benefit of this universal approach was that it introduced a regular count of assisted transients through a mid-monthly census, which allows the Kansas experience to be put in perspective. The national peak for transient families occurred during February and March 1935 when just over forty thousand were recorded. The count of unattached individuals reached a high point in December 1934 with 160,523, of whom 5,004 were women. The total cost of the transient program to the taxpayer was \$106.1 million out of which Kansas secured \$2.1 million. This was a similar sum to that received by Colorado,

nearly double the grant received by Oklahoma and Nebraska but less than the \$3.5 million awarded to Missouri.³⁴ To put this in perspective, during 1934 Kansas transients were cared for at an average cost of 18 cents per day and during that year travelers received \$91,906 in cash wages while the value of their relief in kind was assessed at \$427,231.³⁵

CARE FOR MIGRANT FAMILIES

The survey undertaken at the request of Gerard Price in late 1933 had shown that the provision of aid for all transients was poor, but it was the lack of care offered to families that posed the biggest welfare risk. These findings persuaded officials that family care should be a priority. The three family treatment centers were, therefore, situated in the most urbanized parts of the state, a logical outcome of the decision to place transient families in private houses where they could experience not only the stabilizing influence of home life but could also enter into community activities. Large cities were the only places that combined a sufficient number of homes to rent with the opportunity for suitable work relief. Since the Transient Service was able to pay relatively high rents, the provision of suitable housing was never a problem.³⁶ Social workers hoped that the family treatment centers and the county relief administrations could be amalgamated, but it was soon clear that this additional burden would be too much for county organizations that were struggling to cope with a big increase in resident cases. Transient relief, therefore, remained a separate category, much to the regret of officials who feared that this distinction would stigmatize nonresidents.³⁷ The integration of transients and residents in their communities was considered a priority by social workers as they strove to stabilize the former and it was unfortunate, although unavoidable, that this crucial relationship was compromised by the separation of relief organizations.

The treatment centers created the opportunity for caseworkers to embark upon a full investigation of their clients. They also provided

families with the opportunity to avail themselves of a range of medical services that few had previously encountered. Most migrant families came from Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, and Arkansas, where relief was neither as well organized as it was in Kansas nor, according to Kansas officials, as generous. In particular, travelers should have been impressed by the medical services available at the treatment centers. A small medical unit was provided in each center where sick cases could be isolated and where acute illnesses such as pneumonia could receive bedside nursing. During 1934, 7,380 people received medical attention at the family treatment centers; of these, 2,339 were vaccinated and 2,051 were immunized. All transients were given typhoid jabs; those under twelve years of age received diphtheria toxin. Serious infectious diseases, for example tuberculosis or venereal disease, could be identified and the sufferers offered treatment or isolation. During 1934 alone, 386 syphilitics were diagnosed at the family treatment centers.³⁸ Dental care had been sadly neglected but now large numbers of people were able to enjoy relief after years of suffering. The Transient Service also provided dentures, although only to those younger men who were best placed in the job market, and they were given the opportunity to work extra hours to pay for the dental treatment they received.³⁹

The Transient Service was also obliged to help the victims of a number of accident cases. As neither the railroads nor the counties would accept responsibility for migrants injured on their property, the cost of caring for them fell on the Transient Service. A small hospital was opened in Topeka in January 1935 and was made available to transients throughout the state; during the twelve months of its existence, it had an average daily load of twenty-six patients. The medical assistance available for all categories of transients and was not limited to accident cases. High-quality medical care was of great benefit to a group in poor general health, few of whom had been previously subject to systematic scrutiny by doctors and nurses.

Until October 1934, transient families received relief only in kind. Family heads who were able to work performed various assigned tasks and in return had their utility bills and rent paid, groceries issued to them at a grocery store, and clothing purchased for their families. Once it was clear to social workers that some families wanted to stop wandering and remain in one location, they supported the introduction of a system of cash relief. Willing and able men were given work relief on exactly the same budgetary deficiency basis used for FERA resident cases in the counties. Family resources and needs were assessed by social workers and sufficient hours of work were allocated, up to a maximum of thirty, so that at least part of the deficiency gap could be bridged. To cut down on administrative costs and to assist the rehabilitative process, clients who had the appropriate skills were also used as clerks, stenographers, or as janitors and general laborers. In fact, if clients were suitably qualified for any particular task they were given employment, though not at the cost of them securing private jobs if any became available. National and local officials stressed the morale-boosting effects of employment in a wide variety of occupations and the closer commitment to the program on the part of transients that resulted from their participation in it.⁴⁰

Females who headed households were also offered work, though the need to care for children often proved a major obstacle. If women had no office skills they were employed as cleaners or in sewing rooms set up for work relief. In Topeka, the women's sewing room used textile remnants to manufacture 2,030 toys while men made 310 dolls that were given to the children of transients and to other relief families for Christmas 1934.⁴¹ Sewing-room facilities enabled transient families to make their own clothing and look neater and more self-confident than was usual for relief clients. Employment on work projects played an important part in the rehabilitative process and gave transients the opportunity to appreciate the demands and the limitation of family budgeting. However, work relief was only given

to families who were physically and mentally equipped to cope with the tasks and who were also believed to have become stable. The others continued to receive direct relief.⁴²

