

ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY DECEMBER 14



Great Depression in Scott's Run

On December 14, 1933, Federal Relief Administration field representative Howard O. Hunter, speaking to a joint session of the West Virginia legislature, informed lawmakers that federal aid to the state would be stopped unless the state provided more funding for relief in West Virginia.

CSO: SS.8.24, ELA.8.1

Investigate the Document: (*Journal of the House of Delegates, Second Extraordinary Session, 1933*)

1. According to the 'Journal of the House of Delegates,' the previous March about one out of every ____ people in the United States depended on public relief agencies for *what*? What infamous economic downturn was ongoing in December 1933?
2. Did needy families in West Virginia have any assurance of assistance beyond the immediacy of any given week?

Think Critically: What were the possible causes of the Great Depression? What were some of the major New Deal programs? To what extent is the Great Depression responsible for WWII? How did the Great Depression contribute to the start of World War II? (Hint: think about the Treaty of Versailles)

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RARELY ACCOMPLISHED BY THE NATIONAL RECOVERY
ADMINISTRATION CODES STOP I HOPE WEST VIRGINIA
WILL BE THE SIXTEENTH STATE TO RATIFY.

FRANCES PERKINS.

The Speaker presented the following communication from His
Excellency, the Governor:

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
CHARLESTON

December seventh, 1933.

HONORABLE A. G. MATHEWS, *President*,
West Virginia State Senate
HONORABLE RALPH M. HINER, *Speaker*,
of the House of Delegates
Charleston, West Virginia.

Gentlemen:

With this letter I am transmitting to the Speaker of the House
of Delegates, petitions, letters and other material and communica-
tions from barbers and beauticians seeking to have certain legis-
lation enacted.

From what I know of the measures which the barbers and beau-
ticians desire enacted I think the call is broad enough to cover
them and the matter is presented for such consideration as the
Legislature, may think is proper.

Very respectfully yours,

H. G. KEMP,
Governor.

The Speaker referred the petitions, letters and other material
and communications from barbers and beauticians, transmitted
with this communication, to the Committee on Medicine and Sani-
tation.

Mr. Holt offered the following resolution:

House Concurrent Resolution No. 13—"Raising a joint assem-
bly to hear address of the Honorable Howard O. Hunter."

WHEREAS, The relief problem is one of the outstanding problems to be met by this session of the Legislature; and

WHEREAS, The Federal government is an integral part of this relief work; therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring therein:

That the Honorable Howard O. Hunter, of the Federal Relief Administration, be invited to appear before a joint session of the Senate and House of Delegates to be held Thursday, December 14, at 2:30 o'clock P. M. to discuss the relief program of the federal government.

On motion of Mr. Holt, the rules were suspended, the resolution taken up for immediate consideration and adopted.

Ordered, That Mr. Holt communicate to the Senate the action of the House of Delegates and request concurrence therein.

On motion of Mr. Marsh (of Ohio), the House of Delegates reconsidered the vote by which,

House Concurrent Resolution No. 12—“Opposing Prince Plan for consolidation of railroads.”

Was adopted on yesterday.

On the further motion of the same gentleman, the resolution was laid on the table.

Mr. Marsh (of Ohio), offered the following resolution:

House Concurrent Resolution No. 14—“Opposing Prince Plan for consolidation of railroads.”

WHEREAS, The Hon. Joseph B. Eastman, Federal Coordinator of Railroads, has announced that he is making a study of the so-called Prince Plan for the consolidation of railroads to determine whether he shall recommend it to the President and to the Congress for adoption; and

WHEREAS, Said plan provides for but two railroad systems between the Mississippi River on the west and the Hudson River on the east; and

By Mr. Norton:

(Originating in the Committee on the Judiciary)

House Bill No. 121—"A Bill to amend and reenact section fourteen, article three, chapter eight of the code of West Virginia, one thousand nine hundred thirty-one, relating to the registration of voters for municipal elections."

On motion of Mr. Norton, reference of the bill to a committee was dispensed with.

By Mr. LaFon:

House Bill No. 122—"A Bill to amend and reenact section three, article two, chapter one of the code of West Virginia, one thousand nine hundred thirty-one, apportioning the several counties of the state among the six congressional districts pursuant to the act of congress."

Referred to the Committee on Redistricting.

By Mr. Summerfield:

House Bill No. 123—"A Bill to amend and reenact section two, article one, chapter seven of the code of West Virginia, one thousand nine hundred thirty-one, relating to the number and boundary lines of magisterial districts contained in the counties of this state, and to reducing the number of districts in each of said counties to three, and to the election in each of the said districts of two justices of the peace and two constables, and of the duties of county courts with respect thereto."

Referred to the Committee on the Judiciary.

(Mr. Speaker in the Chair)

Pursuant to H. C. R. No. 13—"Raising a joint assembly to hear address of the Honorable Howard O. Hunter",

The Senate met in the hall of the House of Delegates and the Speaker presented the Honorable Howard O. Hunter, who addressed the joint assembly, as follows:

Mr. Speaker, and Ladies and Gentlemen of the West Virginia Legislature:

While it has never been made very public in the United States, it is a fact that last March there were approximately 4,500,000

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families or about 21,000,000 people in the United States living on public relief. One out of every six persons in the United States at that time was dependent for the barest necessities of life upon grants from public relief agencies.

