

# SurveyLA

Los Angeles Historic Resources Survey

## LOS ANGELES CITYWIDE HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

**Context: Public and Private Institutional Development, 1850-1980**

**Sub-Context: New Deal Programs**

**Theme: WPA, 1935-1943**



*Prepared for:*

City of Los Angeles

Department of City Planning

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## **PREFACE**

This theme of the WPA, 1935-1943 is a component of Los Angeles's citywide historic context statement, and provides guidance to field surveyors in identifying and evaluating potential historic resources relating to WPA programs. Refer to [HistoricPlacesLA.org](http://HistoricPlacesLA.org) for information on designated resources associated with this theme as well as those identified through SurveyLA and other surveys.

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## **THEME INTRODUCTION**

The WPA, officially entitled the Works Progress Administration and later renamed the Work Projects Administration, provided federally-funded jobs for the unemployed during the Great Depression of the 1930s. It was one of many programs originated by President Franklin Roosevelt as part of what is popularly known as the New Deal. The WPA began in 1935, once it had become evident that economic recovery was not to occur soon, and ended in 1943, as the Second World War eliminated the problem of unemployment through jobs in defense industries and service in the armed forces.

Most of the work undertaken by the WPA consisted of constructing new or renovating existing municipal infrastructure. This ranged from roadways and storm drains to playgrounds, parks, firehouses, and bridges. Much less numerous, but of equal historic significance, were projects undertaken by artists and sculptors to provide decoration for public buildings and landscapes. (Many of these artistic works are located in the interiors of public buildings. While SurveyLA did not include building interiors, some have been identified as contributing features of designated resources in Los Angeles.)

The WPA is historically significant as a program that represents the shift of responsibility for society's economic well-being, from state and local governments to Washington. Before the WPA and other New Deal endeavors, the unemployed relied on county relief and state-funded work projects. As the Depression worsened, these traditional programs could not cope with dwindling revenues and greater numbers of those in need. The WPA, with its promise to provide work regardless of the cost and as long as necessary, replaced the inadequate state and local efforts with the vastly greater resources of the national government.

The WPA became a symbol for both liberals and conservatives. Those on the left regarded it as a noble progressive attempt to achieve full employment during a time of economic crisis. The federal government sought to provide workers with jobs that gave them self-esteem and a living wage in the

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face of the private sector's inability to do so. Conservatives, on the other hand, saw the WPA as an example of government waste, paying for work done inefficiently on unnecessary projects. At best it served as a means of buying votes for the Democratic Party, and at its worse became an outlet for radical propaganda.

There is evidence to support both opinions. But, for this historic context, the WPA is best seen from a third point of view. It was in essence a part of municipal government, building infrastructure that in normal times the City would have undertaken on its own. The ideas for projects originated within the City bureaucracy. The design work was undertaken by the City's architectural and engineering staff. The City, as part of its contribution, provided the land and much of the material. Only the provision of labor, consisting of workers from the ranks of the federally-funded WPA, differed from the traditional system of private contractors obtained through competitive public bidding.

At the same time, one aspect of the WPA gave these public facilities something that they might not have had under a more traditional means of funding. This was the Federal Arts Project, through which the WPA provided work to artists and sculptors to decorate buildings and landscapes. The murals and statues that resulted from this endeavor, while a relatively minor part of the entire WPA experiment in terms of those employed, make up perhaps the most memorable aspect of its heritage.

### **Evaluation Considerations:**

The theme of the WPA may overlap with other SurveyLA themes as follows:

- Within the Public and Private Institutional Development context:
  - The sub-themes of Sculpture and Murals under the sub-context of Cultural Development and Institutions and the theme of Public Art
  - The theme of Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure under the sub-context Government Infrastructure and Services
  - The sub-theme of Bridges under the sub-context Government Infrastructure and Services and the theme of Public Works
  - The sub-theme of Post-1933 Long Beach Earthquake under the sub-context of Education and the theme of Public Schools and the LAUSD
- Themes within the Architecture and Engineering context such as Spanish Colonial Revival, Streamline Moderne, and PWA Moderne.

## **HISTORIC CONTEXT**

The context consists of three parts. The first part summarizes the history of the WPA at the national level. The second part looks at how the WPA functioned in Los Angeles. The third part examines the various types of WPA projects in the city and gives representative examples.

Before examining the WPA, the context begins with a glossary of the various federal agencies which undertook construction during the New Deal. Like the WPA, they were typically identified by their initials. This glossary is useful to eliminate confusion, particularly between the two primary New Deal construction agencies, the WPA and the PWA, or Public Works Administration. While this context focuses on the WPA, it discusses the work of these other agencies when this work helped shape the WPA as an organization or when it was part of a WPA project.

**WPA:** The Works Progress Administration, later renamed the Work Projects Administration, was created in 1935 and dissolved in 1943. The purpose of the WPA was to provide jobs to the unemployed, regardless of field or talent. All were hired and paid by the federal government directly. The quality of the work was secondary to the provision of employment. Construction projects were generally small-scale and labor intensive. Artists employed under the WPA in its Federal Arts Project, with rare exception, worked on local and state government buildings, and not on federal buildings (see the PWA below).

**PWA:** The Public Works Administration was created in 1933 and dissolved in 1939. It was a source of funding, and not an employment program. The purpose of the PWA was to provide grants for large-scale public works projects. It relied on the traditional practices of government construction, awarding contracts to private entities through competitive bidding. Workers on PWA projects were employees of these private entities and not of the government. The primary goal of the PWA was to build needed infrastructure rather than to provide jobs for those on relief. Artists for PWA-funded federal projects, such as post offices, were chosen through competitions run by a section of the Treasury Department. Quality of the work, rather relief for unemployed artists, determined the selection.

Other New Deal programs also provided employment. Some preceded the WPA, while others operated alongside it.

**CCC:** The Civilian Conservation Corps was created in 1933 and dissolved in 1942. Its purpose was to provide work for unemployed young men in reforestation and conservation work. The CCC was run by the army and eventually undertook small-scale construction projects, such as park shelters, under the direction of military engineers and construction supervisors. (CCC work can be found within the Los Angeles City limits in places such as Griffith Park, a City Historic-Cultural Monument.)

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**FERA:** The Federal Emergency Relief Administration was created in 1933 and dissolved in 1935. It was the first of the New Deal's relief agencies and provided funds for small-scale construction projects as well as direct relief and aid to states. It was intended to last only two years.

**CWA:** The Civil Works Administration was created In November of 1933 and dissolved in March of 1934. It was intended as large-scale but short-term enlargement of the FERA, to provide work during the winter of 1933-1934. It included a great number of small-scale construction projects and served as a model for the WPA.

**PWAP:** The Public Works of Art Project was part of the CWA. It funded projects for painters and sculptors during the winter of 1933-1934.

**NYA:** The National Youth Administration was created in 1935 and dissolved in 1943. It was originally a part of the WPA and provided employment to student-age men and to young women (who were not eligible for the CCC). The goal was to enable its enrollees to remain in school, and many of the jobs were part-time and involved work at schools. Some of the NYA work was light construction similar to that of the WPA and the CCC.

Finally, there was a significant program which preceded the Roosevelt Administration and the New Deal. This was the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, or **RFC**. It was created in 1932, during the administration of President Herbert Hoover, and lasted in one form or another until 1957. It was a source of government loans to state and local governments as well as to private entities. During the early years of the Depression it provided loans to state and local public jobs programs that undertook construction projects.

### **PART I: THE WPA AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL**

During its eight years of existence, from 1935 through 1943, the WPA employed about eight and one half million different individuals. Nearly one in every four families was dependent at one time or another during this period on WPA wages. In the process about eleven billion dollars were spent on a total of 1,410,000 projects, including 125,110 public buildings and 8,192 parks.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Jobs Programs before the WPA, 1931-1935**

There was actually an attempt, albeit indirect, to provide federal funds for employing the jobless under the administration of Herbert Hoover, who preceded Roosevelt. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation, or RFC, was created in January of 1932 to make loans to businesses unable to gain credit from the contracting private banking sector. In July of 1932 Congress mandated that the RFC also make

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Robb Ellis, *A Nation in Torment: The Great American Depression, 1929-1939* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970), 506; *Final Report on the WPA Program, 1935-1943* (Washington: United States Government, 1947 [Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1976]), III.

loans to states and cities for relief. This relief included work on public projects, generally begun under state and local programs that had run out of money.<sup>2</sup>

But the idea of direct federal funding for jobs came with the Roosevelt administration when it took office in March of 1933. Roosevelt had experimented with such a program while previously serving as governor of New York. He had established a state Temporary Emergency Relief Administration in November, 1931, which contained an Emergency Work Bureau. By March of 1932 it had created some 80,000 jobs. Road construction made up about forty percent of the projects, with the rest consisting of work on water and sewer systems, parks and playgrounds, and schools and other public buildings. It also had an Arts Program. It was managed by Harry Hopkins, a social worker by training.<sup>3</sup>

Once Roosevelt became president, he created a number of work programs based on his experience as governor. The first, and perhaps most popular, was the Civilian Conservation Corp, established in the spring of 1933. The CCC was primarily a rural program, dealing with reforestation and park construction. By the late 1930s, as its staff became better trained and with increasing use of Army engineers, it undertook construction projects such as bridges, picnic shelters, and other park buildings. But because of its mission, it had little impact on the urban landscape.<sup>4</sup>

The next to come was the Federal Emergency Recovery Administration, in May of 1933. Placed at its head was Harry Hopkins, who had gained experience managing Governor Roosevelt's programs in New York State. The FERA was to be, as its title indicated, a temporary emergency program which would expire after two years, in November of 1935. Roosevelt assumed, incorrectly as it turned out, that the private sector would be rehiring large numbers of previously laid-off workers by then. Unlike the CCC, which required relocation to camps in remote areas, the FERA provided relief to the unemployed where they lived.<sup>5</sup>

As with the earlier RFC program under Hoover, the FERA was structured to work through state and city relief agencies. Many of its construction projects were inherited from local public works programs that had been kept alive by RFC funding. In this sense, the FERA was a continuation of the earlier concept that the states and localities still had the primary responsibility for identifying both those in need and projects worth undertaking. The significant difference was that the federal funds under the FERA were grants and not loans, as they had been under the RFC.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ellis, *Nation in Torment*, 188-189, 200.