The oddities of the settlement laws were irksome to social workers and puzzling to many residents. A special session of the Kansas Legislature held during October 1933 had made the state's settlement laws more restrictive. To be consistent with federal rules defining transients, a continuous residence of twelve months was required to gain settlement, but it could be lost by an absence of six months. In other words, native Kansans who had been absent from their county of settlement for over six months, and as a result had lost settlement rights, had to demonstrate continuous residence of twelve months in their new county in order to gain settlement. The result was that for a six-month period some mobile Kansans had no settlement rights in any state. Normally families in this predicament continued to live in their new Kansas county instead of being sent to a family treatment center. They remained there, still under the care of the State Transient Service but approved and budgeted for relief as if they were residents, until they qualified for settlement. The general rule was that the counties took care of all intrastate transients and the federal centers were restricted to interstate cases only.⁴³ However, the flexibility in the system was beneficial to Kansans without legal settlement in their own state. These families often had the support of relatives with whom they sometimes lodged, or they had friends in the community and there were better opportunities for employment. It made little sense to temporarily place rural families in a big city treatment center solely in order for them to gain legal settlement prior to a return to the countryside.⁴⁴ Care in the counties was both a sensible and a cost-effective policy for those falling afoul of the settlement laws. However, where legal settlement outside Kansas could be verified, and there was good reason to encourage families to return to their former homes, this was done. During 1934 the three family

treatment centers returned 652 families to their legal settlements.⁴⁵

TRANSIENT MEN

Unattached men posed different problems to those generated by families. In contrast with other FERA activities, an important feature of the transient program was congregate and camp care, which was seen as the only way to deal with large numbers of homeless men, and the vast majority of them were cared for in this way.⁴⁶ Several treatment centers for single males were located at the stopping points where the railroad routes, which carried about 90 percent of single transients, were most likely to discharge their nonpaying passengers. Centers at Topeka, Fort Scott, Hutchinson, Dodge City, and Liberal owed much to the popular practice of riding railcars. In mid-1934, however, only the Rock Island Railroad had failed to significantly curb free riders, and that line then provided a relatively large numbers of transients.⁴⁷ By the spring of 1935 railroad travel had been so significantly reduced that treatment centers in Belleville, Herrington, and Liberal were closed down.⁴⁸ By the middle of 1935, one-third of travelers were using the highway.⁴⁹ Auto dealers who wanted vehicles delivered to distant destinations provided a seemingly attractive and cheap means of travel for some men to move west but unfortunately, delivery drivers could be stranded on arrival.⁵⁰

Every effort was made to avoid locating the congregate treatment centers in the most unsavory urban environment where clients would be exposed to temptations of the flesh and of the bottle. However, while officials sought sites they thought would boost the morale of their clients and contribute to their stabilization program, local people worried about the effect of large numbers of homeless men on property values and even on personal safety.⁵¹ Moreover, the transients were also seen as competitors for both private employment and for relief work. State officials, however, were imaginative and relatively successful in their attempts to pacify local opposition. Public meetings were held

so that plans could be discussed with local residents at an early stage and the questions they found most problematic were answered. Sometimes a committee whose membership included residents was formed to try to identify suitable premises for a treatment center. If transients were to play a part in the community and not become isolated, it was essential that relationships with local people were cordial. When centers opened, it was customary for representatives of local civic groups and religious leaders to be invited for a meal. For a small charge the standard institutional fare was provided; attendance was usually very high and reports indicate that the visitors were suitably impressed. Senior officials believed that "housewarmings" and the general emphasis on community relationships helped protect the transient service from potentially destructive criticism.⁵²

Staff at the centers were convinced that the development of self-respect and confidence on the part of each transient was an essential prerequisite if a nomadic life was to be abandoned. The centers sought to inculcate new attitudes by ensuring that every man had his own bed rather than a canvas cot that would be allocated to a different person each night, that there was a high standard of cleanliness in the building, and that decent food and adequate washing facilities were also provided for clients. Lockers were available for personal possessions, and where possible, privacy was encouraged. Some men entered the center dirty, verminous and dressed in rags; stabilization required high levels of personal hygiene and adequate clothing, which was provided for them. All the sheets, pillowcases, and towels for the unattached men's centers and the camps were made in the fully equipped sewing room set up in the Topeka family treatment center.

It became obvious that the men actually enjoyed working to improve the building they occupied and that their spartan rooms could be transformed in a short space of time if the appropriate level of supervision and the materials were provided. The men also benefited from a compulsory medical inspection

for all those registered as transients and from hospital services available at Topeka, Fort Scott, Hutchinson, and the Gardner Center and Wabaunsee camp, which treated a total of 2,246 patients in 1934.⁵³ Many transients had been victims of self-neglect and had a low resistance to infectious disease.⁵⁴ These positive measures were designed to erase the worst aspects of institutional life so that the process of stabilization could begin with clients who had a respect both for their center and for the way in which it was run. The centers were not flophouses, but nor were they missions.⁵⁵

After an initial interview with a caseworker, during which the client's skills and fitness for work were assessed, unattached men were encouraged to search for jobs locally. Although the labor market was depressed, they were sometimes successful, especially during the summer months when seasonal work became more readily available. Work projects were also set up for men who were fit for work but unable to find private-sector employment. They were employed on tasks such as construction, repair and maintenance in the centers, the demolition of public buildings, landscaping, public park improvements, and the maintenance and repair of the national cemetery at Fort Scott. The Topeka Board of Education employed about forty transient men as assistant janitors; others worked in the same capacity in the City Building. Unfortunately, Topeka labor union officers, who feared that relief workers would displace salaried janitors from their jobs, objected to this initiative so strongly that the transients were removed.⁵⁶ The usual difficulty for transients was that the public denounced them as scroungers if they did no work but if their search for public or private jobs was successful, they were accused of taking employment away from deserving locals. The fact that transients were fed and housed only added to the resentment felt by their rivals in the search for scarce work.

