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Building Jobs in Iowa: New Deal Dams of the Wapsipinicon River Watershed in Northeast Iowa

Richard J. Carlson  
*University of Iowa*

Chérie E. Haury-Artz  
*University of Iowa*

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Cover images

Front—background image of Littleton Dam (OSA).
Front Inside—historic images of Littleton Dam (from LCHS-FFPC).
Building Jobs in Iowa

New Deal Dams of the Wapsipinicon River Watershed in Northeast Iowa

By Richard J. Carlson and Chérie E. Haury-Artz
with layout by Angela R. Collins
(Office of the State Archaeologist, University of Iowa)

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New Deal Dams in the Wapsipinicon River Watershed

Dam Categories
- Former New Deal Dam
- New Deal-Approved Dam
- New Deal Dams
- Unconfirmed New Deal-Era Dam

Wapsipinicon River Watershed

Frederika Dam
Red Gate Park Rock Dam
Littleton Dam
Independence Low Dam
Quasqueton Dam
Coggon/Buffalo Creek Park Dam

Cities
County Seat
Other rivers or creeks
Upper Wapsipinicon Watershed

Wapsipinicon River

IOWA

Cedar Falls
Waterloo
Waverly
New Hampton
Introduction

The Wapsipinicon River, affectionately known as the “Wapsi,” flows nearly 300 miles through northeastern Iowa to the Mississippi. Strung throughout its drainage basin is a series of dams that are highly valued by their communities as places of recreation and scenic beauty. The Wapsipinicon has long had a reputation as a fishing stream, known for catfish, northern pike, carp, sunfish, walleye, and smallmouth bass. It is not uncommon to find anglers of all ages gathered at one of the Wapsipinicon’s dams to enjoy a day of fishing and possibly take home a prize catch. As time passes, however, a dam may outlive its original function, impede fish passage, and pose a safety hazard. But the idea of demolishing an outdated dam often rallies the community in an attempt to preserve the landmark.

Dams are valued today for their role in local recreation, but the stories behind their original construction have often been forgotten. One important period of dam building in Iowa came during the Great Depression (1929–1942). Dozens of dams throughout Iowa were built during the depression as work relief projects under the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. These dams were funded by one or more federal programs known collectively as the New Deal. Jobs provided by these construction projects put men to work and helped many families survive the worst economic crisis in the 20th century.

This booklet will explore the history of New Deal work relief projects in Iowa, focusing specifically on New Deal-approved dams in the Wapsipinicon River watershed in northeast Iowa. Three of these dams are located in Buchanan County, one in Linn County, and one in Bremer County.

The Great Depression in the Farm Belt

The stock market crash of October 1929 is generally seen as the spark that plunged the nation into the Great Depression. The statistics are grim. In December 1929 three million Americans were out of work. By mid-winter the figure had risen to between 4 and 5 million without jobs. But the national crisis was only a deepening of what Midwestern farmers had already experienced during the 1920s. While urban America was celebrating the “roaring twenties,” falling produce and land prices were destroying the rural economy.

The early decades of the 20th century were known as the “golden age of agriculture.” Bolstered by the demands of World War I and encouraged by the support of government price guarantees, Midwestern farmers increased their production phenomenally. They fed a starving Europe and supplied the armies fighting “over there.” Farmers put more acres into production and increased herd sizes, investing borrowed money in land and equipment. As the needs of the war years faded, however, demand lessened and government supports were ended in 1920. Many European countries, trying to get back on their feet after the devastation of the war, imposed high tariffs on American goods, effectively cutting off these markets. With foreign markets suddenly closed, prices for land and commodities in the United States collapsed abruptly in 1921.

Farm prices fell by 92 percent between 1920 and 1932. In order to make up for the dropping prices, farmers continued to produce at record rates. They were heavily invested in their expansion and much of this investment was borrowed money. Overproduction backfired, however. The surplus of products glutted the market and prices fell even farther. Banks began to call in outstanding loans and those who could not pay faced the loss of their farms. Foreclosures and tax sales became common in the 1920s. Foreclosures continued to increase as the rest of the nation plunged into economic depression.

As the foreclosure crisis grew, so did fear and anger within farming communities. Some increasingly desperate farmers resorted to collective actions to protest their situation. One such action was a “penny auction.” At a penny auction, neighbors sympathetic to an owner whose farm had been foreclosed would attend the foreclosure auction in large numbers, enter extremely low bids, and intimidate anyone who attempted to bid higher. In the end the bank would get whatever was bid and the neighbors would return the farm and its contents to its original owner.

