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## The Lubbock Chamber Of Commerce, The New Deal, And The Ropesville Resettlement Project

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# THE LUBBOCK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, THE NEW DEAL, AND THE ROPESVILLE RESETTLEMENT PROJECT

WILLIAM CLAYSON

US Highway 62 crosses the town of Ropesville, population 480, between Lubbock and Brownfield on the South Plains of Texas. To the north and west of town, scattered among the suburban-style homes of contemporary farmers, stand several dozen small cottages of identical design. Some are still occupied, many nothing more than ruins, and a few have been added on to, stuccoed, or provided a screened porch. All are surrounded by cotton fields and most are accompanied by ramshackle outbuildings, rusted tractors, dormant windmills, and

sealed irrigation wells. These farmsteads are the remains of a rural community project constructed by the federal government during the Great Depression for the resettlement of seventy-six impoverished farm families. The Ropesville Project was one of ninety-nine that were planned and built by the New Deal's controversial community building program. These communities were initiated during the early stages of the New Deal by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads of the Department of the Interior, then taken over by the Rural Rehabilitation Division of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). In 1935, the two agencies were transferred to the Resettlement Administration (RA) which was replaced by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in 1937.<sup>1</sup> These programs, founded on a variety of social and economic theories and ideals, were all based on the belief that rational planning could guarantee a humane, democratic, and egalitarian way of life on the land. While the history of the Ropesville Project reveals much about the community building program, life as a resettlement client, and the long term effects of New Deal social planning, the paper that follows is primarily concerned with the

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project's beginnings—particularly the involvement of the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce in its initial development. This story exposes a hidden interaction between the ideals of the New Deal community program, the ambitions of elites on the local level, and the realities of farming on the South Plains.

The resettlement community building program was the most ambitious and controversial effort launched by the New Deal to rehabilitate the rural poor. The communities were to provide settlers with a lifestyle few American farmers had experienced, including homes with modern plumbing and electricity; freedom from the constant threat of eviction because of market vagaries or climate; financial security for the future; and educational and cultural facilities as an integral part of community life.

Although the New Deal community program is commonly associated with radical left-wing economist Rexford Tugwell and his Resettlement Administration, the concept for rural resettlement communities was proposed by agricultural economist M.L. Wilson of Montana State College. His plan called for "subsistence homestead" communities, in which settlers would grow food on small plots of land while they earned wages in decentralized rural industries. Residents of such subsistence communities would not add to the surpluses of commercial agriculture markets, but would have the means to feed themselves in economic downturns. The plan would also secure for them a part of the vanishing rural lifestyle that Wilson admired.<sup>2</sup>

The plan seemed communistic to local and congressional conservatives. For every supporter, there was an opponent who doubted industry could be lured to the countryside. The Division of Subsistence Homesteads of the Department of the Interior, established by executive order in August of 1933 with Wilson as chief, drew criticism because of high costs and the federal government's strict control over the development of the communities. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes insisted local control would invite graft while

his opponents felt that local control offered flexibility. An alternative to tight federal control was offered by the Division of Rural Rehabilitation of the FERA in 1934.<sup>3</sup> The FERA's rural rehabilitation plan was to be administered on the state level by corporations managed by a board of directors comprised of prominent agriculturalists, educators, and businessmen. Most of the funds were earmarked for direct loans to individual farmers, but the construction of "rural-industrial" resettlement communities in drought areas, the cut-over regions of the Great Lakes, and the coal mining regions of the Appalachians and Ozarks was a small, but significant, part of the FERA's program.<sup>4</sup>

The FERA's plan was similar to the subsistence homesteads concept except rural industrial communities would balance cooperative farming and cooperative industry. Small family plots for subsistence would combine with wage work on large-scale communal farms and cooperative industrial enterprises. FERA communities were less expensive than their predecessors because resettlement clients themselves built homes and community buildings.<sup>5</sup> According to Lawrence Westbrook, FERA administrator in Texas and later assistant to director Harry Hopkins, the FERA projects were to be modeled on the "closely knit communities which were established by North European and Scandinavian colonists according to the European farm village system" because these immigrants seemed able to take care of themselves without having to go on relief. Westbrook believed homes, health and sanitation facilities, recreational and educational opportunities, and assistance in establishing community industrial enterprises would, in the long run, cost less than direct relief payments.<sup>6</sup>

Texas Rural Communities, Incorporated, the agency responsible for distributing FERA funds in Texas, announced a "rural colonization plan" in early February 1934.<sup>7</sup> According to A.B. Davis, manager of the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce, chamber members "were convinced that the idea was . . . one of the few



FIG. 1. *Typical homestead on Ropesville Project, 1936.* Courtesy Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas. Photo collection #61.

worthwhile proposed experiments in the New Deal . . . that had been thought of that would actually rehabilitate humans instead of dopping them with the dole.”<sup>8</sup> The FERA’s rural-industrial communities plan might solve the problem the South Plains had—how to develop about five million acres of unplowed arable virgin land.<sup>9</sup>

The South Plains in the early thirties showed a stronger resemblance to the cattle kingdom it had been than the cotton kingdom it was slowly becoming. Less than half a century had passed since the Comanches and the great buffalo herds had been driven from the region and there were still a few old cowboys around to tell about the land before fences, roads, or towns. Except for the oil that lay

largely untapped beneath the buffalo grass and mesquite, the only natural resource the Llano Estacado had to offer potential settlers was land. By the beginning of the Depression, the vast majority of this land remained unplowed and the relatively few pioneer families that were farming on the South Plains in 1930 had migrated to the region during the teens and twenties. In Lubbock County, the most populous of all South Plains counties, farms increased from 208 in 1910 to 2495 in 1930, while improved acres increased from 838 to 370,512.<sup>10</sup> Although this rapid rise in agricultural development was accompanied by a rise in the population as a whole, the region maintained a frontier character well into the twentieth century. As late as 1940, horses remained

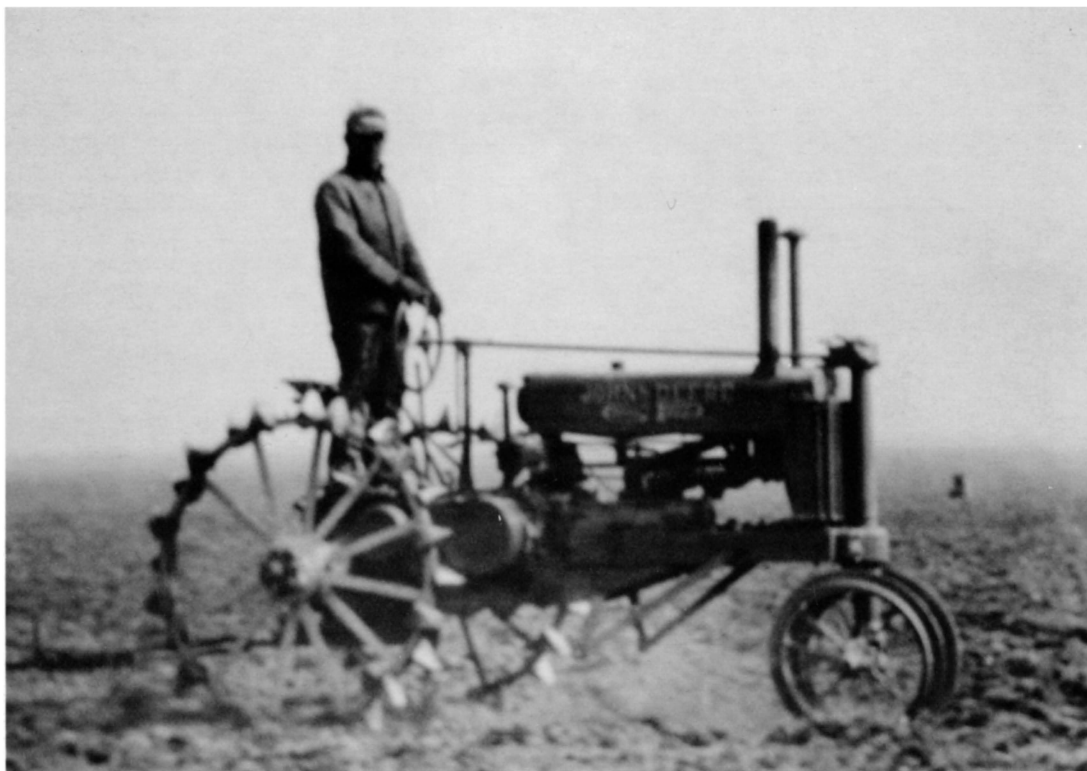


FIG. 2. *Hired tractor operator cultivating, undated.* Courtesy Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas. Photo collection #61.