Lake construction projects provided the rationale for the four transient camps. The Transient Service set up both Wabaunsee and Gardner camps, and as many clients

had experience in the construction industry, they were able to help with the erection of camp buildings.⁵⁷ Workers registered at the Topeka Treatment Center were transported to Wabaunsee each day in order to build a 202-acre lake. The Gardner project involved transient clients building, under supervision, cabins, a water plant, and communal facilities and also fitting electrical wiring and gas pipes. In September 1934, two mobile camps were established at Howard and Sedan. Both counties were desperately short of water and had begun to construct two lakes but could not recruit sufficient local relief labor to complete the work in the time allowed by the water conservation program. At the request of the KERC, the Transient Service provided an additional 100 men at Howard and 150 at Sedan, though the work was organized so that the local relief workers and the transients were employed on separate parts of each project. The rationale for this segregation is not clear, though the implication is that it was for reasons of efficiency, not status.⁵⁸ By the end of 1934, both dams were close to completion.

All the centers and the camps developed well-organized leisure programs that eventually gave transients similar facilities to those available to the small-town dweller. During the winter months, when outside activities were curtailed, clients could use a recreation room to write letters, read, or play games. Local donations ensured that current newspapers and magazines were available to them rather than reading matter long out of date and close to disintegration. The larger camps showed movies and the more isolated camps opened commissaries, the profits from which were ploughed back into leisure activities, in one case helping to finance the purchase of caps and uniforms for baseball teams.⁵⁹ During the warmer months outdoor activities were available. Basketball, softball, volleyball, and even soccer teams competed in local community leagues. Perhaps if the Transient Program had continued for longer, the United States might have emerged as a world force in soccer, a truly international ballgame. A golf course was

constructed at the Wabaunsee camp, which became a popular leisure facility for inhabitants of the small town just a few miles distant. By encouraging these activities, and by making available the facilities of the camps to local people on special occasions such as the Fourth of July, the Transient Service and their clients made considerable progress in building bridges with their neighbors. In addition to games, a handicraft program was implemented so that old skills could be retained or new ones acquired. Each center and camp had a fully equipped workshop where clients were encouraged to produce small items for themselves. Before long it was apparent that high-quality furniture could be produced, and by late 1934 over 80 percent of the office furniture of the State Transient office, the KERC offices, and those of other agencies had been made by transients on work projects.⁶⁰ Five centers developed garden projects, which provided a supply of fresh vegetables and fruits. However, the Transient Service was always careful to preserve good community relations by ensuring that local produce was purchased for its clients. Transients who, after social investigation, were permitted to do their own cooking became eligible for surplus commodities issued through the Surplus Products Division of the KERC. Those housed in camps were communally fed.⁶¹

An attempt to combine leisure activities with work relief can be seen in the establishment of five machine-sewing rooms in the family treatment centers where, under the direction of the local sewing project leadership, women who could not sew were taught, and those who could were given the opportunity to use their skills for the benefit of their families. For example, mothers were encouraged to make clothing for their school-age children.⁶² Experience had shown that some clients would send donated clothing to relatives who were in desperate circumstances; others would sell what they had been given and expect to be reissued with more. Family-made garments, perhaps because of a sense of ownership, were treated differently.

Nor was the education of the young neglected. Children from the family treatment centers attended school along with the offspring of neighboring residents, which was seen as an important bonding element in their new relationship with the community. Their presence was perfectly acceptable to the boards of education in all three towns. This harmony relied on a combination of Kansas law that obliged all children residing in the state for more than thirty days to attend school and the fact that good relations between the centers and their neighbors had been established at an early stage. Even young men who were in congregate care were able to use community education facilities. A few were fortunate enough to be awarded scholarships that enabled them to attend high school, grade school, or even business school. Suitable scholars were given direct relief.⁶³

Work camps also provided a public service in accepting parolees from the State Penitentiary and the Boys' Industrial School. Prisoners eligible for parole who had been transients at the time of their arrest but who had neither legal settlement in Kansas, nor relatives living in the state, nor the promise of a job, could not be paroled. An arrangement was made with the Parole Board for the Transient Service to admit to one of its camps men who they judged had a good chance of adjustment to civilian life given the appropriate support. The camps were seen as the ideal halfway house for those due for release from prison but who could not be legally paroled. Thus, in February 1934, the Transient Service accepted sixteen males who had been paroled from Leavenworth prison. Very few men were involved in this experiment, which in any case lasted for such a short period that it is not possible to make a definitive evaluation of it, but it provides an example of the Transient Service cooperating with other state bodies and demonstrating a willingness to open its facilities to a potentially troublesome group that it could have ignored.

Conviviality was not always evident in the relations between local relief officials and New Dealers in Washington. To the intense irritation of Washington-based officials, the burial

of nonresidents was a subject of continuous bickering between the Transient Service and county relief committees. When a transient died who had no next-of-kin to take care of the funeral expenses, the charge of burial fell upon the local relief administration. This aroused great resentment on the part of the relief authorities, who protested that because they had not encouraged transients to come to their county centers, they saw no reason why the financial responsibility for interment should be theirs. The complaints, which were typically couched in pompous and indignant language, were contemptuously dismissed by Washington officials whose view was that, as the federal government had given substantial assistance to all counties through various New Deal programs, the attempt of county commissioners to avoid their rightful responsibilities over such small sums was shameful.⁶⁴

THE CLOSURE OF THE TRANSIENT SERVICE

During 1935 Congress approved a radical reappraisal of the nation's welfare program. Following a major reorganization of priorities, the federal government decided to end its commitment to emergency relief and to disband the FERA. Since unemployment was a national problem, Washington declared its intention to take responsibility for the nation's employable persons in need of jobs. A new agency, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), was created to provide suitable work relief for needy household heads who fell into this category.⁶⁵ In other words, Washington made a clear distinction between those capable of work and those who, for various reasons, could not be employed. These unemployables became the responsibility of the states or counties where they had residence. Emergency federal relief grants to the states were terminated, and as a result, the funding for the transient program disappeared. The federal plan was that from late 1935, able-bodied transients in need would become eligible for relief work from the newly formed WPA, while the care of needy transient unemployables would be assumed by the county

in which they resided, or more accurately the one in which they had legal settlement. Although the transient camps were popular with both Kansas officials and the public, in the eyes of senior Washington officials they were unacceptable because they inevitably led to segregation. In Harry Hopkins's own words: "[T]ransient camps under the WPA came to an end because of the strong conviction that their psychology was not consistent with the aims of the work program. The final victory for the transient is only won when, working side by side with the local man, he is known simply as a good workman worthy of his hire."⁶⁶