Auction of a farm foreclosure, ca. 1933 (Wikimedia Commons, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).
The Great Depression by the Numbers

Some farmers decided to band together, hoping that, like the labor unions, they could force higher prices for their products if they stood together and withheld their products from the market. One of the first such united actions was the Sioux City “Milk Strike” organized by the Sioux City Milk Producers Association. Dairy farmers set up picket lines on major roads into town blocking delivery of milk and other products and sometimes dumping and destroying deliveries. On May 3, 1932, a group of farmers met at the fairgrounds in Des Moines to form the “Farmers Holiday Association.” The name referred to the so-called “Bank Holiday” that Roosevelt declared shortly after taking office to forestall a run on the banks. The farmers noted that if bankers could take a holiday to reorder their business, they should be allowed to do the same. Similar protest movements spread to other Midwestern and Great Plains states and continued through most of 1933. Some turned violent. Although these uncoordinated attempts were largely unsuccessful, they starkly dramatized the economic crisis in the farm belt in the early 1930s.

In Iowa the depression had started 10 years before the stock market crash.

- In 1920 167 banks closed. That number rose to 505 in 1921 and remained high for several more years (Morain 2005–2014a).
- Farms were foreclosed on at record rates.
- In Iowa the number of farm foreclosures in 1927 had reached 2,300 and farmland was valued at $132/acre, barely half of its 1920 peak of $227/acre.
- In 1932 the number of farm foreclosures peaked at 6,400 while land values had dropped to $89/acre. Land values were at their lowest in 1933, at just $65/acre (Bauer 1989:24).
- By 1939 nearly 30% of farmland in Decatur and Wayne counties was held by banks and other lending agencies (Yoder 1991:53).

Desperate Iowa Farmers Kidnap a Judge

As farm foreclosures increased, farmers in Iowa became increasingly desperate. Violence occurred or was threatened at a number of foreclosure sales across the state. In Le Mars, Iowa, a mob of angry farmers burst into a court room and dragged the judge from the bench. They carried him out of the court room and drove him out into the countryside. He was beaten, threatened and cajoled, as they tried to make him promise that he would not take any more cases that would cost a family their farm. When he refused, they threatened to hang him. Fortunately, calmer heads prevailed. Rather than hanging, the judge was dumped and left alone in the countryside to ponder his position. The governor of Iowa called out the National Guard who rounded up some of the leaders of the mob and put them in jail (Morain 2005–2014b).

“If we cannot obtain justice by legislation, the time will have arrived when no other course remains than organized refusal to deliver the products of the farm at less than production costs.”

[1927 resolution of the Corn Belt Association, revived in 1932 as justification for the direct action tactics of the Farmers Holiday Association (Bender 1932)]
The New Deal

In November 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president with a mandate to end the economic crisis. When he took office, Roosevelt promised to take “direct and vigorous” action to relieve the American people of the suffering brought on by the Great Depression. He vowed to attack the problems as if the nation was going to war. His “new deal for the American people” included two types of programs. Some were designed to stabilize and strengthen the most critical sectors of the economy: banking, industry, and agriculture. Others were designed to provide relief for the unemployed. The New Deal would forever change the physical and cultural landscape of America and permanently alter the federal government’s relationship to the American people.

Relief Programs

Roosevelt wasted no time taking action aimed at turning the tide of the desperate unemployment situation. He quickly implemented a series of relief programs. Some programs provided direct relief and did not have a work requirement. Direct relief, also known as “the dole,” was unpopular. Unemployed workers preferred the dignity of working for their wages. The federal government shared this sentiment, and turned the focus of its efforts to work relief. Work relief programs were designed to help build the nation’s infrastructure and restore prosperity by putting people back to work.

Timeline of New Deal Programs

**CCC—Civilian Conservation Corps (1933–1942)**

*conservation of soil, timber, and water, and public accessibility*

**FERA—Federal Emergency Relief Administration (1933–1935)**

*direct and work relief*

**PWA—Public Works Administration (1933–1943)**

*hired unemployed indirectly by contracting with private construction firms*

**CWA—Civil Works Administration (1933–1934)**

*winter projects*


*funded labor for work projects; both blue and white collar work*

1933  
1943
The most important work relief programs were, in order of their creation, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), Public Works Administration (PWA), Civil Works Administration (CWA), and Works Progress Administration (later Work Projects Administration) (WPA). These programs focused on different types of projects, funded those projects in different ways, and provided relief to different segments of the unemployed population. But all had the goal of relieving unemployment while creating lasting projects in the public interest. Three of these programs—the CWA, FERA and WPA—provided funds to build dams in the Wapsipinicon watershed. The two other programs (CCC and PWA) were used to construct dams elsewhere, but not in the Wapsipinicon watershed.