a common mode of transportation, and many families still lived in sod dugouts without plumbing or electricity.

Agricultural development came late to the South Plains primarily because of the area's unpredictable weather. Like the rest of the region between the ninety-eighth meridian and the Rockies, the South Plains is semiarid, neither "halfway between humid and arid, [nor] half dry or half wet," and in some years "wet or dry at wrong times from the standpoint of agricultural productions and yields." Carl Kraenzel called the unpredictable precipitation on the Great Plains the "undefinable aspect of semi-aridity" that made farming a risky business.<sup>11</sup>

Settlers were attracted to the Llano Estacado during the teens and twenties when

rainfall was adequate for farming.<sup>12</sup> Migration accelerated throughout the twenties. The Great Crash had no immediate effect on most farmers in the region, but the drought, dust, and lack of income that came in the years to follow were disastrous. Throughout these difficult times local people retained faith in the land. Each year they were certain that the rains would return—along with magnificent crop yields. While agricultural economists in Washington were recommending severe cutbacks in production and retirement of submarginal lands, Lubbock area boosters were endeavoring to open up millions of acres of virgin South Plains land to farming.

A. B. Davis and the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce were painfully aware of the difficulties presented by the South Plains climate,





FIG. 3. *Harvesting sorghum, undated.* Courtesy Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas. Photo collection #61.

but what they deemed more important was the potential the region had when there was enough rain. West Texas had few of the problems, such as Johnson grass and boll weevils, that plagued more humid cotton growing areas, and the millions of acres that surrounded Lubbock could easily be converted to crop land. It seemed irrational to the prominent Lubbockites to allow such land to remain unplowed indefinitely because of temporary droughts. Historian Donald Worster has suggested that drought is an “inevitable fact of life” of the semiarid Great Plains. Most Lubbockites of the 1930s would have agreed but, like the perennial optimists Worster studied in southwest Kansas and the Oklahoma-Texas Panhandle region, they also believed that rain would inevitably return.<sup>13</sup>

What was needed was a means to provide farm income during the droughts. Davis believed the FERA rural-industrial communities plan of early February 1934 was the solution. To take advantage of this opportunity the chamber appointed a Local Advisory Committee to “investigate and recommend” on a proposed “New Deal Colony” for the South Plains. The resultant plan had one primary objective—to serve as a model for large landowners of the region to develop their extensive unplowed holdings.<sup>14</sup>

The most active members of the Local Advisory Committee came from the trained and experienced faculty of recently established Texas Technological College. Dean A. B. Leidigh of the Division of Agriculture had grown up on a farm in Hutchison, Kansas,

received his graduate education from Texas A&M, and served as head of the USDA experiment station at Amarillo during the teens. W. L. Stangel, head of the animal husbandry department, had been raised in Stangelville, Wisconsin, had a master's degree in animal husbandry from the University of Missouri, and had served on the faculty at Texas A&M before coming to Tech.<sup>15</sup> President Knapp, by far the most influential and involved member of the committee, was the son of Seaman Knapp, founder of the demonstration service of the USDA. He had been raised in Iowa, educated at Vanderbilt University, and had gained his experience running a plantation in Louisiana. Before becoming Tech's second president, Knapp had served on the faculty at Alabama Polytechnic College (now Auburn University) and Oklahoma A&M.<sup>16</sup> More important than Knapp's experience, however, was his position as chairman of the board of directors for Texas Rural Communities. Other members of the committee included agriculturalists Don L. Jones, administrator of Texas A&M's Lubbock experiment station, and P.T. Monfort, Lubbock County extension agent. From the business sector came S. A. Wells, a prominent area merchant, and Judge R. C. Hopping, author and real estate manager for Ellwood Farms, Incorporated, the company responsible for colonizing the mammoth Spade Ranch. Finally, there was A. B. Davis, who was described as "a ring tail tooter and a driver who could cuss louder than any man twice his size." The chamber manager played an invaluable role in relations with the public, the press, and state and federal officials.<sup>17</sup>

The committee members and the chamber of commerce were convinced that Lubbock would benefit greatly from a successful, highly publicized federal project in the region. The committee submitted a twenty-five page application to Texas Rural Communities, outlining their plans for a project and advertising the benefits of farming in the Lubbock area. The project would take one hundred families "permanently out of the industrial channels

of the towns and cities and return them to farm life." Committee members even hoped:

the government would extend the program, such extension being unlimited because of the five million acres of fine, fertile, tillable agricultural land yet to go under the plow on the South Plains [and that] the large landowners of the section might be induced to follow suit, thus more intensively developing the section.<sup>18</sup>

Dr. Knapp's position on the Texas Rural Communities board of directors probably guaranteed acceptance of the committee's application. It was officially approved before the end February 1934.<sup>19</sup>

The Chamber of Commerce hoped a successful resettlement project would achieve three goals. First, it would be a living advertisement of the benefits of farm settlement on the South Plains and a working demonstration of the quality of the region's only natural resource—land. Second, it would show large landowners of the region how to colonize their own holdings, attracting new settlers, thus increasing the tax base and greatly improving business.<sup>20</sup> Last and most important, the members of the committee hoped the labor pool a large community of small farmers might provide would attract industry to the region.<sup>21</sup>

The committee's plan was a modification of FERA's rural-industrial communities. FERA settlers were to receive small plots of land for subsistence farming and earn wages on large-scale cooperative farms and community industries.<sup>22</sup> The committee members felt that such a plan was "too communistic" and determined that each family should receive forty acres to grow vegetables for the family, feed for livestock, and cotton as a cash crop for income beyond that provided by the project's industrial enterprise.<sup>23</sup> The committee had several locations in mind, but selected a 4000 acre site near the town of Ropesville, on the Spade Ranch lands in neighboring Hockley



FIG. 4. *Charlie Ward (project client) in front of his homestead, 1938.* Courtesy Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas. Photo Collection #61.