The realization that once the program was wound up some transients would gain legal settlement and become Kansas residents attracted a hostile reaction. The *Hutchinson News* reported that Ford, Reno, and Shawnee county commissioners had declared that they had "no intention of supporting the federal cast-offs."⁶⁷ Ford county commissioner A. P. Henthorn was quoted in the *Norton Telegram* as saying, "[W]e have too many local people in need to spend any county money on transients."⁶⁸ The prospect of travelers working on relief projects alongside residents of long standing was not one that many communities relished. However, although residence was not supposed to affect WPA eligibility, in fact it did once the period of transition from the transient service had been completed. It was not sufficient to be unemployed to become eligible for WPA employment. Successful applicants had to be both jobless and certified in need of relief after a full investigation by a social worker. It was easy for local officials to make life difficult for migrants by refusing to accept certifications of relief eligibility made elsewhere and insisting on a new, and naturally lengthy, investigation. Even more significant was the requirement that for WPA certification, applicants had to be eligible for relief. But to become eligible all applicants had to live in a Kansas county continuously for one year. Only then would the state's residence requirements be met.⁶⁹ Moreover, WPA projects had to be supported by substantial contributions (usually 25 percent of the cost) from

sponsors, who were usually the counties. Little wonder that under these circumstances taxpayers believed that locals should be given priority for WPA work. Outsiders faced a further handicap. Federal funding was never sufficient to provide work for more than approximately 40 percent of the men and women eligible for WPA jobs. The heads of transient families, followed by single transients, were at the very bottom of the list of those considered for scarce WPA employment. Outsiders were at the mercy of county relief administrations or the goodwill of private charities. County and charitable relief was always less generous than federal assistance, and was usually given in kind rather than cash.

The liquidation of the Kansas Transient Service began on September 20, 1935, when, as the following figures show, the demands for its services were still buoyant. During 1935 a monthly average of 1,743 families (comprising 6,106 individuals) and 8,730 unattached non-residents were assisted; \$219,356 was paid in cash wages and the value of relief in kind was calculated at \$402,202. One measure of how generously transients were treated was that some were able to start small savings accounts, which ultimately facilitated a move to private employment and personal budget management.⁷⁰ However, once the registration of new transients ceased, the state organization had to be run down, but at a speed consistent with the need to offer aid for those still legitimately under the service's care. Families became cash relief clients, each receiving a weekly check to cover their needs. Those heads of families who were fit for work were, in theory, available for assignment to the WPA on the same basis as residents; by the beginning of 1936, 70 percent had been placed, though it is important to note that most of the transients who were engaged by the WPA lived and worked in camps. In other words, they were retained to work on projects that had been underway for some time and whose distant location lessened the competition from the local unemployed. Some transient family heads were unable to work because of old age, sickness, or injury. And

some mothers who headed households were unavailable for full-time employment because of the demands of their children. These clients ultimately became a county responsibility.

An extra effort was made to return transients who had a legal settlement outside Kansas; during 1935, 364 families, 38 men, and 69 women and girls who fell into this category were removed. On the other hand, in October 1935, 278 families who had gained legal settlement by living in a Kansas county continuously for at least one year became the responsibility of their new county, which received a grant of funds toward their care. During each subsequent month, families were transferred to the counties as soon as they had acquired settlement. However, as late as December 31, 656 families still remained the responsibility of the Transient Service in the treatment centers and thirty-one in the counties. All the family treatment centers were closed on February 1, 1936, but the Transient Service continued to fund the 230 remaining families until they had acquired legal settlement. By September, all were under the care of county organizations.⁷¹ Single men were dealt with in a different manner. All the unemployables, about seventy in number and mostly aged, were brought to the Topeka center. They were, of course, not eligible for WPA work and would eventually become a county charge, after the exhaustion of the final grant that accompanied them. All the employables were transferred to the camps, where work continued on water conservation and other related schemes. In mid-1935 the work on the Dodge City Transient Camp was completed and in the fall the men were moved to Wabaunsee. The Sedan project was also finished and the men moved briefly to Howard and then on to Wabaunsee. In November, the WPA approved the continuation of the projects at Gardener, Wabaunsee, and Howard, thus enabling the men already working on them to prolong their employment. However, once these projects were completed, the men working on them became a county responsibility.

A plea that the transient hospital in Topeka should continue as an infirmary with

a responsibility for camp residents was rejected, so a decision had to be made about the future of hospital patients, many of whom either had, or would shortly gain, legal settlement on Shawnee County. As the county poor farm was full to capacity, a large mobile building was moved from a transient camp to the poor farm and transformed into a hospital. On January 23, 1936, the remaining eight patients were transferred to it from the Topeka hospital, which was then closed. Between December 1933 and the end of 1935, \$31,894 was spent on the Topeka hospital and 519 hospital clients were admitted to it. A large but unrecorded number of outpatients were also treated over this two-year period.⁷² The figures suggest that there was a continuing demand for this hospital service.

AN EVALUATION

At an early stage the Kansas Transient Service became one of the most highly regarded in the country. In 1934, T. J. Edmonds, an FERA field supervisor and an experienced observer of state relief programs, gave his seal of approval by commenting to Harry Hopkins, "[T]his Kansas set-up looks awfully good to me."⁷³ These observations are consistent with other comments from Edmonds and those of fellow field supervisors who were very impressed with the way in which Kansas organized its relief for the welfare of residents and nonresidents under the FERA and the CWA.⁷⁴ The emphasis on stabilizing clients, the appointment of highly qualified staff, and the imposition of a first-rate administrative structure combined to provide a highly efficient system of care. Unfortunately, even with such a praiseworthy program, which was meticulous in its recordkeeping, it is difficult to calculate just how many transients were actually stabilized. One can, however, appreciate some of the formidable problems facing caseworkers who tried to implement this ambitious plan.