<sup>3</sup> Ellis, *Nation in Torment*, 492; Nick Taylor, *American-Made: The Enduring Legacy of the WPA, When FDR Put the Nation to Work* (New York: Bantam Books, 2008), 98-99.

<sup>4</sup> Phoebe Cutler, *The Public Landscape of the New Deal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 88; William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1963 [2009]), 53.

<sup>5</sup> Ellis, *Nation in Torment*, 489-494, Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 227.

<sup>6</sup> Ellis, *Nation in Torment*, 489; Taylor, *American-Made*, 111.



*Civil Works Administration (CWA) laborers, 1933  
Griffith Park  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

By the fall of 1933, with the approach of winter, it was apparent that more relief was needed. In response Roosevelt created yet another entity, the Civil Works Administration. The CWA was a large-scale but short-lived addition to the FERA, existing from November of 1933 through the end of March 1934. It too was headed by Hopkins. Its aim was the creation of four million jobs on small public works. By January of 1934 it had more than 4.2 million previously unemployed renovating schools, building playgrounds, laying sewers and undertaking other such projects that could be accomplished quickly with primarily unskilled labor. Projects which were not complete by March of 1934 were assumed by the still extant FERA under a Works Division.<sup>7</sup>

The CWA was a preview of the WPA. Its goal was to employ as many individuals as possible, regardless of their skills, and then find projects to fit those skills. The provision of employment was more important than the intrinsic worth of the project. Of significance too is that, under a division known as the Public Works of Art Project or PWAP, the CWA found work for artists and writers.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Creation of the WPA in 1935**

By the beginning of 1935 it was clear that the Depression was not going to end soon, and that something other than an emergency program with a stated dissolution date was needed. It was also clear, with the victory of the Democrats in the November 1934 midterm election, that Roosevelt had a mandate to act on this realization. The result was the Works Progress Administration.

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<sup>7</sup> Ellis, *Nation in Torment*, 497, 500-501; Taylor, *American-Made*, 118-141.

<sup>8</sup> Ellis, *Nation in Torment*, 497-499.

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While patterned after the FERA and in particular the CWA, the WPA differed in one significant way. It was structured as an on-going program, with no set end date. The intention was to continue so long as public employment was needed. It established the federal government as the employer of last resort for the foreseeable future.

In January of 1935 Roosevelt proposed what was termed a gigantic program of public employment to provide three and a half million jobs and to cost almost five billion dollars. It had seven principles. First, the projects must be useful and permanent. Second, wages must be high enough to provide for minimal support of a family, but not so high as to compete with the private sector. Third, the projects shall be labor intensive, with relatively little spent on materials and equipment. Fourth, local sponsors will select and recommend the projects. Fifth, projects will be located where relief is most needed. Sixth, those already on relief will have preference in hiring. Seventh, the projects shall be small enough so as to be completed in a single fiscal year.<sup>9</sup>

In response to Roosevelt's proposal, Congress in April of 1935 passed the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act, which called for spending 4.8 billion dollars, its largest single appropriation to date.<sup>10</sup> In May Roosevelt, by executive order, created the Works Progress Administration under the management of Harry Hopkins to carry out the jobs program. Hopkins was specifically instructed to structure the WPA so as not to compete with the private sector or to take the place of traditional government construction programs.<sup>11</sup>

So long as the Depression continued, the problem of competition with the private sector was minor. But the matter of competition with other government construction programs was not. The primary conflict occurred between Hopkins and Harold Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior who was responsible for the Public Works Administration, the agency which funded the kinds of public works, from local post offices to large-scale dams, traditionally undertaken by the federal government.<sup>12</sup>

The PWA dated from 1933 and was initially seen as the primary means of creating jobs through federal expenditures. But because of the nature of its projects and its need to follow standard procedures of public bidding, it moved relatively slowly and hired relatively few low-skilled workers. By 1935 Roosevelt was impatient with its pace and its inability to get jobs to the unskilled most in need. The creation of the WPA was a response to this impatience.<sup>13</sup>

In order to propel the WPA into action, Roosevelt allowed Hopkins initially to use funds originally appropriated for the PWA, thereby posing what Ickes saw as a threat to his position. As a means of differentiating the jurisdictions of the two, the president set an arbitrary line of \$25,000. Any project

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<sup>9</sup> Ellis, *Nation in Torment*, 502; Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 124.

<sup>10</sup> Ellis, *Nation in Torment*, 502; Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 125.

<sup>11</sup> Ellis, *Nation in Torment*, p. 502; Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 125.

<sup>12</sup> Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 125.

<sup>13</sup> Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 133.

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costing below that belonged to Hopkins and the WPA, while any exceeding it was for Ickes and the PWA. But this division proved elastic, since Hopkins was able to take on larger jobs, so long as he could convince Roosevelt that they were labor intensive.<sup>14</sup>

The WPA was organized around several regional directors. Under them were state directors. Each state had a single director, with the exceptions of New York and California. After trying to function with a single head, California eventually had both a northern and a southern director. Under the state directors were district offices, of which Los Angeles County was one.<sup>15</sup>

The WPA linked existing local relief agencies to these district offices. Individuals desiring work first applied to a city, county, or state welfare bureau, which made a determination as to need and employability. Individuals determined eligible would then be sent to the district WPA office and placed on a project. Generally families were limited to one enrollee. Younger family members, in particular those of school age, might be referred to the National Youth Administration, or NYA. If young, male, and done with school, the CCC was an alternative.<sup>16</sup>

The question of need was flexible. If a project called for a certain number of skilled workers or professionals, the standard means test could be waived and those, not truly in need, could be hired. But this waiver was rare. In general, these “non-certified” workers consisted of about five percent of the total WPA work force and never rose above ten percent.<sup>17</sup>

### WPA Construction Projects

Between 1935 and 1940, construction projects made up between seventy-five and eighty percent of all WPA employment. Most common was work on roads, parks and playgrounds, water and sewer lines, flood control, and airports and landing strips. The WPA also worked on public buildings. At first this work was overwhelmingly repair, but later came to include new construction of smaller-scale public works such as recreation centers and firehouses. By March of 1936 job sites featured a standard sign that soon became famous. Designed by Hopkins, it was red, white, and blue, and stated U.S.A. WORK PROGRAM W.P.A.<sup>18</sup>

A WPA construction project began with a proposal from a public sector sponsor, generally a branch of local government such as a city or county. The proposal consisted of a description of the project, together with a cost estimate that included a contribution from the sponsor, and the amount and kind of labor needed. Sponsors supplied any needed architectural or engineering plans and specifications.

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<sup>14</sup> Taylor, *American-Made*, 173.

<sup>15</sup> *Final Report*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> *Final Report*, 15, 17.

<sup>17</sup> *Final Report*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> *Final Report*, 34-35, 50-55; *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 1936.

Sponsors also provided the land. If heavy equipment was required, this too generally came from the sponsor.<sup>19</sup>

While local sponsors were officially responsible for proposing projects, the WPA district office was often involved. Its officials suggested projects, based on the kind of labor it could provide. A WPA district engineer would also work together with local government agencies in preparing the proposals, including cost estimates and breakdowns as to the type of labor needed.<sup>20</sup>

The goal of the WPA was to provide jobs primarily for unskilled and semi-skilled workers. If the proposed project required a relatively higher proportion of skilled workers, the sponsor had to pay for them as part of its contribution. This was particularly the case in new construction of public buildings such as recreation centers and firehouses, which required a relatively high percentage of skilled building trade members. Overall about thirty percent of the employees on public building projects were skilled.<sup>21</sup>

Once the WPA accepted a project, the District Office assigned it to a work crew with a Project Supervisor. While Project Supervisors were officially part of the WPA, they were occasionally also employees of the sponsor. The Supervisor was typically assisted by experienced engineers and construction foremen on larger projects. Keeping foremen was a problem, as they were in relatively great demand as the private sector began to revive. This led the WPA to train its better workers for foreman positions.<sup>22</sup>

The resulting architecture of these WPA construction projects differed somewhat from that of the two other major agencies, the PWA and the CCC. Historians have studied the work of the Public Works Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corp, and have noted particular tendencies typical to each. One is the emergence of what has been described as PWA Moderne, a form of stripped Classicism that characterized many government buildings during the 1930s. The other is a rustic style, with the dominant use of natural materials, which is associated in particular with the work of the CCC.<sup>23</sup>

The WPA buildings are not so neatly categorized. On one hand they were based on designs provided by the local sponsoring agencies and thereby often fit styles and construction techniques with which city and county architectural staffs were familiar. On the other hand, they had to be relatively simple so as to be buildable by generally unskilled labor.

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<sup>19</sup> *Final Report*, 9, 44.

<sup>20</sup> *Final Report*, 48.

<sup>21</sup> *Final Report*, 9, 47.

<sup>22</sup> *Final Report*, 14, 48-49.

<sup>23</sup> See Cutler, *Public Landscape, passim*; and David Gebhard and Harriette Von Breton, *Los Angeles in the Thirties, 1931-1941*, Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged (Santa Monica: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1989), 75-92.

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The *Final Report of the WPA Program*, issued in 1947, discusses its architecture, and its words are a fair judgment. “The WPA followed the newer tendencies toward simplification in architectural style. Simplicity of design was best suited to the limited skills usually available for WPA work. The WPA urged upon sponsors the elimination of ornate architectural features, intricate structural design, and elaborate trim.”<sup>24</sup>

The WPA preferred labor-intensive construction techniques as well as simplified styles. “In order to employ the maximum amount of WPA labor, sponsors were encouraged to use methods which would require the least equipment consistent with efficiency.” Because of this the program had “certain architectural features” that achieved “definite economies” through the use of “particular materials.”<sup>25</sup>

In urban Southern California this meant concrete. “Reinforced concrete was used very extensively in new construction, in designs which fitted the local architecture tradition (as for example, in our originally Spanish southwestern communities).” Elsewhere, the work came closer to that of the CCC. “When other structural materials were used, they were generally native to the region, easily accessible, and not expensive.”<sup>26</sup>

Generally the *Final Report* was pleased with the product. “The result was the construction of many thousands of public buildings of simple and pleasing appearance and sound architectural design, with savings both in original cost and in future maintenance.” At the same time, it did acknowledge criticism. “Although some of the buildings erected by WPA labor are admittedly not of good architectural design, in the main the WPA has had an influence, recognized as good, upon public architectural standards.”<sup>27</sup>

### WPA Federal Arts Project

While construction was the predominant activity of the WPA, it also provided work in many other fields. For our purposes the most important was the Federal Arts Project, which hired muralists and sculptors to decorate public buildings and settings.