County, because Lubbock County was nearing the cotton quota set by the Bankhead Cotton Control Act of 1934.<sup>24</sup> The location, however, was one of very few decisions made by the committee that was included in the project's final design. The committee's plan, never fully endorsed by FERA officials, was eliminated from consideration when the RA took control of the FERA projects on 1 May 1935.<sup>25</sup>

#### FORTY ACRES, DUST BOWL, AND THE CASE OF FARMER A. JUDD

Walter Prescott Webb concluded that the story of white settlement west of the Cross Timbers was one of environmental conquest. Webb believed that those settlers who crossed

the ninety-eighth meridian conquered their new environment and adapted it to settlement with inventions such as barbed wire, windmills, and six-shooters. These adaptations included larger farms and implements designed to conserve the limited precipitation of the Great Plains. Webb asserted that farming the Plains required "big machines, strong horsepower, and rapid work. This means that farming in the Great Plains is done on a much larger scale than elsewhere, not because the West wants to be different, but because it must if it is to have any measure of prosperity."<sup>26</sup>

Although the average annual rainfall in Lubbock often fell below the twenty inches per year necessary for general dry-farming purposes, the Local Advisory Committee was reluctant to admit that Webb's adaptations were



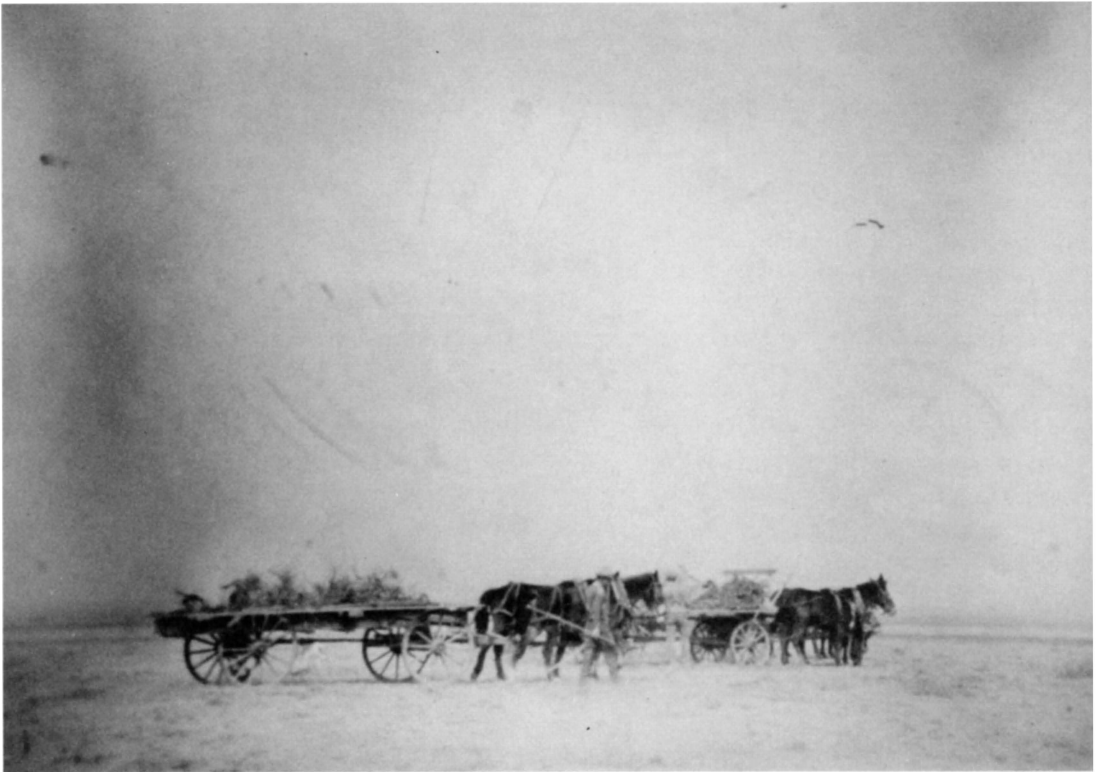


FIG. 5. *Clearing land on the Project (WPA labor), 1936.* Courtesy Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas. Photo Collection #61.

necessary. Their reluctance was not derived from ignorance or a stubborn devotion to farming methods developed over centuries in more hospitable climates. To admit that the South Plains required extreme adaptations would have been tantamount to admitting that their Ropesville Plans were impractical.

To promote the project locally, A. B. Davis scheduled speaking engagements at local civic clubs such as Rotary and Kiwanis throughout February and March of 1934. Lubbockites applauded the idea of a farm project, and the Local Advisory Committee's plan was largely accepted except for the size of the individual farm units. As Davis explained,

Our plan calls for forty acres . . . Instead of having one family on 160 acres, if we have four families on 160 acres, each of them

making a better living, thereby having a higher plane of living than the average family has on 160 acres, business will be multiplied four times as a result of this demonstration.<sup>27</sup>

The increase in business that Davis hoped would result from the Ropesville demonstration obviously appealed to Lubbock merchants, but he did not clarify how a smaller acreage would place project farmers on "a higher plane of living." He did not inform his audiences of the FERA's rural-industrial concept or the committee's modification of it into a balance between community industry and independent farming. Davis instead provided the cost and production records of a local vegetable farmer named A. Judd, included in the committee's application to the

FERA, to demonstrate how small farming might be practiced profitably in the region.<sup>28</sup>

When Garnet Reeves, publicity manager for the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce, interviewed Mr. Judd during February 1934, Judd reported that his 1933 net income from just fifteen acres of vegetables was more than \$2300, or approximately \$150 per acre.<sup>29</sup> The committee estimated that project farmers could earn up to \$259 per acre from vegetables, an estimate Davis deemed conservative.<sup>30</sup> Admitting that the regional market could only support a limited number of vegetable farmers, the committee determined that only three acres could be planted in vegetables per project unit, which would provide approximately \$777 per year (\$259 per acre) in income. Twenty acres would be planted in cotton, which, they estimated, would provide another \$500 per year. The balance of the forty acres would be planted in feed for livestock.<sup>31</sup> Although Davis used Judd's farm as an example of how small, diversified farming could succeed, a significant part of Judd's interview with Reeves was omitted from the committee's application to the Texas Rural Communities and Davis's talk to Lubbock civic clubs. The success of Judd's fifteen acres of vegetables was insured by a \$2000 irrigation unit capable of pumping 600 gallons of water per minute from an eighty-four foot well, a technological innovation on the South Plains.<sup>32</sup>

The committee's report implies that Judd was indebted to nothing more than the benevolence of the South Plains soil for his success. Irrigation, like larger acreages, was an adaptation peculiar to arid and semiarid regions, and to admit that such an adaptation was necessary, or even beneficial, would have meant that South Plains rainfall was unsuitable for small-scale farming, so the committee consistently opposed irrigation. Some of their objections were reasonable. They suggested that an "irrigated undertaking" would fail because one hundred families with enough experience to farm successfully with irrigation could not be found on the South Plains. The availability of ground water in quanti-

ties necessary for irrigation was uncertain in the 1930s and committee members feared reduction of the ground water supply.<sup>33</sup> Less reasonably, however, the committee members argued that mechanized irrigation was simply unnecessary. In the committee's original application to Texas Rural Communities, they asserted that "no irrigation is needed for general farming on the South Plains," but suggested that abundant water was available to project families wanting to irrigate gardens from windmills.<sup>34</sup>

Unlike the Lubbock Local Advisory Committee, officials of the Plainview Chamber of Commerce believed that a federally funded resettlement project was the ideal way to demonstrate the practicability and profitability of farming with mechanized irrigation on the South Plains. In 1935 the Plainview Chamber submitted an application that was virtually identical to Lubbock's with one significant difference—the Plainview project was based on the use of mechanized irrigation. According to the Plainview application, "it has been proven time and time again in this section that average and even large families can make a good living, school their children, and have virtually all the modern conveniences, on an irrigated tract of forty acres."<sup>35</sup> In Plainview, an area one civic booster labeled the "land of the underground rain," irrigation was considered a positive and progressive way to protect crops from drought, keep down blowing dirt, and cultivate the millions of unplowed acres on the South Plains. The Lubbock committee, on the other had, felt that insufficient rainfall was a greater liability than irrigation was a benefit.