The fact that many families and unattached individuals firmly resisted plans to stabilize them presented social workers with a serious problem. Some migrants used the strategy of

applying for assistance at a reference center too late in the day to either be assigned work or be sent to a treatment center. They would be given supper, shelter for the night, and breakfast next morning, but despite promising to liaise with a caseworker, they just continued their journey.⁷⁵ A report on the operation of ten of the twelve treatment centers during the period January 1 to December 21, 1934, which shows the average length of stay of transient families, is revealing. In the first place it is clear that there were great variations in the average length of stay. In five of the centers the percentage of clients staying for less than two days was 58, 90, 67, 68, and 77. Even in the treatment centers, a very high proportion of clients were short-term visitors and therefore could not be candidates for stabilization. Most long-term residents were housed at the Wabaunsee and Gardner camps, where 53 and 48 percent of clients, respectively, remained for longer than one month. In contrast, the family treatment centers had a very rapid turnover of clients, with only a small proportion remaining for longer than four days.⁷⁶ The conclusion must be that the majority of transients did not stay long enough for the stabilization process to be effective, except where the service was successful in persuading clients to permanently return to their place of legal settlement. However, it is impossible to tell what proportion of families and single individuals who returned home actually stayed there. Nor is it possible to judge the success of a planned migration where Kansas was merely a stopping off point. Transient Service officials advised travelers on their route and told them where help was available, but there is no information on whether they reached their desired destination or whether stable self sufficiency was the outcome of their journey.

Dedicated Kansas officials worked hard to provide a first-rate service for families on the move. These social workers were not naive. They were fully aware that the structure they had created could be, and was, abused. The "gasoline group," for example, always claimed to have no resources; they demanded gas and groceries but refused to cooperate in any stabilization plans.⁷⁷ Kansas was so well endowed

with reference centers—one in each of the 105 counties—that the service was ripe for exploitation. As the frustrated state director of Transient Services wrote, an increasing number of clients believed that Kansas “is the land where the coffee tree grows and the sandwiches hang from the twigs.”⁷⁸ He reported that men of all ages neglected to report to caseworkers and would only travel to treatment centers if the subsidized ride took them in the direction they wanted to go. Even then they did not turn up in the centers.

It was natural that officials, who were trying to administer a system designed to reduce transiency, resented the behavior of those who seemed determined to undermine their efforts. They suspected that the program was actually encouraging government sponsored panhandling.⁷⁹ During May 1934, for example, there seemed clear evidence that families were leaving their home states in order to take advantage of the Kansas Transient Service.⁸⁰ State officials claimed that migrants traveled to Kansas because they were convinced that the transient relief they would receive was far superior to the assistance that they could expect at home. Kansas investigators believed that the complaints of miserly relief assistance in some other states had substance. But a contributory factor could have been that the shame attached to relief, which made an application for assistance intolerable at home, became bearable where anonymity was likely.

For whatever reason, an economy drive was instituted in December 1934, and clients who had settlement elsewhere but had refused to return were allocated budgets that were the minimum they could have expected in their place of legal settlement.⁸¹ However, even this draconian experiment, which was not consistent with the spirit of the Transient Service, did not lead to the anticipated exodus. Kansas officials found that relief administrations in other states were sometimes reluctant to accept returnees, even though they were legally responsible for them. Moreover, families who did return often found their relief so utterly miserly, or its delivery so long delayed, that they

had no incentive to stay but every incentive to lose legal settlement so that they would qualify for transient relief in Kansas. Repeated experiences confirmed the suspicion that the high quality of service offered in Kansas contributed to the movement of many clients who were naturally desperate to escape abject misery, as well as those less driven by abject poverty, who were prepared to stay in “Uncle Sam’s Hotels,” as the increasing number of conservative critics called them, but were determined to resist all attempts at stabilization.

Another problem that confronted both caseworkers and their clients was the lack of suitable work relief projects. All federally funded work relief was limited to activities that did not compete with private industry, which is why there was a great concentration on public construction. In a situation where there was a shortage of work relief for both resident and transient unemployed, locals bitterly resented the competition from outsiders. This was especially true after the termination of the CWA program in March 1934. Many of the jobless who had been employed by the CWA, which did not insist on an assessment by social workers to establish need as a prerequisite, were not eligible for work relief under the FERA, which did. The resulting tension often led to a lack of cooperation between the transient service and county relief organizations as the latter held firmly to the view that outsiders should only be allocated scarce relief jobs once local demand had been fully satisfied. Many locals believed that as transients received bed and board, they already had a better deal than residents, and that this injustice would be compounded if they also pushed to the front of the line waiting for work relief.⁸² The fortunate employed used their labor organizations to object to the employment of transients, whom they suspected of not only taking away jobs from their unemployed union work mates, but also of giving employers the incentive to cut wages.⁸³

It is easy to understand why officials favored camps for transients. They were distant from concentrations of unemployment, and that distance provided insulation against attack by

organized labor. Moreover, within each camp there was a full range of tasks to be performed and therefore the skills of clients at all levels could be usefully employed. The electrician, the mason, the plumber, and the laborer not only found their *métier*; there was also an opportunity to teach men new skills. The drawback was that work relief was supposed to be an important element in a stabilization program that required integration in the community. The community spirit, however, seems to have been easier to achieve with families than with single men, though perhaps in the camps, with their relatively long stay, the residents had the compensation of achieving a greater sense of camaraderie.