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<sup>24</sup> *Final Report*, 52.

<sup>25</sup> *Final Report*, 52.

<sup>26</sup> *Final Report*, 52.

<sup>27</sup> *Final Report*, 52.



*WPA Federal Arts Project model for the entrance to the Hollywood Bowl, 1939  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

As with construction, there were two important arts programs under the New Deal, and the division between them paralleled the division between the PWA and WPA. Comparable to the Public Works Administration was the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture. Created in 1934 and lasting until 1943, it provided decoration for federally-owned buildings such as post offices. Like the PWA, the Section was concerned with the quality of the work and not the needs of unemployed artists. It required competitions for commissions, and generally ended up contracting with artists who already had work.<sup>28</sup>

The Federal Arts Program of the WPA, on the other hand, placed the employment of artists above the quality of the work. It was one of four sections within the WPA Art Division, the others being the Federal Music Project, the Federal Theater Project, and the Federal Writers Project, best known for its state guidebooks. They all functioned under the mandate of the WPA – to hire workers in need and then find them projects.<sup>29</sup>

The WPA's artists took responsibility for decorating state and local public buildings and landscapes, such as schools, libraries, parks, city halls, and airports. As with a construction project, a local sponsor identified a potential art project and then made contact with the WPA district office. The sponsor generally agreed to pay for materials, scaffolding, and any other expenses. An artist was selected from the WPA rolls and a suitable subject agreed upon. The artist presented preliminary sketches or models

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<sup>28</sup> Matthew Baigell, *The American Scene: American Painting of the 1930s* (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1974), 50; Taylor, *American-Made*, 270.

<sup>29</sup> Ellis, *Nation in Torment*, 510; Taylor, *American-Made*, 270. There was also a relatively minor program entitled the Treasury Relief Art Project that ran from mid-1935 until mid-1939. It was a relief program to provide decoration in public buildings for which funds had not been allocated under other programs and was financed through the Federal Arts Program. See Baigell, *American Scene*, 54.

for the sponsor to approve. Once approval was obtained, the WPA supplied assistant artists if needed and the work began.<sup>30</sup>

Because of the stress on employment over talent, the quality of the WPA work was more uneven than that of the Section of Painting and Sculpture.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, the work of the two shares certain characteristics. It generally falls into the category of the “American Scene.” The goal was the “depiction of real people in real settings.”<sup>32</sup> This was a style that had become well-established by the early 1930s and was particularly used in large-scale murals.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, there was a degree of difference between Section work in federal buildings and WPA work in local settings. The “American Scene” artists were divided roughly into two groups. The “Regionalists” celebrated local culture, while the “Social Realists” dealt with larger questions of social justice. Overwhelming, the art of the New Deal produced by both the Treasury Section and the Federal Arts Project fell into the “Regionalist” category. But it was more common to find the occasional “Social Realist” work done by a WPA artist.<sup>34</sup>

#### **The WPA between 1935 and 1943**

During its eight years of existence, the WPA went through three periods. The first, from 1935 through 1938, was a period of success in terms of widespread public support. The second, from 1938 through 1940, was one of growing conservative reaction against the New Deal in general and the WPA in particular as one of its emblematic programs. The third period, from 1940 through 1943, was one in which the WPA become increasingly involved in defense-related work and lost its identity as a separate program.

The course of the WPA from early 1936 through the end of 1938 showed just how important it was to the general welfare of the country. By January of 1936 the WPA had enrolled around 2.8 million, and increased later that year to over 3 million. But as the economy appeared to recover, in large part because of the administration’s spending programs, Roosevelt decided that he could retrench. This overly optimistic view led to a reduction in appropriations for all agencies, and in early 1937 he drastically cut funds to the WPA.<sup>35</sup>

From its peak of over three million in mid-1936, enrollment fell to 2.2 million in February of 1937. By August it was down to around 1.5 million. In an attempt to fill the hole created by the withdrawal of

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<sup>30</sup> Milton Meltzer, *Violins and Shovels: The WPA Arts Project* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1976), 69; Taylor, *American-Made*, 274.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor, *American-Made*, 270.

<sup>32</sup> Taylor, *American-Made*, 273.

<sup>33</sup> Baigell, *American Scene*, 46.

<sup>34</sup> Baigell, *American Scene*, 54-61; Meltzer, *Violins and Shovels*, 64.

<sup>35</sup> Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 244; Taylor, *American-Made*, 220, 330.

federal funds, the proportion of local contributions to WPA projects increase from 9.8 percent in 1936 to 20.8 percent two years later.<sup>36</sup>

The result of this federal spending cutback, most particularly in WPA expenditures, was the so-called Roosevelt Recession of 1937. As the stock market fell and unemployment increased, the administration realized just how dependent on government spending the economy continued to remain. In April of 1938 the president reversed course and requested more than 1.4 billion dollars in additional funds for the WPA. By August of 1938 WPA enrollment was almost 3.3 million, more than double that of the year before.<sup>37</sup>

But it was also in 1938 that the mood of the country became more conservative. The WPA was a target for much of this conservative reaction. It was due in part to the poor quality of some of the projects. The WPA acknowledged this in the *Final Report*, where it noted that a “lack of advanced planning of public works made inevitable much of the confusion and waste which marked some of the early work relief activities of the Federal Government.”<sup>38</sup>

Politically more damaging, however, was the charge by Republicans that the WPA was simply a means by which the Democrats bought votes. This was an issue in the 1938 mid-term election, in which the Republicans did relatively well. With Republican and conservative Democratic support, the new Congress passed the Hatch Act in 1939. It specifically prohibited all federal employees, including WPA workers, from participating in any kind of political activity.<sup>39</sup>

To weaken further what was perceived as a permanent pro-Roosevelt army of WPA workers, the period of time during which individuals could remain enrolled was changed. The original mandate of the WPA was to provide a job for as long as an individual needed it. Enrollees remained until they found outside employment. But in 1939 the rules were changed. Now an enrollee could only remain in the WPA for an uninterrupted period of up to eighteen months.<sup>40</sup>

Late 1938 also saw a change in the management of the WPA that was perceived as a conservative move. Hopkins, long accused of politicizing the works program, was replaced by Colonel F. H. Harrington of the Army’s Corps of Engineers. Hopkins had reluctantly hired Harrington in 1935 as his chief engineer to oversee the technical aspects of construction projects.<sup>41</sup> Described by one historian as a “non-political

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<sup>36</sup> Taylor, *American-Made*, 330, 346, 349.

<sup>37</sup> Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 244,257; Taylor, *American-Made*, 358, 361.

<sup>38</sup> *Final Report*, IV.

<sup>39</sup> Ellis, *Nation in Torment*, 529; Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 269-270; Taylor, *American-Made*, 474.

<sup>40</sup> *Final Report*, 21.

<sup>41</sup> Taylor, *American-Made*, 180.

West Pointer,” Harrington was judged to be a balance to the highly political Hopkins.<sup>42</sup> When Hopkins left the WPA in December of 1938 to become Secretary of Commerce, Harrington succeeded him.<sup>43</sup>

Along with the loss of Hopkins came a decrease in independence. The Reorganization Act of 1939 grouped together the WPA, the PWA, and the Treasury’s Section of Painting and Sculpture together under a new single Federal Works Agency. It was at this time that the WPA was renamed the Work Projects Administration. This move, together with the new management under Harrington, resulted in a greater stress on construction and less on the various Federal Art projects, which had generated the greatest amount of conservative opposition.<sup>44</sup>

The Second World War again changed the nature of the WPA. The change occurred well before the United States joined the conflict in December of 1941. The fall of France to German forces in the spring of 1940 left the United Kingdom as the only European power to oppose the Axis. At that point the Roosevelt administration increasingly focused on security matters, and the WPA became, in the words of one historian, “a virtual adjunct of the military services and civil defense authorities.”<sup>45</sup>

Harrington made this shift official when he announced in May of 1940 that “because of the serious world situation” the WPA would henceforth give priority to projects contributing to national defense. WPA construction work focused on the kinds of projects it had done before, but now with a defense purpose. This included in particular airstrips and roads to be used for military transport. By April of 1941 the range broadened to include structures for military bases, hospitals, arsenals, and shipyards.<sup>46</sup>

Significant also was the decrease in enrollment, as private sector defense industries began hiring. Yet in June of 1941 the WPA still employed 1,413,000, as its work was seen as necessary for national security. Even in November of 1942, almost a year after Pearl Harbor, there were still 354,619 enrollees. But the need for a jobs program was clearly gone and in December of 1942 Roosevelt announced that the WPA would soon end. This came officially on June 30, 1943.<sup>47</sup>

## **PART II: THE WPA IN LOS ANGELES**

In terms of unemployment California was relatively better off than the more industrialized states of similar size. It had a cumulative 1935-1943 proportion of 4.2% of WPA employment nationwide, compared to its proportion of the overall population in 1940 of 5.2%. Pennsylvania had 8.6% of the WPA employment compared to 7.5% of the population, Ohio 6.8% of the WPA employment compared

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<sup>42</sup> Taylor, *American-Made*, 420.

<sup>43</sup> Taylor, *American-Made*, 419. Harrington died September of 1940 and was succeeded by Howard Hunter, a long-time regional WPA administrator. By that time the work of the WPA was primarily construction work for the military, as described below. See Taylor, *American-Made*, 504.

<sup>44</sup> Taylor, *American-Made*, 435-437.

<sup>45</sup> Taylor, *American-Made*, 492.

<sup>46</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1940; Taylor, *American-Made*, 492-494, 510.

<sup>47</sup> Taylor, *American-Made*, 518-519, 523.