Whether or not state and federal officials saw through the use of Judd's cost and production estimates, the committee's size limitations were quickly eliminated as plans for the project advanced through 1934 and 1935. That the plans were accepted at all was probably more a result of Knapp's position as chairman of the Texas Rural Communities Board of Directors than any confidence federal officials had in their success. The committee offered a

compromise of sixty acres per unit, but federal officials felt that the plan was not well suited to the South Plains climate. The extra income the committee members hoped the settlers would earn from growing vegetables was eliminated from the project's design when Adam R. Johnson, Texas Rural Communities manager and author of the state report to the FERA concerning the Ropesville Project, wrote that the "comparatively short growing season and the climatic conditions together with the opportunity for specialized cropping make [the South Plains] less adaptable to diversified agriculture than most places."<sup>36</sup>

After the Resettlement Administration (RA) took over the project in May 1935, state and local agencies involved with projects progressively lost their authority. In August 1935, W. B. Orr, assistant manager of the Texas Rural Communities, reported to the Local Advisory Committee that the RA had determined that each unit should be 120 acres. Davis reported this change to farm reporter Victor Schoffelmayer, who published the committee's complaints in the *Dallas Morning News* and later in a collection of essays entitled *The South Plains of Texas Historical Sketches*. According to Schoffelmayer the RA's decision on farm unit sizes brought a "storm of protest" from the Local Advisory Committee, the type of protest "peculiar to Plainsmen when they feel their section is misunderstood."<sup>37</sup> The committee primarily objected to the increase in unit size to 120 acres. Davis complained,

a large number of units of approximately sixty acres each will enable a farmer to make a better living than the large average now makes on 160 acres. . . . Hell, any and everybody who knows anything about this country knows that any intelligent farmer, properly started out and capitalized, can make a good living on 120 acres on the South Plains of Texas.<sup>38</sup>

Once again, Davis did not clarify how families were going to make more on less acreage. Neither Davis' letter nor Schoffelmayer's article

made specific mention of the decentralized rural factories that were the ultimate goal of the members of the Local Advisory Committee. Davis concluded that the original purposes of the project, to demonstrate the benefits of settlement on the South Plains and to stimulate regional development through intensive land colonization, were "completely lost under the 120 acre plan."<sup>39</sup> Despite objections, the Ropesville Project's final plans included 120 acre limits. When the first thirty-three families moved on to the project in January of 1936, some of the homes had to be disassembled and moved to accommodate the final unit size of an average of 165 cultivable acres.<sup>40</sup> The committee members, like many other local officials throughout the country, blamed RA administrator R. G. Tugwell.<sup>41</sup>

Throughout his career, Tugwell was criticized for his outspoken and left-leaning economic philosophy. The RA did not follow the committee's plan because Tugwell felt the rural-industrial communities concept was flawed. Although Roosevelt had assigned the Division of Subsistence Homesteads and the FERA's Rural Rehabilitation Division to the RA in 1935, Tugwell considered them a burdensome liability, impractical programs forced on the RA for the sake of administrative efficiency.<sup>42</sup> Tugwell did not believe that industry could be lured into rural areas. While programs could keep some farmers on the land and help to alleviate rural poverty, most of the displaced poor would be forced to move to the cities. As he said in 1935, "we must be prepared to absorb very large numbers of persons from farms into our general industrial and urban life . . . subsistence homestead projects will function merely as eddies of retreat for exceptional persons."<sup>43</sup>

The practicability of the committee's plan was cast into doubt by the voluminous research conducted by New Deal agencies, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of the Interior following the drought emergency on the Great Plains in the 1930s. This research was summarized in a 1936 report

by the president's Great Plains Committee, prominent officials from seven federal agencies. This report, *The Future of the Great Plains*, concluded that "unless there was a permanent change in the agricultural pattern on the Plains, relief always would have to be extended whenever the available rainfall was deficient." The committee concluded that unwise agricultural practices on the Great Plains were responsible for the severe wind erosion and land deterioration of the Dust Bowl period, but "careful planning [and] fewer and larger farms on scientifically selected sites" would help to restore the land to provide a comfortable and consistent living for a limited number of farmers and ranchers. Farm sizes would have to increase and the number of farms to decrease.<sup>44</sup> The practical experience of men involved with the Ropesville Project confirmed the findings of the Great Plains Committee. For example, C. P. Blackwell, Assistant Regional Director of the Land Utilization Division of the RA, who owned more than a half-section of land on the South Plains, informed Davis in December of 1935 that "with thirty years of farming experience in that section to my credit, I would have to discount many of your calculations because I own a farm of 330 acres which has not produced enough in the past five years to pay the taxes."<sup>45</sup>

Although the extended drought decimated the South Plains agricultural economy, the committee insisted that the drought and the dust storms were temporary inconveniences and that rain would inevitably return. They were aware of the problems landowners like Blackwell were having but they, particularly A. B. Davis, were consistently optimistic about the future of the South Plains. Davis's protest of the Federal Land Bank appraisal in March 1935 reveals his optimism. The appraiser included the Lubbock area in the "extended 1934 drouth [sic] area" but Davis insisted to officials of the FERA and later to the RA that this was misleading. Including the information about low rainfall was unfair because the "drought of 1934 was not confined to this area.

It was nation wide, in fact, it was world wide. No one knows what the future will be."<sup>46</sup>

Donald Worster has characterized the Dust Bowl as a region that had borders as "inexact and shifting as a sand-dune." Whether or not the South Plains area can be included in what became known as the Dust Bowl is uncertain. Lubbock was on the southern fringe of the area the SCS defined as having suffered from "severe wind erosion" between 1935 and 1938.<sup>47</sup> Whether or not the region could be considered part of the Dust Bowl was a matter of perspective. Most farmers in the region probably thought the label accurate. Maureen Condra and her son Frank, residents of the Ropesville Project, recalled a midday duster in 1938 that filled their house with dust so thick and black they were blinded beyond an arm's length. To protect her children from suffocating, Mrs. Condra placed wet rags over their noses while they slept. Lillian Willis recalled her husband going out on horseback to roundup livestock after a storm had drifted dust dunes over the fences on land northwest of Lubbock now owned by Texas Tech University. Viedna Darby recalled her husband getting lost on the way back from the out-house, blinded by the blowing dirt.<sup>48</sup> While storms like this frequented the Lubbock area throughout the 1930s, the Local Advisory Committee made every effort to disassociate the South Plains from the Dust Bowl label.

In an effort to "stay out of the Dust Bowl," the committee initiated another "storm of protest" when RA officials decided to transfer the Ropesville Project to RA Region Twelve, with headquarters in Amarillo, from Region Eight, which was headquartered in Dallas.<sup>49</sup> The committee felt that Region Twelve was associated with the Dust Bowl while farms and crops around Lubbock were completely different. R. P. Trent, administrator of Region Eight, informed Tugwell that the Local Advisory Committee felt the appropriate dividing line between Regions Eight and Twelve should extend from the southwest corner of Oklahoma along the northern boundaries of those counties immediately north of Lubbock

because "the country south of the line is not seriously affected by wind erosion, dust storms, etc., and is not characteristic of the rest of the dust bowl."<sup>50</sup> The original boundary remained, down the length of the ninety-eighth meridian and west along the southern edge of the Llano Estacado. The decision to transfer Ropesville to Region Twelve was probably made for administrative efficiency, since Amarillo was a little more than two hours drive away while Dallas was about six. Then there was the fact that L. H. Hauter, director of the Amarillo office of the RA, had visited Lubbock in April of 1936 during a dust storm, a common occurrence in Lubbock during the spring time. This particular storm, according to Garnet Reeves, hit Lubbock like a "slap in the face"—as did Hauter's speech. He began his talk by saying sarcastically, as Reeves noted, that he was "glad to come down here to Lubbock where you don't have any dust."<sup>51</sup> The project was transferred to Region Eight effective 1 October 1936.<sup>52</sup>