Even for families who were prepared to work out a plan with caseworkers, stabilization posed serious difficulties. Consider, for example, those clients who came from the backwoods of Missouri or Arkansas where they had endured a miserable life as tenant farmers. Perpetually in debt even though every member of the family worked, now broken by drought, poor health, and starvation levels of relief, they did not want to return to their former communities. Kansas social workers felt that it would be cruel to send seriously disadvantaged people back to a perpetually depressing lifestyle, but they were acutely aware that the transition to an unfamiliar urban life for poverty-stricken rural transients would also pose formidable problems.⁸⁴ While the niceties of this dilemma were debated, rural clients who enjoyed the treatment centers were quick to encourage their relatives to join them, thus adding to the migration that the transient service was trying to contain. Meticulous casework was essential with poor rural families, many of whom would have benefited more from subsistence homesteads than from urban work relief.

With the demise of the Transient Service, accurate nationwide data on migration were no longer available. To get some indication of the extent of this ongoing problem, the U.S. Senate asked the states to gather information on transients for the month of June 1936. To meet with this request, administrators in eighty-six

Kansas counties, the Salvation Army, and all private welfare agencies provided information on travelers, or at least those travelers who had requested assistance. Though not as robust as the data collected by the Transient Service, where the possibility of double counting was remote, it seems that for the month in question, 271 families, most accompanied by children, sought help from the counties. Of those, 149 were successful in gaining assistance at a cost of only \$515.15, of which less than half was allocated for food. Either the counties had become extremely parsimonious or the needs of these applicants were not very pressing. The former seems the more convincing explanation. The counties also assisted 299 unattached males, but most of their expenses were to cover emergency medical care and hospitalization.⁸⁵ Migrants continued to flow into Kansas after the transient program was discontinued, but they were at the mercy of a county relief system that never considered them a high priority, or they were reliant upon the generosity of private charities.

Virtually all states were conscious of the presence of migrants but few considered that their out-migration had contributed to the national problem. In spite of the influx of transients, and a surplus of births over deaths, the total population of Kansas declined by approximately eighty thousand persons between 1930 and 1940, the first decline since census records began. In particular the state lost a disproportionate number of males and also young people, including families with children. During this period the state's farm population fell by approximately one hundred thousand, but those being driven from the family farm would find relatively few economic opportunities in urban Kansas. Many had to look out of state if they were to secure a future for themselves and their families.⁸⁶ An analysis of all the factors influencing the powerful push and pull factors, which strongly influenced so many potentially restless people throughout the 1930s, is beyond the scope of this paper.⁸⁷ Nor, indeed, can we answer that very pertinent question, namely, why others similarly affected by economic

misfortune opted to stay put. What is certain is that many of those who chose to move would need some targeted assistance along the way.

A representative sample of 5,489 interstate migrant families selected from those who were receiving care in transient bureaus during the summer of 1935 provides an fascinating insight into the causes and the results of population movement. Although the sample is weighted toward urban families, as the bureaus were located in cities, and those who were least equipped to move on to a new destination, this statistical exercise is of value if the results are properly interpreted.⁸⁸ Of 1,091 families in this sample who had migrated from Kansas, 33 percent had done so because of unemployment, 17 percent because of farm failure, while ill health had persuaded 13 percent to move. In other words, the loss of a job was a more significant reason for migration than farm misfortune. The 1,091 families originating from Kansas were found in the transient bureaus of thirty-four states, but the most significant locations were Colorado (335), California (193), and Missouri (149). It should be pointed out that Kansas gained more families than were lost, as the state's transient bureaus housed 1,368 out-of-state families. Of these, the most significant sources were Arkansas with 124 families, Missouri with 357, Oklahoma with 343, and Texas with 93. These figures show that most family migration was over relatively short distances.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, the survey did not consider single migrants, whose profile was probably very different.

The federal government provided Kansas with \$2.1 million to finance the Transient Relief program, which was a relatively large sum. Funding for the other FERA Special Emergency Relief Programs to March 1937 was as follows: Rural Rehabilitation, \$1.3 million; College Student Aid, \$334,000; and Emergency Education, \$265,000.⁹⁰ There can be no doubt that the Transient Service in Kansas gave valuable help to needy people who otherwise would have received little or no assistance at a time when adverse economic circumstances acted as a force for mobility. Indeed, during

the two years of its operation, the national transient program assisted approximately two hundred thousand families containing about seven hundred thousand persons. The figures show that there was a sizeable constituency of needy nonresident families and individuals who could benefit from the professional assistance offered by social workers in the struggle to stabilize their lives. It is hard to be fiercely critical of a well-intentioned program that had such a short life that its administrators had little opportunity to learn from mistakes. Kansas did provide a highly effective service for those who were prepared to avail themselves fully of it. A settled existence in Kansas, a return to their state of origin, or a planned onward migration was a favorable outcome for some families. However, it is evident that the majority of travelers, though it is not possible to say exactly how many, were prepared to use the Transient Service as a form of "passing on." There is also some evidence that the quality of service offered in Kansas acted as a magnet and attracted the needy.

With the demise of the FERA, federal assistance for needy migrants came to a halt and the responsibility for assistance was passed to the counties. It is not surprising that strangers were always a low priority in the distribution of welfare resources. As WPA funding was able to accommodate only about 40 percent of those eligible for relief employment, outsiders faced a considerable competitive disadvantage. Moreover, strict settlement rules ensured that if the residence requirements were not met, charitable handouts were all that transients could legitimately expect. Economically distressed migrants bore the heaviest cost of the transfer from the FERA to the WPA.⁹¹ From late 1935, indigent migrants were forced to turn once again to private relief agencies, or to the counties, or when all else failed, to begging.