The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA)

The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) was established in May 1933. It was headed by Iowa native and Grinnell College graduate Harry L. Hopkins, a close advisor to President Roosevelt and one of the main architects of the New Deal. The creation of FERA marked the first time that the federal government, rather than state and local agencies, assumed direct responsibility for providing relief to the unemployed. FERA funds could be used for both direct relief and work relief. Direct relief was most common because it was easier to administer.

FERA grants were administered by state agencies which were often inexperienced and overwhelmed. These agencies wanted to avoid funding projects that might compete with private industry. As a result, many projects were make-work projects of limited usefulness.

Work projects under FERA were briefly taken over by the Civil Works Administration (CWA). The CWA was a very successful but short-lived program that lasted only from November 1933 to April 1934. The federal government then returned to its policy of supporting work relief only through FERA.

The return to FERA meant a return to all the inadequacies in that program. Many workers were forced to return to direct relief when they would have preferred to work. For those who
continued to work, hours and pay rates were reduced, and federal worker’s compensation ended. After the success of the CWA, a return to FERA was widely viewed as unacceptable, forcing the Roosevelt administration to reconsider its relief policies. The result was the Works Progress Administration (WPA), created in 1935. FERA ceased to operate at the end of 1935. Its work relief component was taken up by the WPA, while its direct relief component was assumed by other newly created New Deal programs. The Civil Works Administration (CWA)

Relief workers predicted that the winter of 1933–1934 would be the most desperate of the depression for needy families. The ranks of the unemployed continued to grow, and many people were out of resources, with no food, no heat, and poor clothing. Severe winter weather was expected to compound the disaster. On November 8, 1933, the federal government announced the creation of the Civil Works Administration (CWA). The CWA was designed to remove heads of household from the direct federal relief rolls and put them to work on public works projects at wages higher than the amounts they were receiving on direct relief.

The CWA was short-lived by design, intended only to provide work relief to four million Americans during the 1933–1934 winter. It officially ended on April 1, 1934. For a program that lasted less than five months, the CWA was significant in several ways. First, it succeeded in providing paid work to millions of unemployed Americans, boosting the economy while removing the stigma that many people attached to being on the dole. Second, it served in many ways as a precursor to the best known New Deal program, the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The successes and failures of the CWA were analyzed to help make the WPA an even more effective work relief program. Finally, the CWA’s lasting impact on America’s built environment remains evident today. After more than 80 years, CWA infrastructure projects can still be seen in Iowa and elsewhere.

The Works Progress Administration (WPA)

The Works Progress Administration (WPA), created in May 1935, bore many similarities to the CWA. Like the CWA, it funded labor for work projects suggested by local organizations and state and local governments; the pay was higher than FERA direct relief payments; and it included both blue collar and white collar work. Intended to last for the duration of the depression, the WPA operated for nearly seven years, much longer than the CWA. It ended in early 1942, after the United States had entered World War II. Because of the WPA’s longevity, the large number of people it employed, and the large number of lasting work projects it helped fund, the WPA is often thought of today as the quintessential New Deal program.
In the News . . .

Waverly Council Plans for Further CWA Projects

LOW FARMS PAY SEEN AS HELPING SALE OF HORSES

Farmers Now Work 3,000 Hours for Less Than 15 Cents Per Hour.