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to 5.3% of the population, and Illinois 7.3% of the WPA employment compared to 6.0% of the population. Nonetheless, by 1935 California's state and local relief programs were in serious need of federal assistance.<sup>48</sup>

### Pre-WPA Construction Programs

Both the California State Emergency Relief Administration and the Los Angeles County Relief Administration predated the WPA. Both provided construction projects that ranged from road repairs and creation of firebreaks in the Santa Monica Mountains to rehabilitation work at the county's General Hospital. The County Relief Administration even included an art project that was eventually incorporated into both the Treasury's art program and the WPA Art Project. But funds were limited and projects often remained unfinished once the money ran out.<sup>49</sup>

As funds grew low and the unemployment problem only got worse, state and local agencies turned to the federal government for assistance. By December of 1932 Los Angeles had an unemployment rate of close to twenty-eight percent. During that month the county applied to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation for funds to finance its public works program. The money given would provide ten days of work for 14,000 workers. This was obviously only a stopgap measure, and once the New Deal programs came into force, state and local agencies increasingly relied on them to continue their construction efforts.<sup>50</sup>

From 1933 through 1935 the FERA and the CWA kept this work active. While FERA was allowed to initiate projects, the CWA was limited to projects locally sponsored. In practice, both agencies tended to adopt the already underway state and county activity as their own. These ranged from CWA participation in the initial stages of the demolition of the old County Courthouse, later taken over as a WPA project, to clearing and grading work for what became Los Angeles International Airport.<sup>51</sup>

There are several extant resources that date back to the pre-WPA construction programs. Two of the best known are in Echo Park. They are the Boathouse of 1932 (City Historic-Cultural Monument No. 950), constructed under local jobs program, possibly with Reconstruction Finance Corporation assistance, and the "Lady of the Lake" statue, created in 1934, with funding from the Public Works of Art Project. Additional resources that predate the WPA include improvements to Hollenbeck Park in 1932-1933, carried out by county welfare labor with funds from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, and the Vermont Canyon Tennis Complex in Griffith Park, built in 1933 under the CWA.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Final Report*, 36.

<sup>49</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 1935, July 5, 1935, August 25, 1935; Taylor, *American-Made*, 186.

<sup>50</sup> Taylor, *American-Made*, 15, 77-78.

<sup>51</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 6, 1935, October 10, 1935, March 22, 1936.

<sup>52</sup> Data from "Living New Deal," [www.livingnewdeal.org](http://www.livingnewdeal.org).

## **The WPA Comes to Los Angeles**

In the summer of 1935, when the WPA began to organize itself, Los Angeles County had about 100,000 individuals – heads of families or single men and women – on relief who were considered employable and qualified for the WPA. In light of this need, the county received about forty percent of the two-hundred-million-dollar federal allocation made to California. This was estimated to be enough to put 96,000 individuals to work by November. It would include more than 60,000 skilled and unskilled workers assigned to construction.<sup>53</sup>

For its state and local management, the WPA initially made use of experts previously involved in relief programs. The first WPA Administrator for California was Frank McLaughlin, who was already serving as the state's relief administrator. The assumption was that the WPA would take the place of the state agency. Ralph Dalton, a former executive with the PWA, was sent from Washington to become the Los Angeles County WPA Director. Included in his staff was a member of the planning division of the Los Angeles County Relief Administration, who had also been an executive with the local CWA.<sup>54</sup>

Dalton's stated goal, when he arrived on the job in mid-July of 1935, was to shift 75,000 individuals listed on the county relief roles to the WPA "at once."<sup>55</sup> Yet by the middle of August, no new WPA jobs had yet been created. The best that Dalton could do was to express the hope that soon the WPA would be able to take over the approximately 285 projects already underway as part of the county construction effort. In explaining this delay, State Administrator McLaughlin blamed it on the inability of the local sponsors to come up with their required matches.<sup>56</sup>

The response to this delay was to bring in the military. In mid-September of 1935 Dalton was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Donald Connolly of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. A graduate of West Point and the University of California, Connolly had worked earlier in Los Angeles as part of the CWA and, at the time of his appointment, was the WPA Regional Assistant Director for the eleven western states. Connolly brought with him six additional army officers as assistants.<sup>57</sup>

Management by the Corps of Engineers was logical, particularly for construction projects. The Corps had experience in precisely the kind of civil engineering that made up much of the early WPA work. At the same time, the military knew how to handle large groups of men, an important if not commonly mentioned skill when the work force existed of individuals who were assigned to a job, not because of any particular aptitude or enthusiasm, but because they were unemployed.

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<sup>53</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 1935, July 18, 1935.

<sup>54</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 1935, July 6, 1935, August 2, 1935.

<sup>55</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 17, 1935.

<sup>56</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, August 11, 1935, August 18, 1935.

<sup>57</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 1935, September 27, 1935.

The Corp of Engineers was already involved in early WPA work in the area. Many of the first WPA jobs were on city and county flood control projects begun earlier under the direction of Corps. There was also use of the WPA at Fort MacArthur in San Pedro, where in July of 1935 the War Department proposed using it for rehabilitating hangers and barracks, paving runways, and improving the grounds.<sup>58</sup>

Connolly and his staff proved to be a success. Initially he had been chosen to get the district office running efficiently and then return it to civilian control. The agreement between the WPA and the Corps of Engineers allowing for his service was to end in May of 1936. But Connolly's achievements were such that both State WPA Director McLaughlin and the Regional Director for the eleven western states asked Hopkins to make an exception for Los Angeles. Hopkins agreed, approving his retention. More than a year later, in September of 1937, the army formally agreed to allow Connolly and his staff to stay in charge of Los Angeles as long as needed.<sup>59</sup>

Originally Connolly was responsible for construction work alone. But by the end of 1937 he assumed control of all WPA endeavors, including the Art, Music, Theater, and Writers Projects. He also saw his responsibility enlarged to include Santa Barbara, Ventura, Orange, San Diego, San Bernardino, and Imperial Counties. In January of 1938 Southern California officially became a separate entity from Northern California, placing Connolly on a level with other state administrators.<sup>60</sup>

By the end of 1938 circumstances were stable enough to permit Connolly to return to the army. The *Los Angeles Times*, no fan of the WPA, expressed its respect for his work. It noted that Connolly had been brought in earlier to straighten out the CWA "when the New Deal administration of this first form of Federal unemployment relief became entangled in politics in 1933 and 1934," and had to return in September of 1935, with a staff of fellow soldiers, when the early WPA needed a similar strong administrative hand.<sup>61</sup> "These able officers have done much to deflect scandal from work-relief in this region, and while they have not in the circumstances done the impossible of keeping politics out of a system infected with it from the top, they have minimized its evil effects."<sup>62</sup>

### How the WPA Functioned

The first need of the WPA was a central office. Initially, in July of 1935, it worked out of temporary quarters within the County Relief Administration at 714 South Flower Street. Within a month the WPA was planning to establish its own headquarters in the former Furniture Exchange Building at Twelfth and Santee Streets. Twelfth and Santee soon become known as the WPA Building.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 1935, July 18, 1935.

<sup>59</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 1936, May 10, 1936, May 16, 1936, September 10, 1937.

<sup>60</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, December 22, 1937, January 13, 1938.

<sup>61</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 1938.

<sup>62</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, December 24, 1938.

<sup>63</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1935, August 16, 1935, August 27, 1935. The building dates from 1927-1928 and was designed by W. Douglas Lee. It is notable as having been developed by Florence C. Casler, one of the few women involved in large-scale real estate investment at the time. After serving the WPA, it became offices for the Army



*The WPA Building, 1935  
Twelfth and Santee Streets, Los Angeles  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

By November of 1935 a pay scale for construction projects had been established for California. Amounts were given for a 120-hour month. Unskilled laborers, the bulk of WPA workers, received \$55 per month. Semi-skilled workers, including helpers for carpenters and electricians, made \$65. Skilled workers, such as licensed electricians and plumbers, master carpenters and painters, made \$85. Professional and technical personnel, such as engineers, made \$94.<sup>64</sup>

These rates were at the higher end of the national WPA wage scale, which varied among regions. In New York, the unskilled rate was also initially \$55 a month, later raised to \$60.50, while in rural North Carolina the unskilled received about \$44 a month. For professional and technical workers, the California salary of \$94 per month was as high as the WPA scale allowed. These rates were in force at a time when, in comparison, a teacher in an urban school district could expect to earn about \$70 a month.<sup>65</sup>

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and retained this role as late as 1950. See Sanborn Map for 1907/1950; Central City Community Plan Area, Individual Resources Report, SurveyLA.

<sup>64</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1935.

<sup>65</sup> Ellis, *Nation in Torment*, 504; Taylor, *American-Made*, 199, 366, 370, 514.



*WPA job site, 1936*

*Arroyo Seco at the Santa Fe Bridge (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 339), Highland Park  
(L.A. City Archives and Records)*

The WPA soon established itself as a presence in the economy of Southern California. During 1936 it spent \$45,504,446 in Los Angeles County. It gave employment to 53,229 on average over the year. It started with 58,209 in January, rose to 65,170 in February, dropped to 45,164 in August, and rose again to 49,195 in November. At the beginning of January of 1937 it had 47,304 on its rolls.<sup>66</sup>

By July of 1937 the WPA had created a support system for its construction projects. It had a main warehouse at 5955 South Western Avenue for storing equipment. There was an estimated one million dollars' worth of machinery and tools, ranging from scissors to steam shovels, and including about thirty-six thousand pick axes, the tool that came to symbolize the WPA in the public mind. There were also smaller warehouses scattered around the county. About 150 employees maintained and kept track of items checked out by teams working on specific projects. The system was seen as a model for WPA offices in other parts of the country.<sup>67</sup>

The City and County of Los Angeles were the sponsors for most the WPA projects covered by SurveyLA. In July of 1935 the Los Angeles City Council approved a list of 164 projects which included water line extensions, sewer and storm drain construction, street improvements and tree planting. By September the proposed list for the county as a whole contained work worth an estimated \$28,000,000. Most of

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<sup>66</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, January 11, 1937.