NOTES

The research for this paper was made possible by the award of an American Council of Learned Societies—Fulbright American Studies Fellowship, which enabled me to visit the National Archives and

also to exploit the extensive resources of the Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas. The work was completed at the Institute for Advanced Study, La Trobe University, Australia.

1. Robert S. Wilson, "Transient Families," *The Family* 11 (December 1930): 243-51.

2. Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 5.

3. Peter Fearon, "From Self-Help to Federal Aid: Unemployment and Relief in Kansas, 1929-1932," *Kansas History* 13 (Summer 1990): 107-22.

4. Grace A. Browning, *The Development of Poor Relief Legislation in Kansas*, Social Service Monographs, no. 25 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935) 19, 94.

5. Kansas Emergency Relief Committee (KERC), *Public Welfare Service in Kansas*, KERC Bulletin no. 127, 1934, 47. The Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas

6. Robert S. Wilson, "Problems of Transiency," in *Handbook of Kansas Social Resources* (Topeka: Kansas Conference of Social Work, 1932), 158.

7. Carroll D. Clark, "Public Poor Relief in Kansas," in *Handbook of Kansas Social Resources*, 117.

8. Clark, "Public Poor Relief in Kansas," 158-59; KERC Bulletin no. 127, February 1934, 578.

9. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *Rooted in Dust: Surviving Drought and Depression in Southwestern Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 84-85.

10. Carroll D. Clarke and Roy L. Roberts, *People of Kansas: A Demographic and Sociological Study* (Topeka: Kansas State Planning Board, 1936), 70-71.

11. See the example in Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 42-43.

12. Wilson, "Problems of Transiency," 160.

13. Francis W. Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil, 1930-1936* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 47-78.

14. T. H. Watkins, *The Hungry Years: A Narrative History of the Great Depression in America* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), 68-72.

15. For a recent account of FERA, see Jeff Singleton, *The American Dole: Unemployment Relief and the Welfare State in the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000); Peter Fearon, "Federal Emergency Relief Administration," in *Encyclopedia of the Great Depression*, ed. Robert S. McElvaine (New York: Macmillan, 2004), 1:340-44; William R. Brock, *Welfare, Democracy, and the New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

16. Theodore E. Whiting, *Final Statistical Report of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration*

(Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1942), 70-74.

17. John N. Webb and Malcolm Brown, *Migrant Families*, WPA Research Monograph no. 18 (Washington, DC: [U.S. Government Printing Office], 1938), 73.

18. Texts generally ignore the impact of the FERA's Transient Bureau. Their authors' interest in the causes and the effects of migration is often heavily influenced by the Dust Bowl, John Steinbeck, and the Okies and concentrates on the post-1935 period. There is one research-based monograph that examines transiency in New York state: Joan M. Crouse, *The Homeless Transient in the Great Depression: New York State, 1929-1941* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

19. Peter Fearon, "Taxation, Spending and Budgets: Public Finance in Kansas during the Great Depression," *Kansas History* 28 (Winter 2005-6), 237-40.

20. Peter Fearon, "Kansas Poor Relief: The Influence of the Great Depression," *Mid-America* 78 (Summer 1996): 157-59.

21. Josephine Chapin Brown, *Public Relief 1929-1939* (New York: Henry Holt, 1940), 192-93, 199-200; William R. Brock, *Welfare, Democracy, and the New Deal*, 179, 191.

22. *Kansas Relief News-Bulletin*, no. 5, May 21, 1934, 3-4; T. J. Edmonds to A. M. Landon, April 25, 1934, Folder 3, Box 12, Papers of Governor Alfred M. Landon, Kansas State Archive, Topeka. The CWA was a federal employment program that lasted from November 1933 to March 1934 and provided work for 4 million Americans.

23. Doris Carothers, *Chronology of The Federal Emergency Relief Administration, May 12, 1933, to December 31, 1935*, WPA Research Monograph no. 6 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1937), 130-34.

24. See, for example, John N. Webb, *The Migratory Casual Worker*, WPA Research Monograph no. 7 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1937) 9-10, 13-16, 19; Harry L. Hopkins, *Spending to Save: The Complete Story of Relief* (1936; reprint, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), 130-34.

25. See, for example, John N. Webb, *The Transient Unemployed: A Description and Analysis of the Transient Relief Population*, WPA Research Monograph no. 3 (Washington, DC: Works Progress Administration, 1935); Webb and Brown, *Migrant Families*.

26. William W. Bremer, "Along the 'American Way': The New Deal's Work Relief Programs for the Unemployed," *Journal of American History* 62 (1975-76): 36-38.