Buchanan County Asks for $24,000 Civil Works Fund

152 Men Will Have Work on Buchanan Projects of PWA

Waterloo Daily Courier (November 21, 1933)

$25,000 Project Financing to Be thru PWA Loan


$30,000 Project Financing to Be thru PWA Loan

Waterloo Daily Courier (March 30, 1934)

Waterloo Daily Courier (January 28, 1934)

Waterloo Daily Courier (November 21, 1933)

Waterloo Daily Courier (March 12, 1934)

Waterloo Daily Courier (March 30, 1934)

Waterloo Daily Courier (November 22, 1933)

261 Men Work on CWA in Buchanan

Full Quota Under Original Allocation

New Work: New Projects

261 Men Work on CWA in Buchanan

Waterloo Daily Courier (December 6, 1933)

Waterloo Daily Courier (February 22, 1934)

In the News . . .
The New Deal in Iowa and Buchanan County

Although the full “alphabet soup” of New Deal programs operated in Iowa, the focus here is on the three programs that funded the construction of dams in the Wapsipinicon River watershed. New Deal dams include the Littleton and Independence Low dams (CWA), Quasqueton and Coggon dams (FERA and WPA), and Frederika Dam (approved by WPA). With the exception of the Coggon and Frederika dams, all were located in Buchanan County.

Approximately 5,975 CWA projects were undertaken in Iowa, creating 53,250 jobs. The numbers ranged from 21 projects in Washington County to 282 projects in Polk County. Buchanan County had close to the statewide average, with 63 projects.

Statewide, the largest single category of CWA projects was road and street work, which included grading, graveling, adding curbs and repairing pot-holes. Another roughly one-third of the projects were non-street repair or construction projects, which included building dams, park buildings, and other structures; repairing schools; and laying water mains and sewer lines. In Buchanan County, these projects included construction of two dams; work on a water main in Winthrop; septic tank and river channel work in Lamont; construction of a storm sewer in Independence; maintenance and redecoration work in the schools in Hazleton and Lamont; relocating a flagpole in Fairbank; and providing air markers to identify eight Buchanan County towns from the air.

The remaining CWA projects included both white collar jobs and non-construction blue collar jobs. They included janitorial services, home nurse visits, stenography, clerical work and library book rebinding and repair. Many were carried out by the Civil Works Service (CWS), created as a white collar counterpart to the CWA. While not designed specifically to assist women in need of work relief, the CWS came to employ a large number of women.

By October 1933, 163 people in Buchanan County were receiving unemployment relief. With the announcement of the CWA the following month, one Independence newspaper urged local officials “to get busy working out local projects. It is a big proposition and getting in on it by the county, city and communities would be beneficial to all concerned.” By mid-December, Buchanan County was “one of twenty-nine counties in the state that had its quota of men at work, being one of the earliest to get that record.” In January 1934, the number of Buchanan County residents on the unemployed list had risen to 882, with 451 CWA placements.

In all, CWA expenditures in Buchanan County between November 1933 and August 1934 totaled $98,685.64—approximately $1.7 million in 2013 dollars. Nearly two-thirds of this amount went towards wages and salaries, with the rest divided between equipment and materials. Nearly 70 percent of the total amount was supplied by the federal government. The remaining amount consisted of local funds provided by the state and county.

Information on FERA projects in Iowa is not as readily available as it is for CWA and WPA projects. Since at least two dams were built in the Wapsipinicon watershed using FERA funds, it is clear that substantial FERA work relief projects continued in Iowa after the end of the CWA. However, it may be a sign of the shortcomings of that program that neither of the two FERA dams discussed below was completed on time, and both eventually had to be completed using WPA grants.

Although the WPA lasted for much longer than the CWA, it is noteworthy that fewer WPA projects were undertaken in Iowa during the seven years that program operated (5,222) than the number of projects undertaken during the CWA’s brief five-month history (5,975). Of the WPA projects in Iowa, 65 percent (3,399) were construction projects, and nearly a third (1,607) were road, street and bridge projects.

WPA projects in Buchanan County, as elsewhere, focused predominantly on improving streets and roads, but also included indoor work such as nursing, sewing and serving school lunches. With the exception of the completion of the Quasqueton Dam in 1935, no WPA projects in Buchanan County are known to have involved the construction of major buildings or structures.

![1936 map of WPA projects in Buchanan County, Iowa (from Special Collections Department, Iowa State University Library).](image-url)
The Wapsipinicon River Watershed

The Wapsipinicon River originates in Minnesota, just across the state line from Mitchell County, Iowa, and flows southeast to join the Mississippi River at the border between Scott and Clinton counties, Iowa. Currently eight dams span the Wapsipinicon River, all located along a 120-mile stretch between Frederika (Bremer County) and Anamosa (Jones County). No dams are present in the 95 miles of the river downstream from Anamosa. The Wapsipinicon River watershed also includes numerous tributaries. The five largest include two tributaries named the Little Wapsipinicon River (one joining the main river near New Hampton, the other near Littleton), as well as Crane Creek, Otter Creek and Buffalo Creek.