<sup>67</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 1, 1937. The building on Western Avenue was constructed as a furniture factory in 1924. Most likely the WPA rented, rather than owned, the facility, but this needs to be confirmed. The building still stands, with a greatly altered façade. See original building permit at the City's online building records service [www.ladbs.org/services](http://www.ladbs.org/services); 1927 Sanborn Map.

these early proposals, both City and County, consisted of unfinished projects begun under earlier programs.<sup>68</sup>

In order to provide for its portion of the cost of these early, as well as subsequent, projects, the City and County counted on its contribution of planning and supervision services. In October of 1935 the County Board of Supervisors allocated \$100,000 to pay for about 100 additional staff to draft plans, write specifications, and provide supervision for WPA construction work. The City in contrast relied at first on its existing staff and assigned its City Engineer as the coordinator for WPA projects.<sup>69</sup>

But the workload eventually overwhelmed the City's resources in place. By May of 1937 it anticipated adding at least 94 additional civil engineers, draftsmen, and other technical staff to prepare plans and specifications for WPA-funded street, sewer and storm drain improvements. The City's Park Commission was particularly active in providing plans, specifications and supervision for WPA projects. As early as November of 1935 it proposed to hire a Chief Project Engineer specifically to oversee WPA work.<sup>70</sup>

#### **The WPA after Connolly**

Lieutenant Colonel Connolly and his fellow Corp of Engineer assistants were followed, after January of 1939, by a series of civilians. But the change from military to civilian management in Los Angeles coincided with a contrasting change from civilian to military management at the national level. It was in January of 1939 that Hopkins was replaced by Colonel F. H. Harrington.

Harrington was expected to continue, at the national level, the relatively non-political style of Connolly. The *Times* echoed this view in reporting on an appearance by Harrington in Los Angeles in November of 1939. "A colonel in the Army Engineering Corps, he has a background that fits him for the work. Smartly dressed mufti, he talks like an engineer and a little like an economist."<sup>71</sup>

The first to follow Connolly as Southern California Administrator in early 1939 was Herbert Legg, a former L.A. County Supervisor with experience in flood control work. He was followed in November of 1940 by Clayton Triggs, who had experience working for the Los Angeles Charities Department, as well as holding positions with the California state relief office and with the WPA in Washington.<sup>72</sup> The *Times* praised him as "a man of conservative ideas" and "an active opponent of radicalism."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1935, September 3, 1935, October 8, 1935.

<sup>69</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1935, October 29, 1935.

<sup>70</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 1935, December 10, 1935, May 19, 1937.

<sup>71</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 25, 1939.

<sup>72</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 13, 1939, November 14, 1940.

<sup>73</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 15, 1940. Triggs is perhaps better remembered for his subsequent position as the first director of Manzanar. See *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1942.

By the early 1940s the role of the local WPA administrator was becoming increasingly irrelevant as defense work became the priority. The shift became more pronounced after America's entry into the war in December of 1941. In Los Angeles this meant a concentration on roads around military-related facilities. In January of 1942 Los Angeles received a grant of over three hundred thousand dollars for street improvements "in areas where population has expanded because of defense activities."<sup>74</sup> This consisted primarily of improvements to streets in the San Fernando Valley around aircraft plants and in the harbor area. The need for these improvements had been certified by the military.<sup>75</sup>

With the demands for labor in the defense industries and the manpower needs of the armed forces, the WPA in Los Angeles became increasingly irrelevant. It actually came to an official end in Southern California on March 31, 1943, three months before its national termination. Left unfinished were several major projects.<sup>76</sup>

### **PART III: WPA PROJECTS IN LOS ANGELES**

There are five categories of project types. They are: first, roadways, drainage, and other infrastructure; second, parks, playgrounds and associated buildings; third, stand-alone public buildings; fourth, bridges and viaducts; and fifth, public art projects.

#### **Roadways, Drainage, and Other Infrastructure**

The first WPA projects for Los Angeles were in drainage and flood control work, often planned earlier together with the Corps of Engineers. As early as July of 1935 WPA allotments had been authorized for jetty construction at the mouth of Ballona Creek and for the installation of rip-rap along the Los Angeles River. In August Dalton, the first local WPA administrator, worked with the Corps on proposals for similar projects. In September the WPA granted approval for additional storm water drainage projects, along with water lines, roadway and sidewalk improvements.<sup>77</sup>

The WPA sewer and storm drainage projects that were actually underway by October of 1935 were mostly those taken over from the Los Angeles County Relief Administration. As late as November, when some new projects began, the *Times* noted that current and near future WPA work was all storm drainage and sewer construction, with a few road improvements. The Corps of Engineers remained responsible for overseeing all WPA flood control projects.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 1942.

<sup>75</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 1942.

<sup>76</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 1943. For unfinished work see the discussion of the First Street Viaduct and the Aliso Street Bridge below.

<sup>77</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1935, August 7, 1935, September 18, 1935.

<sup>78</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 8, 1935, November 4, 1935, December 22, 1935.

Throughout the late 1930s and into the early 1940s storm drainage remained a primary focus of the WPA. It was an area in which the Corp and City engineers had experience. It was also an activity that employed large numbers of unskilled labor of the kind that made up most of the WPA rolls. Added to this was the need for these projects demonstrated by extensive flooding in early 1938. After that event, work on flood control increased public support for the WPA in general.

There were a number of major storm drainage projects that involved several districts of the city united together by the nature of their drainage patterns. The two districts receiving the most attention were the West Side and Northeast Los Angeles. The West Side was the first to receive funding. What was commonly called the Slauson Avenue system drained 10,000 acres bounded roughly by Slauson, Exposition Boulevard, Western Avenue and Ballona Creek. It was estimated to have provided jobs for 7531 workers and to have cost over nine million dollars.<sup>79</sup>

By March of 1937 fourteen storm drainage projects had been completed or were under construction throughout the county. They included the work on the West Side as well as along Yosemite Drive in Eagle Rock, which had begun under the county relief program. The flooding that occurred in 1938 shifted additional focus to the northeast. The result was a series of linked storm drainage projects around Garvanza Avenue and Figueroa Street. These projects began in March of 1939, with additional work added in March and April of 1940.<sup>80</sup>

These northeastern storm drainage systems were related to one of the best known of the Depression-era projects, the Arroyo Seco Parkway (110 Freeway north of the interchange in Downtown, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, a National Civil Engineering Landmark, a State Scenic Highway and a National Scenic Byway). The Parkway, construction of which began in March of 1938 and was substantially completed by December of 1940, was actually one part of a decade-long Arroyo Seco Project that included drainage improvements and park construction along with the highway work. The PWA and the state highway department took primary responsibility for the parkway itself, while the WPA worked on the adjacent channel.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1935.

<sup>80</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, March 21, 1937, May 22, 1941.

<sup>81</sup> Starr, *Endangered Dreams*, 322. WPA work on the Parkway included roadway preparation, concrete abutments for the railroad bridge south of Avenue 35 and the Avenue 52 automobile bridge, widening of the Solano Avenue pedestrian undercrossing, and grading for landscaping. See National Register of Historic Places Draft Registration Form for the Arroyo Seco Parkway Historic District (October 1990), Section 7; 5, 16, 18, Section 8; 5, 9.

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*WPA flood control work, 1936*

*Arroyo Seco at the Santa Fe Bridge (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 339), Highland Park  
(L.A. City Archives and Records)*



*WPA flood control work, 1936*

*Arroyo Seco south of San Pascual Avenue, Highland Park  
(L.A. City Archives and Records)*

The Arroyo Seco Project began as flood control work in 1932, funded by the RFC and with labor supplied by the state relief agency. Continuation of the flood control work was one of the first WPA projects,

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with \$453,826 allocated in October of 1935. By 1941, the WPA had constructed five miles of concrete and masonry-lined channels and connections to the adjoining storm drainage systems.<sup>82</sup>

The street improvement work of the WPA was widespread and ongoing for the eight years of its life. As with the flood control projects these were jobs that could employ large amounts of unskilled labor. But, unlike flood control, street work was under the control of the city's Board of Public Works, rather than the Corps of Engineers.

Mention of some of the projects underway in January of 1937 gives a feel for the extent and nature of the work. They included widening of Highland Avenue between Cahuenga Boulevard and Santa Monica Boulevard, straightening and widening Olympic Boulevard from Norton Avenue to Rimpau Boulevard, improving Main Street in Venice from Navy Street to Venice Way, and paving Santa Monica Boulevard from Heath Avenue to Sepulveda Boulevard.<sup>83</sup>



*Retaining wall, 1940*

*Sunset Boulevard near North Benton Way, Silver Lake*

*(Photo by author)*

Typical of the infrastructure associated with road improvements is the retaining wall located along the west side of Sunset Boulevard near North Benton Way in Silver Lake. Of particular significance are the plaques that note the project's completion. They state BUILT BY UNITED STATES WORK PROJECTS

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<sup>82</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 1935, May 22, 1941. The National Register Arroyo Seco Parkway Historic District includes the Arroyo Seco Channel from the Los Angeles River to approximately Stoney Drive in South Pasadena. See National Register of Historic Places Draft Registration Form for the Arroyo Seco Parkway Historic District (October 1990), Section 10; 3.

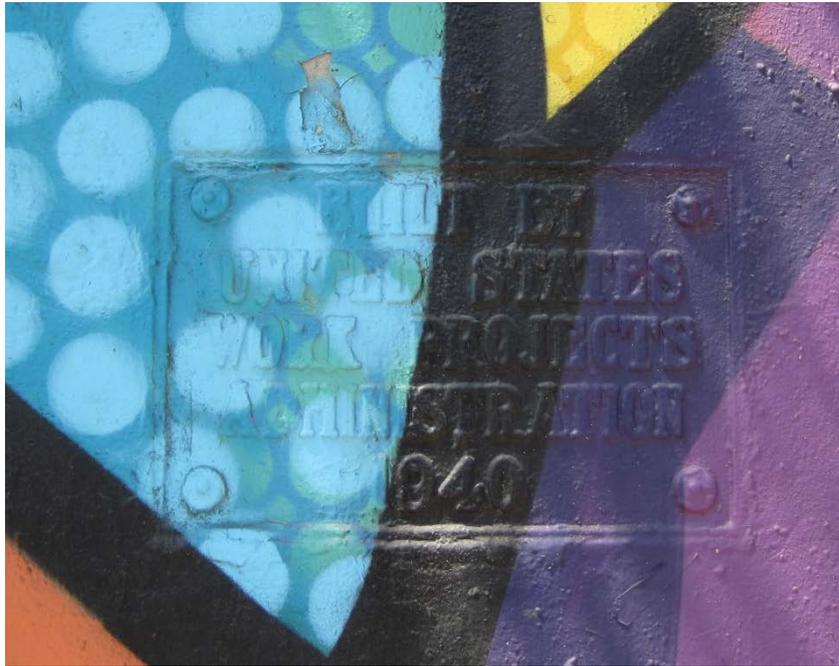
<sup>83</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 1937.