27. Nels Anderson, *Men on the Move* (1940; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), 301-2; Hopkins, *Spending to Save*, 126-34.
28. Edmonds to Hopkins, Digest of Conversation between Gerard F. Price and Frances Moore (Field Supervisor, FERA), April 13, 1934, Narrative Reports and Correspondence, 1934, Transient Division Files, Kansas State File, FERA, RG 69, National Archives (NA), Washington, DC.
29. Minutes of Executive Committee of KERC, August 31, 1933, Papers of John G. Stutz, RH MS 327:1:30, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.
30. KERC Transient Division, Monthly Report, January 1934, Kansas Transient Division, State Files, 1933-36, FERA, RG 69, NA.
31. Whiting, *Final Statistical Report of the FERA*, 72.
32. KERC, "History and Development of the Transient Service, 1933-36," KERC Transient Service, Topeka, August 1936, 22-25. This informative and lengthy typescript is in the Stutz Papers, RH MS 327:3:29.
33. The 1934 figures are from KERC, *Public Welfare Service in Kansas, 1934*, KERC Bulletin no. 289, November 1935, 743-45; for 1935 data, see *Public Welfare Service in Kansas, 1935*, KERC Bulletin no. 355, July 1936, 18-20.
34. All figures from Whiting, *Final Statistical Report of the FERA*, 71-73, 297; KERC Bulletin no. 289, November 1935, 743.
35. KERC Bulletin no. 289, November 1935, 743.
36. KERC, "History and Development of the Transient Service," 30.
37. *Ibid.*, 26.
38. KERC Bulletin no. 289, November 1935, 745.
39. KERC Transient Division, Monthly Report, January 1934.
40. KERC, "History and Development of the Transient Service," 41.
41. KERC Transient Division, Monthly Report, December 1934. Work relief rules stipulated that any output from projects must not be sold. Toys, sheets, and other items made by relief workers were distributed free to other clients.
42. KERC Bulletin no. 289, November 1935, 745.
43. Edmonds to Hopkins, April 13, 1934, FERA Transient Division Files.
44. KERC Bulletin no. 289, November 1935, 744. At the end of 1934, 140 families were receiving relief in the counties through the State Transient Service.
45. KERC Bulletin no. 289, November 1935, 745.
46. The separately funded Civilian Conservation Corps also established camps for young men and for veterans.
47. KERC Transient Division, Monthly Report, July, 1934.
48. KERC Bulletin no. 355, July 1936, 20.
49. KERC Transient Division, Monthly Report, May 1935.
50. KERC Transient Division, Monthly Report, September 1934.
51. G. F. Price to William J. Plunkert, Acting Director of Transient Activities, April 7, 1934, Transient Division Files, Narrative Reports and Correspondence, 1934, Kansas File, FERA, RG 69, NA. The centers for single men were large. In early 1934, Fort Scott had accommodation for 300 but had registered 415 men; Hutchinson with 300 registrations was nearly full while Topeka had registered 320 men but had places for only 250. Several centers had to acquire temporary buildings to cope with the overflow. KERC Transient Division, Monthly Report, January 1934.
52. KERC, Summary Report of Activities of Kansas Transient Service, September 27, 1933, to July 31, 1934, Records of the Transient Division, Kansas State File, FERA, RG 69, NA.
53. KERC Bulletin no. 289, November 1935, 745.
54. A venereal disease clinic was established at all treatment centers and camps. All suspected sufferers were given Wasserman Kahn tests at the State Public Health Laboratory.
55. The provision was not so attractive in other Plains states. Carroll Van West, "The Best Kind of Building: The New Deal Landscape of the Northern Plains, 1933-42," *Great Plains Quarterly* 14 (Spring 1994): 132-33.
56. KERC, "History and Development of the Transient Service," 41-42.
57. In the case of Gardner, the work was begun by skilled CWA labor and completed by unskilled transient workers. KERC Bulletin no. 289, November 1935, 745-46, has information on all the Lake projects.
58. KERC Bulletin no. 289, November 1935, 748. It is possible that the segregation was a result of differing wage rates for CWA and Transient Service workers which was viewed as potentially disturbing if the two groups were working side by side.
59. KERC Transient Division, Monthly Report, May 1935.
60. KERC Bulletin no. 289, November 1935, 748; KERC, "History and Development of the Transient Service," 77-79.
61. KERC Bulletin no. 144, January 1935, 1.
62. KERC Transient Division, Monthly Report, May 1934.
63. KERC Transient Division Monthly Report, September 1934.
64. Deposition from Chairman of Shawnee County Relief Administration, January 12, 1934;

Plunkert to Price, February 5, 1934; B. E. George to Price, January 29, 1934; Price to M. Lewis, January 30, 1934, Transient Division Files, Kansas State File, FERA, RG 69, NA.

65. *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, vol. 4: *The Court Disapproves*, 1935 (New York: Random House, 1938), 15-25.

66. Hopkins, *Spending to Save*, 136-37.

67. *Hutchinson News*, October 10, 1935. The local fear was that eight of the sixteen residents in the Hutchinson center could immediately become legal residents.

68. *Norton Telegram*, October 10, 1935.

69. Donald S. Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy* (1943; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 332-34.

70. KERC Bulletin no. 355, July 1936, 19-20.

71. KERC, *Social Welfare Service in Kansas*, 1936, Bulletin no. 380, January 1937, 26-28.

72. KERC Bulletin no. 355, July 1935, 285.

73. Edmonds to Hopkins, April 13, 1934, FERA Transient Division Files; KERC Bulletin no. 355, July 1935, 41.

74. Peter Fearon, "Kansas Poor Relief," 170-73.

75. Edmonds to Hopkins, April 13, 1934, FERA Transient Division Files.

76. KERC Bulletin no. 289, November 1935, 745.

77. KERC Transient Division, Monthly Report, July 1934.

78. Price to Plunkert, April 7, 1934, FERA Transient Division Files.

79. Nels Anderson, *Men on the Move*, 305-6.

80. KERC Transient Division, Monthly Report, May 1934.

81. KERC Transient Division, Monthly Report, 47, December 1934; Price to Plunkert, April 7, 1934, FERA Transient Division Files.

82. Price to Plunkert, April 7, 1934.

83. Price to Plunkert, April 7, 1934; Edmonds to Hopkins, April 13, 1934, FERA Transient Division Files; KERC, "History and Development of the Transient Service," 30.

84. KERC Transient Service, Monthly Reports, January 1934 and September 1934.

85. KERC Bulletin no. 380, January 1937, 26-27.

86. Emile B. Dade, *Migration of Kansas Population, 1930 to 1945*, Industrial Research Series no. 6 (Lawrence, KS: [University of Kansas], 1946), 7-21.

87. For an overview of migration during this period, see *The Problems of a Changing Population*, Report of the Committee on Population Problems to the National Resources Committee, May 1938 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938).

88. Webb and Brown, *Migrant Families*, xvii-xviii.

89. Ibid., appendix A, supplementary tables 2, 4-6.

90. Whiting, *Final Statistical Report of the FERA*, 297.

91. James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle against Poverty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 60-62.