The Wapsipinicon River, and the Littleton area in particular, have long been considered attractive fishing destinations. The construction of dams along the river helped to cement this reputation, particularly in combination with the State Fish and Game Commission’s program of restocking the river above the dams with game fish from government fish hatcheries. This program began in the late 19th century. The draining of lakes and marshes for agriculture, excessive silting and erosion, and industrial pollution was drastically reducing the numbers of fish in Iowa’s rivers and streams. Concerned about this loss, the state began to maintain fish hatcheries in order to periodically restock Iowa’s waterways. In conjunction with restocking, the state also sponsored the construction of low-head dams to impound sufficient water to carry the fish through drought periods. Beautification of the rivers and the elimination of the health risks caused by pools of standing water during low water periods were also considered as reasons to support the construction of these dams.

Although some of the low-head dams along the Wapsipinicon River were built as mill dams in the late 19th or early 20th centuries, many were built during the 1930s to complement the restocking program. During the 1930s, approximately 50 low-head dams were constructed throughout the state of Iowa.

New Deal Dams in the Wapsipinicon River Watershed

In 1979 and 2010 the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) conducted two surveys of Iowa’s dams. These surveys recorded every dam on every major river and stream in the state. Using the list of dams maintained by the DNR as a starting point, research has determined that four dams in the Wapsipinicon watershed were constructed under one or more New Deal programs.

**Littleton Dam**, Buchanan County (1933–1934, CWA), extant

**Independence Low Dam**, Buchanan County (1934, CWA), extant

**Quasqueton Dam**, Buchanan County (1934–1935, FERA and WPA), extant but concealed

**Coggon Dam**, Linn County (1934–1936, FERA and WPA), non-extant

In addition to these four dams, a fifth, located at Frederika in Bremer County, was approved for WPA funding in 1935 but was never built as a WPA project. Five years later the dam was eventually constructed using only state funds and a local bond issue. Because of this history, the Frederika Dam is also included here as an “honorary” New Deal dam.

Three other dams are either known or reported to have been built in the Wapsipinicon River watershed during the New Deal era. Two built in Chickasaw County—one in 1934 and the other in about 1940—had no documented connection to the New Deal and are not shown on the map on Page 2.

The reported construction date of 1934 given for the third dam—Red Gate Park Rock Dam in Fayette County—could not be confirmed.

Records of engineering plans for the New Deal dams are sparse. Based on the limited information available from published sources and the dams themselves, the New Deal dams in the Wapsipinicon watershed appear to reflect standard engineering practices of the 1930s. The dams in the Wapsipinicon watershed were typically constructed of reinforced concrete or a combination of rock and concrete. The dams for which a specific designing engineer has been identified were designed locally, by either a county or state engineer, although the designs had to be approved by federal engineers to receive federal funds.

The Littleton Dam and the Independence Low Dam were probably designed by Buchanan County engineer Ralph W. Gearhart. Gearhart was in charge of engineering of the Littleton Dam, and was identified as the designer of the Independence Low Dam. He inspected the site of the Quasqueton Dam on at least one occasion, but the chief engineer for that dam appears to have been a state rather than a county engineer, one Mr. Baumer, who has not yet been identified in any other source. It is not presently known who designed the Coggon Dam or the Frederika Dam.
**Littleton Dam**

The first of the four known New Deal dams constructed in the Wapsipinicon watershed, the Littleton Dam, started as a locally funded project. Its construction was supported by the State Fish and Game Commission because the dam fit into the state's 25-year conservation plan. As originally proposed in August 1933, the state would supply the materials for the dam and a local committee would raise the funds for the labor. Construction of the dam started around November 1, 1933, using locally funded labor. Within days, however, the Civil Works Administration (CWA) was established, and by the third week in November the Iowa office of the CWA was receiving applications for projects. The local sponsors of the Littleton Dam applied for CWA funding, which was approved on November 24, subject to a small local match for “engineering advice and incidentals.” The dam was constructed of reinforced concrete, and was seven feet high, 135 feet long, and 20 feet wide at the base. By mid-January 1934, an average daily work force of 50 men was at work, with as many as 72 workers one day. The concrete for the dam was poured in six sections. After delays due to high water in January, the dam was completed around the first week of March 1934.33