The local advisory committee was aware of how harsh the South Plains climate could be, but they refused to concede that dust storms and drought were anything more than temporary inconveniences. Otherwise their plans were impractical, and to them the Ropesville Project was not a relief measure but an advertisement for the benefits of farm settlement on the South Plains. Drought and dust were not incentives for settlers, and the committee, believing in the regenerative powers of the land, were exasperated by the opinion of RA officials. As A. B. Davis informed the members of the Local Advisory Committee, "I still have some hopes of our doing something with the Ropesville Project [but] . . . all too many of those in authority just don't believe in this country. They speak of it as being a country of 'low rainfall.' They just can't get it out of their heads that this is not a desert."<sup>53</sup>

#### "STRICTLY INDIGENOUS AMERICAN LINES"

The Lubbock Chamber of Commerce did not wish to consider any negative aspects of

the South Plains climate nor any political, social, or economic issues that prospective settlers, land owners, or industrial investors could construe as negative. Committee members believed the Ropesville Project could begin to revolutionize agriculture on the South Plains, but they endeavored not to deviate from traditional, conservative American norms or to allow federal officials to do so. The committee members sought to disassociate the project from the economic left and to limit project costs, so as to avoid the negative attention other community projects were receiving for excessive spending.

Much of the support for the Ropesville Project came from Colonel Lawrence Westbrook, the original administrator of the FERA in Texas and later assistant administrator of the agency under Harry Hopkins. Westbrook wanted the FERA rural resettlement communities to resemble the communal villages established in the United States by Northern European immigrants. He believed these immigrant communities had "almost invariably . . . managed to get by without having to go on relief" because the members cooperated.<sup>54</sup> The FERA plan called for a small subsistence plot for each family combined with wage work on large communal farms and in cooperative industrial enterprises.<sup>55</sup> Unlike "crackpot economic or social panaceas," FERA communities were to make families "self sustaining by an investment in equipment and supplies which would not exceed the cost of extending relief over a period of several months."<sup>56</sup>

Westbrook's ideas about communal village life and cooperative farming carried the leftist tinge the committee wanted to avoid. As Davis wrote Victor Schoffelmayer, the members of the committee "just did not believe the community or cooperative thing would work with worthwhile Americans—it was too communistic."<sup>57</sup> Davis insisted on not being quoted, but Schoffelmayer agreed with him, stating that Ropesville was to "be operated on strictly indigenous American lines, provided that the federal planning administration will incorporate some of the advice of the South Plains



special committee.”<sup>58</sup> Individual family farms, not cooperative farms or subsistence homesteads, were what the committee sought for the “young, pioneer, independent stock” that would be moving into the farmsteads at Ropesville.<sup>59</sup>

Because of the “communistic” implications of cooperative or communal projects, most New Deal communities, including Ropesville, were designed from the beginning for individual family farms. Only four farm communities operated by the RA and its successor the Farm Security Administration (FSA) might have been appropriately labeled cooperative or communal, in that each farmer had a small subsistence plot and the community as a whole worked a large commercial plot. These four, however, received much attention from reporters and congressmen dismayed by the possibility of leftist “encroachments.”<sup>60</sup>

In Texas, the target for anti-leftist suspicions was the Woodlake Community near Houston, which seemed to represent all that was “un-American” about the New Deal community program. Writing for *The Farmer Stockman* Clarence Roberts suggested that Woodlake ruined the lives of men and their families because the good houses and steady work were not worth the embarrassment of “complete dependence on the government.”<sup>61</sup> Several Ropesville committee members visited the Woodlake Project, but according to Davis it was the antithesis of what they wanted to accomplish on the South Plains.<sup>62</sup>

The Ropesville committee also wanted to avoid Woodlake’s high costs and demonstrate how inexpensive farm settlement on the South Plains could be. When the March 1935 “Application for Approval” to the FERA for the Ropesville Project showed little resemblance to the committee’s plan, the Chamber of Commerce forwarded a copy to Dean Leidigh of the Division of Agriculture at Texas Tech. Leidigh scribbled corrections in the margins and slashed through figures and tables in a bold, impatient cursive. Underneath the total estimate of \$4886.07 for land and homes Leidigh wrote “too damn much!” In the mar-

gin beside the itemized list of construction, implement, livestock, and startup costs he wrote “change all this.” The dean slashed all the estimates, except the cost of land and barns, reducing the total cost for beginning operations, including land, construction, livestock, and implements, from \$5769 to \$4411 per unit.<sup>63</sup>

These cost reductions brought praise from the Texas Rural Communities Board of Directors. Dr. R. Benedict, president of the corporation, suggested that the committee was “entitled to gold buttons” for their endeavors.<sup>64</sup> Carl Lovelace, a very strong adherent of the Ropesville Project on the Texas Rural Communities Board of Advisors, said:

It seems to me we have a very unique situation here, this is the only time the community has ever evinced any interest after the land was sold . . . . They are putting their knowledge and experience into [the Ropesville Project]—they are not asking us to spend more—they are asking us to spend less.<sup>65</sup>

To the committee members, particularly Knapp, the facilities that were to equip most New Deal communities offended the West Texas pioneer spirit. Conveniences like indoor plumbing and electricity would deprive the settlers of the pioneering experience of most other West Texans. Knapp claimed, “I am not ashamed to admit that I did not have a bathroom until long after I was married. I am willing to bet that nine-tenths of the people in that country don’t have them.” He continued that West Texas settlers had “gone out there into dugouts and made their way . . . . That’s the thing I feel that we should remember. I don’t think we should wire these houses at all, I wouldn’t think of wiring them.”<sup>66</sup> Sumner A. Wells agreed with Knapp, stating that placing government clients “on a plane of living—with a home and improvements and so forth—far above the farm owning citizens of the section” was fundamentally wrong and was bound to cause “friction” with their

neighbors.<sup>67</sup> Lovelace agreed with Knapp, believing that the best plan was the one first introduced by the Local Advisory Committee: "forty acres and the ordinary conveniences they are used to . . . furnish them with bathtubs, electric lights and a lot of other things they are not used to and they will never be able to pull out." Lovelace suggested that a pioneering experience would have an immeasurable benefit:

I know a little about that country out there. You go out there and see people living in dugouts with probably the whole improvements not worth more than two hundred dollars, and then go back in three or four years, and they have a nice house. There is something very beautiful about it.<sup>68</sup>

Providing farmers with a higher standard of living was, however, along with reducing tenancy and improving land utilization, one of the fundamental objectives of the New Deal's rural rehabilitation program. Franklin Roosevelt declared in 1934 that New Deal rural rehabilitation would make "country life every bit as desirable as city life" by providing rural people with the "necessary advantages which exist in the cities."<sup>69</sup> New Dealers found nothing beautiful about American farm families living for three or four years in sod dugouts with no plumbing or electricity. Such a lifestyle was cold, dark, and unsanitary. The RA was designed to relieve rural poverty and, to New Dealers, life in a dugout without running water or electric light was poverty—not pioneering. The homes were built with indoor sinks and a tub, and they were wired by the Rural Electrification Administration in 1939.<sup>70</sup>

The committee insisted that the Ropesville Project follow "indigenous American lines" because high costs and "communistic" experiments were unpopular in Texas in the 1930s. They tried to rid the Ropesville Project of whatever might attract negative publicity and disassociated themselves and Lubbock from the project where it drifted away from the lines

they drew. As A. B. Davis told Frank P. Holland, editor of *Farm and Ranch*, "very frankly, we may want [a story] for propaganda purposes—and then again, depending on certain developments, we may not want a story at all."<sup>71</sup> The Chamber had initiated the Ropesville Project to inspire large land owners to colonize their own holdings, to attract new settlement by advertising the capabilities of the South Plains soil, and to create a contented labor pool of small farmers that would bring industry to the region. The project was supposed to demonstrate a new, efficient way of life on the South Plains.