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ADMINISTRATION 1940, using the new name the WPA had adopted. The plaques have been incorporated into the artwork that now adorns the wall.<sup>84</sup>



*WPA plaque, retaining wall, 1940*

*Sunset Boulevard near North Benton Way, Silver Lake*

*(Photo by author)*

Among the most significant roadwork projects was the upgrading of what was then referred to as the Municipal Airport at Mines Field. Mines Field opened as the official airport for the city in 1930, and work on it was included as part a City-proposed WPA road improvement package put forth in September of 1935. But it was rejected because the land was leased rather than city-owned. By 1937 the City obtained title and WPA funds were forthcoming. But the greatest part of work took place once Harrington shifted the WPA's focus to defense, and the airport gained an additional \$742,423 in April of 1941.<sup>85</sup>

### **Parks, Playgrounds, and Associated Structures**

As with street improvements and drainage projects, work on parks and playgrounds was a prime WPA focus. Here too great numbers of unskilled workers could be employed in grading and landscaping. The park and playground projects, however, went beyond storm drainage and street infrastructure in that

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<sup>84</sup> Data from "Living New Deal."

<sup>85</sup> Data from "Living New Deal;" *Los Angeles Times*, September 5, 1935, October 10, 1935, March 24, 1938, April 13, 1941.

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they often involved light construction as well, with restrooms, clubhouses, and recreational centers added to the landscape work.

By February of 1936 work was scheduled to begin on improvements to 43 city playgrounds. It consisted of general repairs and renovations to 25 of them, and minor improvements to the rest. In addition to general landscaping, work ranged from grading baseball diamonds and play areas to installing fencing and remodeling existing buildings.<sup>86</sup>

Included in these early 1936 projects were a number of improvements to Elysian Park. They cost \$211,942, provided 358 men on average per month with employment for nine months, and created two tennis courts and two restrooms, along with grading and landscaping. Another 1936 project, typical of the minor improvements to smaller sites, was at Terrace Park and Powers Place (L. A. Historic Cultural Monument No. 210). Terrace Park, dedicated in 1904, is an integral part of the Alvarado Terrace complex. Here the WPA constructed new walkways and curbs.<sup>87</sup>

Park work continued to be a focus in the following years, with increasing attention directed to buildings. In 1938 the city requested additional funds for “general improvements,” specifically for recreational centers in parks. It was to include repairs to existing structures, landscaping around the structures, and some new “construction of sports and recreation facilities.”<sup>88</sup>



*Clubhouse, Sunland Park Playground, 1941  
1701 Foothill Boulevard, Sunland  
(Photo by author)*

Three projects, completed between 1938 and 1941, are examples of this later WPA park work in neighborhood settings. The first is the Sunland Park Playground (now the Sunland Park and Recreation

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<sup>86</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 1936.

<sup>87</sup> Data from “Living New Deal,” Jeffrey Herr, editor, *Landmark L.A.: Historic-Cultural Monuments of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Cultural Affairs Department, 2002), 438.

<sup>88</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1938.

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Center). It is located at the intersection of Sunland and Foothill Boulevards. In 1937 the City purchased six acres adjacent to the existing Sunland Park for a playground. The project was completed by the WPA in May of 1941.<sup>89</sup>

It included, in addition to picnic grounds and a children's play area, tennis courts, baseball diamonds, athletic fields, and courts for basketball, volleyball, paddle tennis, horseshoes, croquet, and badminton. It also contained a clubhouse constructed at a cost of \$14,000. The clubhouse is representative of the smaller structures built by the WPA as part of its park and playground improvements.<sup>90</sup>

The second example of a neighborhood park project is the pool and bathhouse at the rear of the 109<sup>th</sup> Street Playground, located at 1464 East 109<sup>th</sup> Street. (The pool and bathhouse are now hidden from view by a later Recreation Center. Their original public entrance appears to have been from 110<sup>th</sup> Street.) WPA work at this site was completed in 1939. The ensemble consisted of a pool fronted by an east-facing bathhouse, perpendicular to 110<sup>th</sup> Street, which opened onto the playground. The long and narrow single-story bathhouse was designed in a simplified Mediterranean Revival design, composed in a classically symmetrical Palladian mode of central pedimented mass and extended wings.<sup>91</sup>

The third example, completed in 1938, is the Rancho Cienega Playground (now the Rancho Cienega Sports Center Park), located just to the west of Dorsey High School, between Exposition Boulevard and Rodeo Road, to the east of La Brea Boulevard. Ground was broken in November of 1936 for what was to become the city's largest municipal recreation and athletic center. It consisted of a 30-acre site, and was associated with the construction of Dorsey High. The WPA built the playground while the City funded the school.<sup>92</sup>

The site had been donated to the city, and the final cost amounted to \$218,917.<sup>93</sup> A 1938 report from the Los Angeles Department of Playgrounds and Recreation described the project as follows: "Forerunner of the great regional recreation center of the future, the Rancho Cienega Playground was the outstanding addition to the Los Angeles recreation system in 1938."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1941; *Rancho Tujunga: A History of Sunland-Tujunga, California*, compiled by Sarah R. Lombard (Sunland: Sunland Women's Club, 1990), 168.

<sup>90</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1941. The original Sunland Park and the playground have been united into a single entity. Updated facilities still include baseball diamonds and basketball courts. New structures have been added, including a larger clubhouse.

<sup>91</sup> 1927/1950 Sanborn Map; "Southeast Los Angeles Individual Resources," SurveyLA. The extent of WPA responsibility for the work on the pool and bathhouse is not clear. "Living New Deal" notes that the WPA "helped in improvements at this pool" in 1939 with \$36,211 in labor and \$3,129 in other expenses. Further investigation into the history of the pool and bathhouse is required. (The city has no building permits recorded for either of them, per the City's online building records service at [www.ladbs.org/services](http://www.ladbs.org/services).)

<sup>92</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 1936.

<sup>93</sup> Data from "Living New Deal."

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in "Living New Deal."

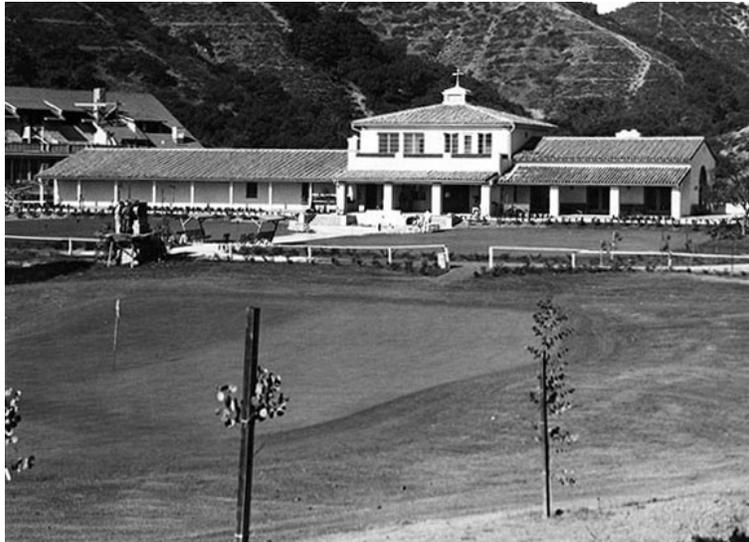
## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

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The completed playground included baseball diamonds, tennis courts, a field for football or soccer encompassed by a running track, an archery range, and facilities for basketball, volleyball, croquet, and horseshoes. The most important element was a stadium seating six thousand, as well as a number of support buildings. Along with general landscaping and fencing the WPA also constructed parking for four hundred cars.<sup>95</sup>

The athletic facilities have been altered, but still consist of a stadium and field, four baseball diamonds, tennis courts, a running track around a second field, and a parking lot. Several major buildings have subsequently been added, including a gymnasium and a swimming complex. The only building that apparently survives from the WPA period is a small, single-story structure just to the northwest of the stadium. Its construction is similar to the Sunland Park Clubhouse, but it is smaller in size and simpler in massing.<sup>96</sup>



*Franklin D. Roosevelt Golf Course and Clubhouse, 1937  
Griffith Park (L. A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 942)  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Apart from this neighborhood playground work, the site receiving the most WPA attention was Griffith Park (L. A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 942). In October of 1935 the Park Commission proposed a series of projects for it, valued at \$2,400,000. The City would provide twenty-two percent of the cost by contributing planning, materials, equipment, and skilled labor. The work was expected to employ three thousand for at least a year.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Data from "Living New Deal."

<sup>96</sup> An aerial photo from 1938, illustrated in "Living New Deal," shows the small, single story building just to the northwest of the stadium. The later swimming pool complex, built in 1960, is called out in the West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Community Plan Area, Individual Resources Report, SurveyLA.

<sup>97</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1935.

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In addition to general development, three specific projects were proposed. The first was the construction of a new nine-hole golf course, along with improvements to the two existing courses, which would include a pumping plant and an irrigation system. The second was the construction of a new clubhouse, to cost \$70,000. The third was the modernization of the existing Griffith Park Zoo (the first Los Angeles Zoo).<sup>98</sup>

The golf course and clubhouse were completed in 1937. The clubhouse, in Spanish Colonial Revival style, replaced an earlier structure that had been destroyed in a 1933 fire. Its interior featured vaulted beamed ceilings and hand-pegged wood floors, thereby providing touches of a private country club within a public facility. The golf course was named for President Roosevelt at the suggestion of Mayor Frank Shaw. (The WPA's Roosevelt Course has been incorporated with adjacent courses and the entire ensemble is now known as the Wilson and Harding Golf Course. A new course was subsequently constructed in a section of the park near the Greek Theater and named for Roosevelt.)<sup>99</sup>



*Bear enclosure, circa 1940  
Griffith Park Zoo  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Equally significant was the work on the zoo. The Griffith Park canyon area had served as the site of the City Zoo since 1912. Work on improvements had actually begun under the County relief programs that predated the WPA. The WPA resumed the work in 1936 and spent several years installing a variety of enclosures, walkways, and supporting structures.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1935.

<sup>99</sup> Data from "Living New Deal," *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1937.

<sup>100</sup> Data from "Living New Deal."