The Littleton Dam was originally built without a fishway. The Wapsie Fish and Game Association agitated for a fishway for two years starting around 1936, and one was finally built in 1938 under the direction of the Iowa Fish and Game Commission. The concrete fishway was three feet, four inches wide, and had nine wood steps. A 24-foot railing was set in the concrete to prevent accidents.34
Independence Low Dam

Just before the phase-out of the CWA began in January 1934, the City of Independence applied successfully for CWA funds to build a trio of small dams across the Wapsipinicon at Independence downstream from the city’s mill dam. On further investigation by the county engineer, the number of dams was reduced to two, and later to one. This dam, now known as the Independence Low Dam, spans the river at the northwest corner of Oak Grove Cemetery. The original plans called for multiple three-foot dams constructed of rock and other materials, but eventually a single four-foot dam was constructed of cement and stone taken from the river. The dam was apparently constructed in four sections. The work was started in late February 1934, and was completed a month later.35

The dam served a variety of purposes, but the main one was to prevent fish from perishing in large numbers during times when the water flow over the mill dam was shut off by the power company that owned it. During these periodic water flow shutoffs, fish that had migrated upstream during high water were trapped in small pools below the power company’s dam where most died. Other benefits of raising the water level between the two dams included beautifying the river and promoting more sanitary and healthful conditions during periods of low water.36 A second dam constructed of rock now spans the river approximately 100 feet downstream from the original dam. Historic aerial photographs indicate that this dam was in place as early as the late 1930s. Nothing was discovered about the construction of this second dam, including whether it has any New Deal connection.

Quasqueton Dam

Plans for the Quasqueton Dam were developed in May and June 1934, shortly after the CWA ended. Federal funding was initially provided by FERA. However, the construction took much longer than originally planned, so the completion of the dam was funded in the fall of 1935 by the WPA. As with other New Deal dams in Iowa, the material was supplied by the State Fish and Game Commission, and the labor by the federal government (FERA or WPA).37

Construction started in June 1934. The dam was 6½ feet high and 250 feet long. It was identified in newspapers more than once as a rock dam, but one article described cement (probably actually concrete) being poured into forms for the dam, so it may have been constructed of both rock and concrete. It is not clear which engineer was responsible for the dam’s design. Newspapers mentioned that a state engineer, Mr. Baumer, conferred with local relief officials on the project and visited the site at least once. But the Buchanan County engineer, R. W. Gearhart, also visited the construction site, so it is not clear what roles the two engineers had in the design.38

Although it was originally expected that the dam would take about five months to complete, construction actually took much longer. Work was delayed in November 1934 when the uncompleted dam was damaged by high water. Work resumed in spring 1935, but for unknown reasons the dam was not completed using FERA labor. It may be that the federal government began winding down FERA funding after the WPA was established in May 1935. Whatever the reason for...
the delay, WPA funding to complete the dam was obtained in October 1935, and the dam was completed on November 11, seventeen months after construction began.\textsuperscript{39}

The Quasqueton Dam remains in place, but it was covered in 2014 by broken concrete and rock arranged in a series of downstream arcs to create a rock rapids. This was done to aid fish passage and to prevent dangerous undertows.\textsuperscript{40}

\textbf{Coggon Dam (site of present Buffalo Creek Park Dam)}

The New Deal dam in Coggon, located in northeastern Linn County, was replaced in 1967 by the current dam, known as the Buffalo Creek Park Dam.\textsuperscript{41} The New Deal dam was built in order to restore Manhattan Lake in Coggon. Construction began in September 1934 with labor supplied by FERA. Although the date of completion was not discovered, it was originally estimated that the dam would take four months to construct, suggesting an expected completion date in early 1935. However, just as with the FERA dam in Quasqueton, the construction of the Coggon Dam took considerably longer than originally estimated. One problem was a disagreement between the state and Linn County regarding which of the two would pay the $700 cost for materials. It was not until December 1934 that the state agreed to absorb the expense. But other delays seem to have occurred, since again, the completion of the Coggon Dam became a WPA project in the fall of 1935.\textsuperscript{42} The dam was probably completed in 1936, since a photograph of it taken in February 1936 appears to show it uncompleted (see photograph below).