"A CITY, EXTENDING IN EVERY DIRECTION, AND YET IT IS NOT A CITY"

The Local Advisory Committee and the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce hoped to fill the South Plains with thousands of families on small farms. Although they understood it would be difficult for a family to subsist on forty or sixty acres of land, committee members were not concerned with making the farms on the Ropesville Project consistently profitable because they were confident that industry would provide the settlers a steady cash income. Once the Slaughters, Ellwoods, and other large ranchers of the region began to colonize their lands in a similar manner, the committee members believed the large population of small farmers would attract industry to the region. The settlers could find wage work in decentralized rural factories, enjoy the benefits of a rural lifestyle, and be able to feed their families when economic downturns came to the factories. Such industrial development had some support beyond the committee, as Davis told S. A. Wells in 1935: "very very confidentially, the State Planning Board has experts studying the possibilities of a woolen mill of some kind in connection with a colony of something like 1000 families to be built around the present Ropesville Colony."<sup>72</sup>

This "woolen mill" was to be the first of many rural factories that committee members hoped would one day dot the landscape of the

South Plains from Plainview to Big Spring and from Clovis to the Caprock. Bradford Knapp wrote an article in 1934 for the fiftieth anniversary edition of the *San Angelo Standard Times* prophesying what life might be like in West Texas in 1984. When he woke from his imaginary fifty-year nap, he found six million more people, cars that looked like “animated turtles,” highways without accidents, and noiseless airplanes. To his surprise Knapp found, spread out across the Llano Estacado, “a city, extending in every direction, and yet it is not a city.” It was comprised of “great groups of small farms with factories in the center.” These “factories out in the country [had] beautiful cottages all around them [with] beautiful curved roads and every house has its garden, its own poultry, and anywhere from three to five or six acres to support the family.” Knapp was “amazed at the vegetation” and discovered that “tree conscious” West Texans had altered their climate by planting rows of trees in between fields to control the “blowing of soils.” Equally “water conscious” people had dammed rivers “until the succession of lakes has almost the appearance of a string of pearls, glittering in the sunlight along every canyon and every stream.” Industry had become the lifeblood of West Texas and “only finished products are exported” from the region, featuring “beautiful fabric of wool, cotton, and mohair or in new and interesting combinations.” Knapp’s 1984 was the new way of life he and the Local Advisory Committee hoped to begin with the Ropesville Project.<sup>73</sup> Knapp hoped for a life on the land that was planned and rational, that included the benefits of the modern industrial world without sacrificing the rural lifestyle—and that was very different from the agricultural complex that developed around Lubbock after World War II.

The possibility of a community like that envisioned by Knapp was eliminated when the RA took charge of the project in April 1935. Once it became apparent that Tugwell’s RA “sang low on industrial development,” Knapp and the members of the committee admitted that an increase in unit size was necessary if

the farms were going to be profitable. Knapp wrote Davis on 30 December 1935, two days before the first settlers moved in, that “when we began this project it was rather definitely understood that the small size of the farms would have to be supplemented by some sort of a community manufacturing enterprise.” Since the RA was unwilling to support such an enterprise “the only way to increase the certainty of each farm paying out was to increase its size.” In fact, Knapp suggested that the biggest asset for farmers in the South Plains was “the fact that one man with team and tools can handle more land than in other sections.”<sup>74</sup>

It became apparent that the committee was no longer involved with the administration of the project when the RA hired R. D. Jones as the first community manager. The committee had asked in June of 1935 to accept applications for the position, had sifted through one hundred applicants, interviewed several and had narrowed the field down to three when the RA sent word that they had already appointed Jones. The Baylor alumnus with some graduate credits from Yale had been eliminated by the committee early on in the process.<sup>75</sup> By the time the first thirty-three families moved on to the project in January 1936, the committee members were “practically out of the picture as far as directing the policies in connection with [Ropesville] is concerned.”<sup>76</sup>

Several members of the committee prepared to resign after the first families moved in. They were certain the project would fail and, as committee member Don Jones put it, if it should “‘fall flat’ this country would be condemned as far as its agricultural possibilities are concerned.” Some of the members hoped the government might expand the number of units on the project but Spencer Wells would have won when he offered to “make you a three to one bet you never get 100 units.” When the settlers bought out the project in 1943 there were only seventy-six units. Only Bradford Knapp continued to support the project, regularly visiting the settlers and writing letters to

government officials on their behalf until his death in 1938. Knapp was disappointed that the Ropesville Project would not include industry but was "entirely in favor" of many of the aims of the RA—particularly its efforts to stop farm tenancy.<sup>77</sup> He believed that fundamental changes were necessary in the economic and social structures of rural America and that government intervention and regulation were necessary so that the "rights of all will be protected and preserved" from "the glorification of the individual." He also felt that projects like Ropesville were steps toward the "great and overpowering demand—the common good."<sup>78</sup> As he wrote Rexford Tugwell in 1936, "I think that the kind of thing that has been attempted at Ropesville could be made the means of converting a large proportion of the tenants in the South, both white and Negro, into self-respecting landowners."<sup>79</sup>

Self respect was at the foundation of the committee's plans for Ropesville. All were educated men who were aware that farms, particularly in the South Plains, were growing larger and fewer. Like New Dealers they were shocked by the suffering of the Great Depression and their rural backgrounds led them to conclude that solutions could be found on the land. Land ownership provided families with self respect and a sense of independence that wage labor never could. The committee members believed that Texans, especially the "young pioneer stock" of the South Plains, needed only a decent house and a tract of fertile soil to lead a satisfying life.<sup>80</sup>

#### "THE MOST PRACTICAL RESETTLEMENT PROJECT IN THE NATION"

Even after Tugwell resigned in 1936 and his Resettlement Administration was replaced by the Farm Security Administration in 1937, the New Deal's community projects remained controversial, as the Local Advisory Committee had feared, because they were expensive and were thought to be "communistic." Despite these fears, the Ropesville Project at-

tracted little of the negative attention directed at the New Deal community building program as a whole. Government officials, journalists, historians, and the settlers themselves judged the project a success. Its practical design, the long term economic benefits it brought to its settlers, the ability of most settlers to pay their government loans before they were due, and the help it provided the seventy-six families of more than three hundred individuals who settled on the project all help account for its success.