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Plans called for the demolition of the existing cages and the construction in their place of moats and concrete walls, based on the advanced practices of “several large eastern zoos.”<sup>101</sup> These included what were referred to as habitats or grottoes for bears and similar large mammals. (In spite of these improvements, the zoo was eventually considered outmoded. It closed in 1965 and was replaced by the current Los Angeles Zoo in a different location. But the facilities still exist as a set of ruins.)<sup>102</sup>

### Stand-Alone Public Buildings

This was the area in which the WPA and the PWA most overlapped. Cooperation between the two agencies was evident in the Los Angeles School Project. The Project was a program to upgrade or replace schools in light of the damage resulting from the 1933 Long Beach earthquake. Between 1934 and 1938, a board of architects, engineers, and construction experts supervised work on schools that included the Emerson School, Thomas Jefferson High School, and Hollywood High School (listed in the National Register of Historic Places). More than half the funds were supplied by the PWA, and projects were bid out to private contractors through the traditional method of public construction. The WPA provided unskilled labor for such tasks as demolition and small repairs, and also occasionally decoration through its Art Project.<sup>103</sup>



*Fire Station Number One, 1940  
L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 156  
(Photo by author)*

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<sup>101</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1935.

<sup>102</sup> Hadley Meares, “A Whimpering Road: The Old Griffith Park Zoo, Then and Now,” April 13, 2015, [www.kcet.org/history-society](http://www.kcet.org/history-society).

<sup>103</sup> Starr, *Endangered Dreams*, 318.

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Representative of the relatively few stand-alone public buildings for which the WPA took primary responsibility are two designated resources. The first is Fire Station Number One (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 156). In February of 1936 the Los Angeles Fire Department prepared a request for a WPA grant for stations long needed, but not funded by the City. The department stated that some neighborhoods had stations in rented quarters, while others were in need of renovation. There were also districts within the city that had seen rapid growth in the late 1920s and were still without stations.<sup>104</sup>

Fire Station, or Engine Company, Number One is one of the new stations built by the WPA. Located at 2230 Pasadena Avenue in Lincoln Heights, it was completed in 1940 and has been described as “a sterling example of Streamlined Moderne architecture.”<sup>105</sup> Gebhard and Winter note that “the street elevation of this two-story building comes close to being pure two-dimensional design, with the windows and entrance door as an L-shaped form articulated in the lower section with horizontal fins, the lettering treated as a horizontal line, and then two fire truck entrances as two deep rectangles.”<sup>106</sup>



*Naval and Marine Corp Reserve Armory, 1940*

*California Registered Historic Landmark 972, L. A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 1101*

*(Photo by author)*

The other notable public building project is the Naval and Marine Corp Reserve Armory in Elysian Park (California Historical Landmark No. 972, L. A. Historic-Cultural Monument 1101). The Armory was proposed in September of 1937 for a 4.5-acre site on what was then Chavez Ravine Road. It was a

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<sup>104</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1936.

<sup>105</sup> Herr, *Landmark L.A.*, 433.

<sup>106</sup> David Gebhard and Robert Winter, *An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles*, Revised Edition (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 2003), 315.

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cooperative effort of the City, the County and the WPA. The Streamlined Moderne design has been attributed to Robert Clements and Associates. The City contributed the land while the County prepared the working drawings and specifications and supervised construction.<sup>107</sup>

The goal was to provide an assembly space for the two reserve services, which in late 1937 numbered 2500 enlisted men and 700 officers. At the time the reserve units, which included radio, intelligence, legal, medical, and other specialties, met in what the *Times* described in an old garage at 1965 South Los Angeles Street. The new facility would be built on the original site of the city's smallpox hospital.<sup>108</sup>

The project was originally estimated to cost about \$800,000.<sup>109</sup> But once construction began the estimate rose to around \$1,100,000, and there was speculation as to the need to seek PWA assistance. This was due in part to the scale of the project, whereby it was proposed that "P.W.A. skilled workers would step in after preliminary construction is completed by W.P.A. unskilled workers."<sup>110</sup>

Nonetheless, the Armory was declared complete in September of 1940 and described at the time as a WPA project. The land was then formally transferred to the Navy, as what had begun as a locally sponsored endeavor became part of the defense effort. Later that year approval was given for additional WPA work, including the installation of a public address system and other mechanical items, paving, landscaping, and a formal entrance gate with flagpole.<sup>111</sup>

The Armory saw heavy use during the Second World War, with more than 20,000 sailors and marines passing through. During its first 40 years, almost 250,000 members of the military made use of the building at time or another. It was seriously damaged by fire in 1980, but was reopened in 1986 after a \$4.5 million dollar restoration.<sup>112</sup>

### Bridges and Viaducts

Most of the WPA bridges were relatively small projects, usually done as part of flood control projects. Representative of these is the San Pascual Avenue Bridge in Highland Park. It was completed in 1938 and spans the Arroyo Seco Channel. Its design in reinforced concrete, with simple but elegant detailing at the railings, is similar to that found in larger works. It has been repaired, but its overall form, including its roadbed with a single narrow sidewalk along only one side, remains intact.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Data from "Living New Deal;" *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 1937, October 12, 1937.

<sup>108</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1937, February 13, 1938; February 18, 1938.

<sup>109</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 1937.

<sup>110</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, August 6, 1938.

<sup>111</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 1940, November 11, 1940.

<sup>112</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 2, 1986.

<sup>113</sup> Data from "Living New Deal." Three similar bridges, all in Brentwood-Pacific Palisades and spanning the Rustic Creek flood control channel, have been identified by SurveyLA as associated with the WPA. They are located at Channel Lane, Pacific Coast Highway, and Short Street. All date from 1940. See Brentwood-Pacific Palisades Community Plan Area, Non-Parcel Resources Report, SurveyLA.



*San Pascual Avenue Bridge, 1938*  
*San Pasqual Avenue at the Arroyo Seco, Highland Park*  
*(Photo by author)*

There were two projects in this category that exceeded the typical WPA project in size and complexity. Here, as with the Armory, the line between the jurisdictions of the WPA and the PWA was blurred. In most cases, works of this scale would have been considered as belonging to the PWA. These two projects can best be seen as cooperative endeavors among a variety of agencies – local, state, federal – and, with the involvement of the railroads, private.

One is the First Street Viaduct (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 909), upon which work began in 1940. The reinforced concrete overpass was planned to be 900 feet long, with a 44 foot wide roadway, and was designed to carry First Street (which becomes Beverly Boulevard to the west) over Glendale Boulevard and the Pacific Electric railroad tracks. The goal of the project was to eliminate the hazard of the intersection and improve the flow of traffic between downtown and the west side, including the Wilshire district and Hollywood. Also improved would be traffic along Glendale Boulevard. The project employed a crew of 270 workers during its peak of construction.<sup>114</sup>

The First Street Viaduct remained uncompleted in the summer of 1942, with workers increasingly being hired by private defense contractors or entering the military. As a consequence, the City Engineer requested that the City Council approve an additional appropriation so that the remaining work could be put out for bids from private contractors. This was done and the First Street Viaduct was completed by September of 1943.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Data from “Living New Deal.” Three other viaduct or grade separations, all in the Central City North Community Plan Area, have been identified by SurveyLA as associated with the WPA. They are the Macy Street Grade Separation (1938), the Vignes Street Grade Separation (1938), and the Figueroa Street/College Street Grade Separation (1939).

<sup>115</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1942, July 19, 1942, September 19, 1943.

The viaduct remains for the most part intact. Its design is a classic of the era, with the pier and spandrel structure emphasized by the extension of the intermediate vertical supports through the railings along the roadbed. The resemblance to the much smaller San Pascual Avenue Bridge is evident, with similar use of a shallow segmented arch for the span.



*First Street Viaduct, 1942*  
*L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 909*  
*(Los Angeles Public Library)*

The other large project was the Aliso Street Bridge over the Los Angeles River. The City engineer had first proposed it in 1937 to replace an existing structure at an estimated total cost of around two million dollars. The State promised to contribute \$220,000, provided the City and County contribute a like amount. The railroads that ran along the banks of the river, and over which the bridge would also cross as a viaduct, had already pledged \$450,000. The City hoped that the federal government would provide the remainder.<sup>116</sup>

The Aliso Street Bridge was actually part of the early freeway system. It was designed to connect what was then the Ramona Parkway (today's San Bernardino Freeway or Interstate 10) with the proposed Hollywood Parkway (the current US 101 as it passes south of Union Station). Work finally got under way

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<sup>116</sup> Commentary to "Drawing of Aliso St. viaduct" photograph (Order Number 00053012), Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

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in 1940, with WPA funding and an added contribution of \$350,000 from the Pacific Electric Railroad, which would have a set of tracks running down the center of the roadway atop the bridge.<sup>117</sup>

By 1942 the Aliso Street Bridge had been completed to the degree that the *Times* could feature a story. The newspaper referred to it as the “city’s greatest bridge,” the largest of the eighteen major structures crossing the river, with a main arch 220 feet long. The *Times* also noted that it would serve as “a link in the express highway system envisaged for this metropolitan area.” The final cost of five million dollars was borne by the city, county, state and three railroads, as well as the WPA.<sup>118</sup>



*Aliso Street Bridge under construction, 1942  
View from the southwest  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Yet the bridge, like the First Street Viaduct, remained unfinished as the war siphoned off workers. It finally opened fully to traffic in August of 1944. But, because of its role as a link in the new freeway system, it was soon to be altered drastically. As the system developed the bridge came to carry both the San Bernardino and the Santa Ana Freeways. The Pacific Electric tracks were removed and the roadbed widened. In the process much of the initial work has been lost. But the south elevation still contains the original arch over the river flanked by the two abutments with their segmentally-arched openings.<sup>119</sup>