This dam is identified on its WPA project card as a “rock fill dam.” The 1936 photograph of the dam, however, appears to show its downstream slope constructed of concrete, making it unclear exactly where rock was used in the dam and where concrete was used. The amount approved by the WPA for completing the Coggon Dam was almost $27,000, more than was typically requested for entire New Deal dam projects in the Wapsipinicon watershed, and much more than the $3,020 approved for the completion of the Quasqueton Dam. The reason for the large amount requested is not presently known.\textsuperscript{43}

\textbf{Frederika Dam}

Although the Frederika Dam is not technically a New Deal dam, it was not for lack of trying. The town of Frederika sought funding from different New Deal programs, and was even granted WPA funding in 1935. But for various reasons, the dam was never completed as a federal project. It was eventually built in 1940, funded entirely by the state of Iowa and a local bond issue. For this reason, the Frederika Dam is included here as an “honorary” New Deal dam.

An earlier dam in Frederika was damaged in the spring of 1935. For some time afterwards, it appeared certain that the dam would be rebuilt as a federal project. In June 1935, it was proposed to rebuild the dam using Public Works Administration (PWA) funds. Records indicate that John E. Flanagan, relief engineer, was in the process of drawing up plans in September. Local sponsors planned to seek a PWA grant for 45 percent of the project costs.\textsuperscript{44} Either the references to the PWA were mistaken, or the dam’s proponents decided...
to apply to a different federal funding agency. Whatever the reason, the dam was approved for $6,880 in WPA (rather than PWA) funding on October 18, 1935. But the dam was still not built. In July 1936, Frederika residents decided to repair the dam themselves “[w]ithout waiting for a federal grant to build a new dam.” Although it is not clear why this happened, the WPA grant was eventually withdrawn and the project rescinded in February 1937.

The movement to build a new dam began to gain renewed momentum in May 1938, when the Wapsie Fish and Game Club expressed an interest in acquiring WPA funds to re-build the dam. State engineers were later sent to inspect the site, and in September 1938, Governor Nelson G. Kraschel promised that the state would “finance the larger portion” of the dam and adjacent park improvement. The WPA was reported to have made a grant of $3,000 towards this project shortly afterwards, and again the construction of the dam seemed assured.

But again problems arose. The most significant problem was that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers declined to accept the proposed design of the dam approved by the WPA engineers. The Corps wanted a much larger dam, capable of handling 24,000 cubic feet of water per second, rather than the 7,500 cubic feet per second capacity of the original design. The dam’s local promoters countered by requesting a smaller dam costing $20,000, pleading that it would not otherwise be possible to make up the difference locally between the amount granted by the state and federal governments and the total cost. But the Corps evidently rejected the counterproposal, and plans for the dam were again stalled.

Finally, in March 1940, the town of Frederika decided to forego federal funding and requested bids on a smaller dam. The low bid was $15,000, but with further plan revisions, this was ultimately reduced to $10,000. Of this amount, $8,500 would come from the state and $1,500 from a local bond issue. The bond issue was approved unanimously on May 29. In June 1940, five years after a new dam was originally proposed, construction was finally started. The dam was built by Welden Bros. of Iowa Falls, and was completed by the end of August. It was 135 feet long, and was located just downstream from the old dam. It was 2½ feet wide at the top and 13 feet wide at the base. Wing walls at each end of the dam extended both upstream and downstream from the dam, and rose four feet above the crest of the dam. The construction material, most likely some combination of concrete and rock, was never identified in newspaper articles.
The Legacy of the New Deal in Iowa

It is hard to overestimate the impact of the New Deal programs on the Iowa landscape. The core idea of the New Deal work relief programs was to provide work to jobless Americans by having them create useful public works. In addition to feeding and clothing millions of families during a time of severe economic crisis, the work relief projects also altered the physical and cultural landscape of the state. Although some New Deal work relief projects did not involve construction, many FERA and WPA projects—and nearly all projects of the CCC, PWA and CWA—involved some change to the built or landscaped environment. These projects included the construction of buildings, dams, bridges, waterworks, swimming pools, and other public works; resurfacing of roads; landscaping public parks and green spaces; and in some cases, erosion control on private farmland. Anyone who grew up or raised a family in Iowa in the mid to late 20th century would have encountered many examples of New Deal buildings, bridges, dams, park structures, and other public works.

The legacy of the New Deal dams in the Wapsipinicon River watershed continues into the 21st century. More than 80 years after they were built, these dams remain valued as recreation areas for neighbors and visitors alike. They have become beloved landmarks which may be closely tied to the identity of the associated towns. Although safety issues and changing ideas of conservation practices have required the removal of some older dams, others remain to remind us of the worst economic crisis of the 20th century and the national legacy of public works that were created in response.