Marion Clawson presented the most objective account of Ropesville, comparing it with eight other FSA projects in January 1943. Ropesville compared well in every category to four other individually operated farm projects and four cooperatives. Its unit cost of \$8431 was third lowest. Ropesville Project farmers' delinquency rate on loans was very low, just 22 percent compared to 86 percent on Wichita Valley Farms and 88 percent on Osage farms in Missouri. Turnover rates were also very low; only fourteen families left Ropesville between 1939 and 1943, while most of the other projects lost about one third of their families during the four year period. The nearby ninety-unit Wichita Valley Project, for example, lost thirty-four families between 1939 and 1943. By 1940, Ropesville was the only project that had a positive net return, \$1814. The other projects had negative balances from \$913 to \$32,217.<sup>81</sup>

Hearing that Eleanor Roosevelt might visit Lubbock, Ropesville residents invited her to visit "the most practical resettlement project in the nation."<sup>82</sup> The Ropesville Project maintained a reputation of practicality throughout its history with the FSA (1936-43). Wes Izzard, writer for the *South Plains Farmer*, suggested that the "benevolent supervision" with which the community manager and his staff administered the Ropesville Project was a "practical rather than a brain trust management." It was "emphatically not a cooperative scheme, with the work and profits shared, that had been tried on other projects with conspicuous lack of success."<sup>83</sup>

The FSA's "benevolent supervision" may have contributed to the Ropesville Project's financial success, but all New Deal community projects were subject to the same supervision and most were considered failures. Many FSA clients, even on successful projects like Ropesville, resented government interference in their day to day lives. Project farmer J. D. Watts, for example, complained about FSA supervision in an angry letter to Congressman George Mahon, asking "is this an American way of living? . . . why send our boys to fight and die for us if we lose our freedom at home?" Watts suggested that the government should "eliminate a half dozen officials or all of them and [treat] us like we were white American people. Without a complete record of everything we do we could go on with our farming and other duties with the peace of mind that comes from living in a free country."<sup>84</sup> In another letter Mrs. L. S. Rosser echoed Watts, adding:

to have four to six people trying to promote this and that, drawing a nice salary which is paid for by every taxpayer in the U.S., seems to be uncalled for . . . why have a group of people all the time examining [us] and using us to experiment on . . . Consider us as a human being and not as a *guinea pig*.<sup>85</sup>

Most FSA community projects were designed to resettle families on individual farms, so Ropesville's not being a "cooperative scheme" was not unusual and cannot account for its success.<sup>86</sup> Most FSA community projects failed because the individual farms were too small to be profitable and land prices were too high for the farmers to purchase them.<sup>87</sup> Most settlers on FSA projects left when they were able to purchase other farms or when wage work became plentiful during the war. The Ropesville Project succeeded in the long run because land prices were low in the South Plains. The settlers' original agreement offered them the eventual opportunity to purchase their farms. Land values were low and the 165 acre plots were large enough to turn a profit,

so the Ropesville settlers very wisely stayed on their farms while their counterparts on other projects were leaving in droves.<sup>88</sup> When the FSA offered purchase contracts in 1943, all but seven families purchased their farms.<sup>89</sup> They paid about \$6000 each for their farmsteads, or approximately \$31.40 per acre, while the price of land on most other projects was much higher.<sup>90</sup> At Osage Farms in Missouri, for example, land values were more than \$50 per acre four years before the FSA began offering purchase contracts to settlers.<sup>91</sup> Even with the strong markets and high prices brought by World War II, Ropesville farmers probably would not have been able to afford such a purchase.

The project's final design was only practical, however, when there was sufficient rainfall. In 1940 Acting Regional Director Wilson Cowen reported to FSA administrator C. B. Baldwin that crop yield estimates on the Ropesville Project were "entirely too optimistic" because they were based on wet years. Ropesville's impracticality in a dry year is illustrated by comparison with the New Mexico Farms Project in Fort Sumner. Although net income on the projects in 1939 was similar, \$752.93 for New Mexico and \$689.51 for Ropesville, farmers on Ropesville received \$789.42 in direct government payments and FSA loans while those on New Mexico Farms received just \$315.63. Farmers in Fort Sumner, a similar climate, needed less aid because their crops were irrigated.<sup>92</sup>

The widespread use of mechanized irrigation systems, capable of drawing 800 gallons per minute from the Ogallala Aquifer, did not come to the South Plains until the post-war period. Project farmers were able to convert to irrigation earlier than their neighbors because they were able to build equity as land values rose rapidly on the South Plains after the end of the war. Of twenty-six project families traced through the records of the Hockley County Courthouse, half had taken out materials and mechanic's liens on their property to install pumping plants prior to 1949. Eight of the other thirteen families had already sold



their farms, three had pumping plants installed prior to 1955, and two either did not install irrigation systems or did not borrow to do so.<sup>93</sup> Between 1945 and 1950, just 37 percent of Hockley County farmers had converted to irrigation. The average size of these farms in 1950 was 388.6 acres under cultivation, compared to the 165 for former project farmers. The project farmers were good credit risks because the land for which they had paid \$6000 in 1943 was worth about \$16,000 in 1950.<sup>94</sup> While their neighbors were paying off debts from previous decades, going into debt to buy land, or going out of business, project farmers owned their land or had relatively little debt. Thirty-one of seventy-six project farmers had paid off their loans and owned their land by 1947.<sup>95</sup> Besides irrigation systems, project farmers were able to make further improvements on homes, purchase automobiles, and buy farm equipment like tractors and combines. The project farmers were one step ahead of their competitors as the South Plains evolved into the giant cotton factory it is today. In 1993, a half century after they were purchased, thirty-six of the Ropesville Project farms were still owned by project family members.<sup>96</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Paul Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal's Community Building Program* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959), pp. 1-10, appendix. The resettlement community built near Ropesville had several names, including Ropesville Farms, the Ropesville Resettlement Project, the Ropesville Community Project, Ropesville Rural-Industrial Farms. It will be referred to as "The Ropesville Project."

2. Ibid, pp. 60-64.

3. Ibid, pp.135-37.

4. Ibid, pp.135-37; Lawrence Westbrook, "The Rural Rehabilitation Program of the FERA," *Journal of Farm Economics* 18 (January 1935): 94-96.

5. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World* (note 1 above), pp. 135-37.

6. Westbrook, "Rural Rehabilitation Program" (note 4 above), p. 99.

7. Gene Cooper, "Rural Colonization Plan in Texas Hits at Unemployment," *Dallas Morning News*, 4 February 1934, 1:10.

8. Donald Green, *Fifty Years of Service to West Texas Agriculture* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1977), p. 72.

9. Lubbock Chamber of Commerce, "Application to the Texas Rural Communities, Inc., for a Farm Community Project of 100 Units to be Established on the South Plains of Texas, in the Vicinity of Lubbock, the County Seat of Lubbock County, Texas (hereafter cited as "Lubbock Application"), undated, Lubbock Chamber of Commerce Records, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University (hereafter cited as Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU).

10. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Census of Agriculture, Texas*.

11. Carl Kraenzel, *The Great Plains in Transition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), quoted in Donald Green, *Land of the Underground Rain: Irrigation on the Texas High Plains, 1910-1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), p. 21.

12. Green, *ibid.*, p. 121.

13. Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 12.

14. A. B. Davis to Eleanor Roosevelt, "History: Ropesville Community Farms Project," 8 March 1938, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU; A. B. Davis to Victor Schoffelmayer, 25 October 1935, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

15. Seymour V. Connor, ed., *Builders of the Southwest* (Lubbock: Texas Technological College, 1959), pp. 122-25, 235-37.

16. Floy F. Wilbanks, "The Life and Work of Dr. Bradford Knapp" (master's thesis, Texas Technological College, 1940), pp. iii-iv.

17. William Curry Holden, interview with Jim Skaggs, November 1967, transcription, SWC-TTU.

18. "Lubbock Application," (note 9 above).

19. Donald Green, *Fifty Years of Service* (note 8 above), p. 72.

20. Ibid.

21. A. B. Davis to S. A. Wells, 23 April 1935, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

22. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World* (note 1 above), pp. 135-37.

23. "Lubbock Application" (note 9 above), Davis to Schoffelmayer, (note 14 above); Davis to Wells, (note 21 above).

24. Bradford Knapp to A. B. Davis, 24 April 1934, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

25. Michael V. Namorato, *Rexford G. Tugwell: A Biography* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), p. 111.

26. Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1931), p. 372.