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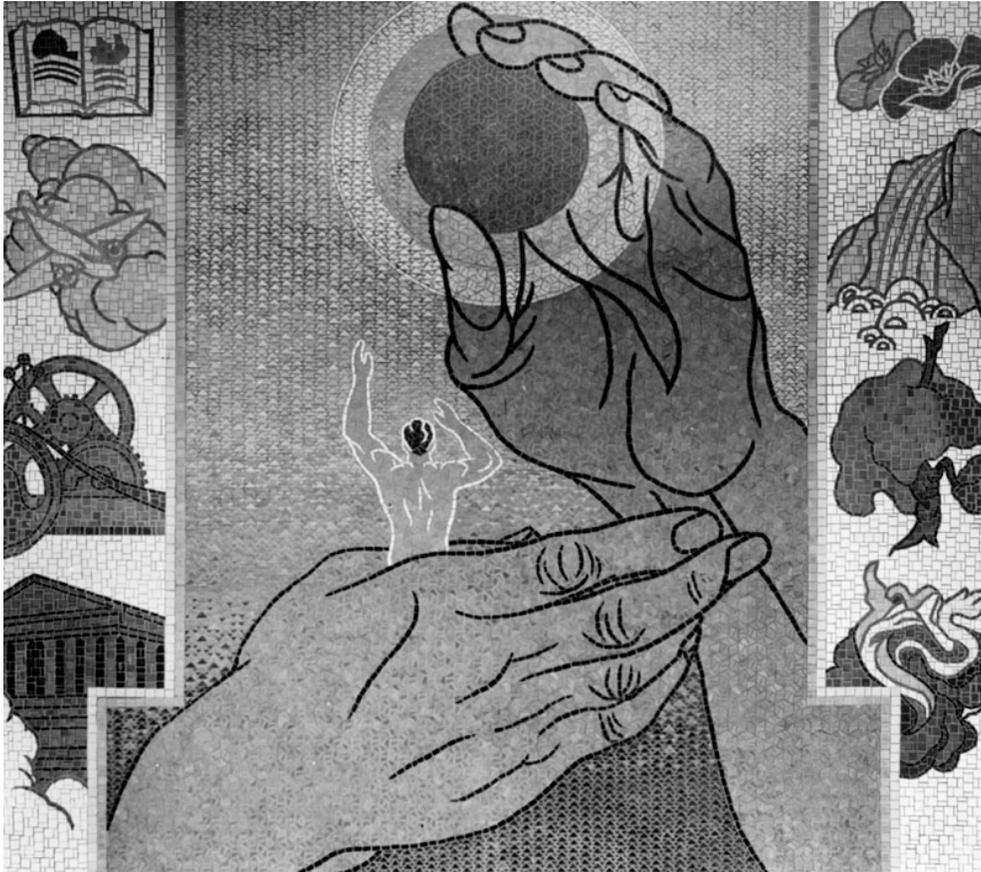
<sup>117</sup> Data from “Living New Deal.”

<sup>118</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1942.

<sup>119</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 1943, August 6, 1944.

### Public Art Projects

The WPA Art Project was responsible for a great number of painted murals and mosaics, and a lesser number of sculptures. Most decorated interior spaces, (not included in SurveyLA) but there are a few intact resources located outside that were evaluated for SurveyLA, since they can be seen from the public right of way.<sup>120</sup>



*“Products of Nature and Inventions of Man” mosaic, 1937  
Hooper Avenue Elementary School, 1225 East 52<sup>nd</sup> Street  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Many of these projects were placed at schools. Two, a mosaic and a sculpture, illustrate these school installations. Exemplary as an exterior mosaic is that found at the Hooper Avenue Elementary School, located at 1225 East 52<sup>nd</sup> Street. It is readily visible from the street, located over the recessed entrance of the Auditorium.

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<sup>120</sup> Murals and public art are included as significant features of designated resources where applicable. In some cases, art may be identified as individually significant. Additional survey work may identify murals and other public art to be contributing features of resources included in SurveyLA or other surveys.

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The mosaic, dating from 1937, is by Stanton MacDonald-Wright and entitled “Products of Nature and Inventions of Man.” MacDonald-Wright was in charge at the time of the Federal Art Project in Los Angeles County. The mosaic is approximately eight feet square and fills the entire bay above the double doors within the recessed entrance.<sup>121</sup>



*“The Vanquished Race” sculpture, 1936  
Thomas Starr King Middle School, 4201 Fountain Avenue  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

The representative school sculpture can be found on the grounds of Thomas Starr King Middle School at 4201 Fountain Avenue. It dates from 1936 and is entitled “The Vanquished Race.” Sculptor Djey el Djey created what has been described as a composite of Native American types, expressing the anguished acceptance of the fate imposed by the invading Europeans.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Data from “Living New Deal.”

<sup>122</sup> Commentary to “‘The Vanquished Race’, Thomas Starr King Junior High School” photograph (Order Number 00076381), Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library; Data from “Living New Deal.”

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In addition to the public school, another common site for WPA art projects, primarily sculpture, was the public park. An example can be found in Lincoln Park. In February of 1937 the City's Municipal Art Commission approved a model of a proposed sculpture to be installed between Valley Boulevard and the park's lake. It was to be of Florence Nightingale, called the mother of modern nursing. It was completed under the WPA Arts program. (The sculptor of the model was, according to the *Times*, Louis Zack. But the completed statue, again according to the *Times*, was done by David Edstrom.)<sup>123</sup>



*Statue of Florence Nightingale, 1937  
Lincoln Park  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Perhaps the best known of the WPA Art Projects is the fountain and sculptures at the entrance to the Hollywood Bowl. As early as October of 1935 the county had gained \$18,426 for general repairs to the Bowl. Plans for the entrance, with its ensemble of fountains and statues, were first shown to the public in late 1939 when a model was included as part of a WPA show.<sup>124</sup>

The sculpture, entitled the "Muse of Music," along with its fountain base, was completed in 1940. The sculptor was George Stanley, the creator of the Oscar statuette. The base is a multi-layered concrete

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<sup>123</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 1937. December 29, 1940. The commentary to a photograph of the statue in the photo collection of the Los Angeles Public Library also attributes it to David Edstrom. See "Lincoln Park statue" (Order Number 00010700).

<sup>124</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 1935, November 7, 1939.

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structure faced with granite, and the sculpture itself is granite and stands fifteen feet high. As part of the ensemble are two other statues, the muses of dance and of drama, each ten feet high. A fountain system circulated water among the various pools at different levels of the base.<sup>125</sup>



*"Muse of Music" sculpture, 1940  
Entrance to the Hollywood Bowl  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

The WPA's work at the Hollywood Bowl proved to be one of its more controversial projects. The issue concerned which entity benefited from the improvements, the public which owned the land or the private Hollywood Bowl Association which administered the facility. Harrington issued a statement in May of 1940 in an attempt to settle the matter. "We found that no officer or director of the association has ever received a remuneration or profit, that the underlying deeds restrict the use to educational, recreational and musical purposes, and, in my opinion, our expenditures are thoroughly justified from the standpoint of public interest and benefit." He went on to note: "Politics in Southern California is a tangled business, and I doubt that any administrator could so conduct the W.P.A. as to avoid charges of favoritism."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> "About the Hollywood Bowl," [www.hollywoodbowl.com](http://www.hollywoodbowl.com); Data from "Living New Deal."

<sup>126</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 1940. Two Hollywood Bowl buildings had received WPA funding in 1938, a restroom facility and a restaurant called the Tea Room. See *Los Angeles Times*, June 6, 1938; "About the Hollywood Bowl." The Tea Room was converted into a museum in 1984 and transformed into essentially a new structure in 1996. See "At the Museum," [www.hollywoodbowl.com](http://www.hollywoodbowl.com).

**Note on Extant WPA Resources**

The best source for a list of WPA projects is the Living New Deal website, at [livingnewdeal.org](http://livingnewdeal.org). It is the product of the Living New Deal, a non-profit organization supported by a mix of public and private donations. Its research arm is hosted by the Department of Geography at the University of California, Berkeley. The Living New Deal maintains a national database of known WPA and other New Deal projects which can be accessed via the website.

**THEME: WPA, 1935-1943**

**Summary Statement of Significance:** Resources evaluated under this theme are examples of the work of the WPA from 1935 through 1943. They are buildings, landscape features, urban infrastructure, and public art produced by this New Deal program. These resources were built and/or created by unemployed individuals hired by the federal government during the Great Depression.

Resources related to the WPA are significant within the area of Politics/Government as representative of the role of the New Deal and the WPA, working with the City of Los Angeles, in creating a program that provided jobs for the unemployed during the Depression and which resulted in significant contributions to Los Angeles' public-sector built environment. Depending on the property type, resources may also be significant in areas including: Architecture, Art, Engineering, Landscape Architecture, Recreation, Transportation, and, Education.

**Period of Significance:** 1935-1943

**Period of Significance Justification:** The period of significance begins in 1935, when the Roosevelt administration created the WPA as a means of providing jobs to the unemployed in the face of continuing hard times. It ends in 1943, when the administration abolished the WPA once the unemployed were able to find work in defense industries or entered the armed forces. (Some projects may predate 1935, in that they began under state and local jobs programs, and/or earlier federal programs. The completion of some may postdate 1943, in that they remained unfinished when the WPA ended.)

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<b>Geographic Location:</b>	Citywide - particularly in parks, playgrounds, and schools
<b>Area(s) of Significance:</b>	Politics/Government Note: Depending on the property type, resources also may also be significant in areas including: Architecture, Art, Engineering, Landscape Architecture, Recreation, Transportation, and, Education
<b>Criteria:</b>	NR: A            CR: 1            Local: 1
<b>Associated Property Type:</b>	Various within the categories of Institutional-Recreational, Institutional-Education, Institutional-Government, Institutional-Transportation, and Institutional-Visual Arts. Property types also include commercial and industrial buildings serving the administration and activities of the WPA.
<b>Property Type Description:</b>	Various, including parks, playgrounds, recreational buildings, swimming pools, bridges, viaducts, fire stations, armories, and other building and landscape improvements typically undertaken by government as public improvements. Buildings such as office structures and warehouses served the administration and activities of the WPA.
<b>Property Type Significance:</b>	Resources illustrate how the federal employment program known as the WPA provided work to the unemployed and in the process gave Los Angeles a great number of public improvements that it would otherwise not have been able to afford during the economically difficult years of the Great Depression.
<b>Eligibility Standards:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is directly associated with WPA programs and activities</li></ul>
<b>Character Defining/Associative Features:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Retains most of the character-defining features from the period of significance</li><li>• Was used by the WPA in carrying program administration</li><li>• Was constructed by the WPA, in whole or in large part<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Serves a public function, such as a park, bridge, or building housing a municipal service</li></ul></li></ul>

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- Generally labor-intensive in its construction techniques, thereby providing work for the unskilled unemployed
- May have a plaque identifying association with the WPA program and project completion data.
- May also be significant under themes relating to architecture, art, engineering, landscape architecture, recreation, transportation, and education

### Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of design, materials, location, feeling, and association
- Setting may have changed
- Should maintain association with the architectural/landscape/engineering /artistic requirements that gave it form

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