27. Lubbock C of C, "Talk on South Plains Rural Community to Lubbock Civic Clubs," February

and March, 1934, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

28. "Lubbock Application" (note 9 above).

29. Garnet Reeves to A. B. Davis, 16 February 1934, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

30. "Talk to Civic Clubs" (note 27 above).

31. "Lubbock Application" (note 9 above).

32. Reeves to Davis (note 29 above).

33. Davis to Schoffelmayer, (note 14 above); Bradford Knapp to A. B. Davis, 23 December 1935, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

34. "Lubbock Application" (note 9 above).

35. Plainview Chamber of Commerce, "Application to the Texas Rural Communities, Inc., for a Farm Community Project to be Established on the South Plains of Texas, in the Vicinity of Plainview, in Hale County, Texas," Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

36. Adam R. Johnson to FERA, "Application for Approval of Ropesville Industrial Farms, Hockley County, Texas," 20 April 1935, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

37. Victor H. Schoffelmayer, "Ropesville Rural Industrial Community," *South Plains of Texas Historical Sketches* (n.p.: Texas Highway Department, 1936), pp. 18-22.

38. Davis to Schoffelmayer (note 14 above).

39. Ibid.

40. Lillian Willis, interview by William Clayson, 1 April 1995, Ropesville, Texas, SWC-TTU. The amount of land the project farmers owned varied from 159 to more than 300 acres, but this included land surrounding homesites, roads, playa lakes, and other non-cultivable land. The project farms were designed to have approximately 165 acres of land in cultivation. See Charlie T. McCormick, "A Comparison of Actual and Adjusted Incomes of Seventy Farm Families of the Ropesville Project, 1943-1947" (master's thesis, Texas Technological College, 1948), p. 23.

41. LAC Minutes, 9 January 1936, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

42. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World* (note 1 above), p. 166.

43. Bernard Sternsher, *Rexford Tugwell and the New Deal* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1964), p. 266.

44. Great Plains Committee, *The Future of the Great Plains* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1936), pp. 1, 10, 74-75.

45. C. P. Blackwell to A. B. Davis, 23 December 1935, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

46. A. B. Davis to W. B. Orr, 23 April 1935, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

47. Worster, *Dust Bowl* (note 13 above), pp. 4, 31.

48. Maureen and Frank Condra, interview by William Clayson, 13 April 1995; Lillian Willis

interview (note 40 above); Viedna and H. L. Darby, interview by William Clayson, 1 April 1995; all Ropesville, Texas, SWC-TTU.

49. Garnet Reeves to A. B. Davis, 21 April 1936, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU; Schoffelmayer, "Ropesville" (note 37 above), pp. 18-22.

50. D. P. Trent to R. G. Tugwell, 7 August 1936, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

51. Reeves to Davis (note 49 above).

52. Bradford Knapp to A. B. Davis and R. C. Hopping, 12 October 1936, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

53. A. B. Davis to the Members of the Ropesville Advisory Committee, 17 December 1935, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

54. Lawrence Westbrook, "The Program of Rural Rehabilitation of the FERA" (note 4 above), 88-100.

55. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World* (note 1 above), pp. 135-37.

56. Westbrook, "Program of Rural Rehabilitation" (note 54 above), pp. 99-100.

57. Davis to Schoffelmayer (note 14 above).

58. Schoffelmayer, "Ropesville" (note 37 above), p. 20.

59. Lubbock C of C, "Talk to Civic Clubs" (note 27 above).

60. Richard Kirkendall, *Social Scientists and Farm Politics* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966) p. 129.

61. Clarence Roberts, "Stranded on a Subsistence Homestead," *The Farmer Stockman* 291 (1 July 1935): 3.

62. Davis to Schoffelmayer (note 14 above).

63. Adam R. Johnson to FERA, "Application for Approval of Ropesville Industrial Farms," March 1935, annotated copy, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

64. Davis to Schoffelmayer (note 14 above).

65. Texas Rural Communities, Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, 13 March 1935, Bradford Knapp Papers, SWC-TTU.

66. Ibid.

67. S. A. Wells to V. R. Smitham, 24 October 1935 Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

68. Ibid.

69. Federal Emergency Relief Administration, "Plan for Rural Resettlement Colonies," March 1935, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.

70. US House of Representatives, Select Committee on Agriculture, *Hearings on the Farm Security Administration*, 78th Congress, 1st Session (1943), 1118-1127. Many of the settlers equipped their homes with "wind chargers," which provided electricity from windmills, prior to REA wiring. Viedna Darby interview (note 48 above).

71. A. B. Davis to Frank P. Holland, 13 December 1935, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.
72. Davis to Wells (note 21 above).
73. Bradford Knapp, "Dr. Bradford Knapp Wakes Up in 1984 and Finds West Texas Happy, Prosperous," *San Angelo Standard Times* 51 (3 May 1934):1.
74. Bradford Knapp to A. B. Davis, 30 December 1935, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.
75. Local Advisory Committee to W. B. Orr, 19 June 1935, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.
76. LAC Minutes, 9 January 1936, (note 41 above).
77. Bradford Knapp to Rexford Tugwell, 3 August 1936, Bradford Knapp Papers, SWC-TTU.
78. Bradford Knapp, "Our Changing Attitude Toward Government," *Texas Outlook* (May 1934), 13-15.
79. Knapp to Tugwell, (note 77 above).
80. Talk to Civic Clubs (note 27 above).
81. Marion Clawson, "Resettlement Experience on Nine Selected Resettlement Projects," *Agricultural History* 52 (January 1978): 35, 45, 54, 36. Clawson's study was first published in *Agricultural History* thirty-five years after it was written as a government report. Turnover rates were normally very high on RA/FSA projects. The Pine Mountain Valley Project, for example, lost 275 families in a six year period.
82. Residents of Ropesville Project to Eleanor Roosevelt, telegram, 1 March 1938, Lubbock C of C Records, SWC-TTU.
83. Wes Izzard, "Ropesville: A Venture in Utopia," *Lubbock South Plains Farmer* (27 May 1938):1, 4.
84. J. D. Watts to George Mahon, 8 June 1943, George Mahon Papers, SWC-TTU.
85. Mrs. L.S. Rosser to George Mahon, 10 June 1943, Mahon Papers, SWC-TTU, emphasis in original.
86. Kirkendall, *Social Scientists and Farm Politics* (note 60 above), p. 129.
87. Anthony Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1989), p. 185.
88. McCormick, "Comparison" (note 40 above), p. 23.
89. John Armstrong to George Mahon, 21 July 1943, George Mahon Papers, SWC-TTU.
90. William Johnson, "Rural Rehabilitation in the New Deal: The Ropesville Resettlement Project," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXXIX (Jan. 1975), p. 294.
91. Paul Neider, "The Osage Farms Project: An Experimental New Deal Community," *Gateway Heritage*, 12:3 (Summer, 1991), p. 54.
92. Wilson Cowen to C. B. Baldwin, 9 May 1940; "Farm and Family Business Summary of Forty Nine Units on the Ropesville Project Based on 1939 Record Books" and "Farm and Home Business Summarizations, New Mexico Farms, Ft. Sumner, New Mexico, For the Year 1939," Farmer's Home Administration (FmHA) Records, Amarillo Office Files TX 53-935, National Archives Southwest Region, Fort Worth, Texas.
93. Materials and Mechanic's Lien Records, Hockley County Courthouse; Deed of Trust Records, Hockley County Courthouse, Levelland, Texas.
94. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Agriculture, 1950: Texas* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1952).
95. McCormick, "Comparison" (note 40 above), p. 34.
96. Farm Plat, Hockley County, Texas, Hockley County Courthouse, Levelland, Texas, 1993.