With the increased employment in the country and the beginning of a general business recovery, this number has been considerably reduced, but at that, in November of this year there were about 3,000,000 families or nearly 15,000,000 people still on public relief.

In this state of West Virginia there were at one time last spring one person out of every three in the state existing on public relief. Even today there are over 100,000 families or nearly half a million people, or about one person out of every four in this state dependent for their food and shelter upon public relief.

May I say that this does not take into account other thousands of people who are unemployed, but who through the resources of friends, relatives and their own ingenuity, have managed to stay away from the public relief office.

I would like to ask you to think of what it really means to a state to have over one person out of every four existing today, and day after day upon a public relief system. Think of this, not only as it affects these people themselves, but also of the general effect upon the state itself of having such a tremendous proportion of its population entirely dependent upon some form of public aid.

Now, I would like for you to get a picture of what this public aid means to these families. What have we given them and how have we given it, and what is it doing to them?

Well, in the first place, we have been giving to one person out of every four in the state of West Virginia public relief to the extent of about forty cents a day per family. And this is all they have been getting, which covers food, clothing, shelter, fuel, etc. I wonder if any person in this general assembly would be willing to state that it is a fair and just proposition to establish a living standard for twenty-five per cent of the people in the state on a basis of forty cents per day per family.

While there may be many justifiable criticisms to the effect that some people have received relief who are not entitled to it, nevertheless remains a fact that the vast majority of these people are

not only entitled to the meager dole which we hand out, but are also entitled to a more intelligent consideration. In the main, relief has been administered in this state as in other states in the country, on just as decent and fair a basis as it is possible to administer any public relief. At its best, public relief is still a discouraging and unpleasant matter. It is particularly discouraging when it is done on such inadequate and hand to mouth basis as it has been necessary to do it in West Virginia.

Some of the stories we have heard and some of the things we have seen in West Virginia about the conditions in some of these relief families would make your hair stand on end. There are true stories of conditions which, if published, would almost amount to a national scandal. Children by the thousands have stayed at home this winter instead of going to school because they have no shoes and clothing. Thousands of children in families in this state never see a bottle of milk. Other thousands of people are living in shelters which are a disgrace to the state. It was impossible to put many thousands of men to work in this state on our civil works program, for instance, until the federal government had made a special grant of money to purchase clothing.

In other words, this is the most real and most critical situation that has ever been faced in this state and it is even more critical to these half a million people who are entirely dependent on public aid for their very living.

Now, who has paid for what has been done for these people? The serious question which I am presenting to you today is the fact that the state of West Virginia, as far as any practical action goes, has ignored this problem.

Ninety-six per cent and more of all the money that has been spent for public relief in this state for relief the past year has come from the federal government. The other small amount has been squeezed out here and there from local communities. The state itself has yet to show any evidence of a sense of responsibility for this great problem.

As you are probably well aware, the purpose and intent of this federal relief act of May, 1933, is to aid states in meeting this unemployment relief crisis. It is not the intent of the federal relief administration to supplant the aid which should be given by states

and localities. The very wording of the act itself makes it very directly the responsibility of states and localities to utilize every possible resource to meet this unemployment crisis and to call upon the federal government only for supplementary aid.

However, in your state it has been true all during this year that practically the entire cost of relief has been met by the federal relief administration. During the past twelve months more than \$18,000,000 has been granted to this state by the federal relief administration, without any money whatever being put up by the state.

Repeated efforts have been made since May of this year to get this state to assume some responsibility. These efforts have been continuously met on the part of the state by dodging the issue and presenting various and sundry excuses as to why it did not act.

This kind of a situation is not fair to the people of West Virginia or to the other states in the Union. Other states have met this responsibility. In most of the states of the United States, state and local governments are carrying a heavy share of the relief burden, and on top of that these other states and local communities, for several years past, have spent large sums of their own before the federal government even entered the picture at all.

This situation is not fair. It is not fair to have a state like West Virginia, which has the largest percentage of its population on public relief of any state in the Union, to dodge this responsibility any further. In fact, the federal relief administration will not continue to be a party to any such arrangement. We have more than met our responsibility and we have been more than fair to this state, hoping that the state government would soon recognize an obligation which has been recognized by nearly every other state in the Union.

May I call your attention to the fact that not only have we poured \$18,000,000 of relief funds into this state, but we have also made it possible to employ over 70,000 persons on civil works projects for which we are also paying practically the entire bill. This means an additional sum of \$7,000,000 to \$8,000,000 which will be spent in this state in the form of wages between now and February 15th.

On top of this, we are also distributing in this state to the needy unemployed millions of dollars worth of food commodities.

Our latest official communications with this state stated very definitely that we would continue to be responsible for this relief business only on a weekly basis until such time as this Legislature took proper action. Included in the call for this session was the question of relief legislation. At the present we are granting relief funds to the state weekly until you act, provided such action is taken promptly.

This means that at no time do the people in this state have any assurance of getting this relief beyond the immediate week unless you face this problem and act accordingly.

The federal government is in no way required or obligated to carry this entire load any longer. In fact, we are pretty definitely convinced that unless the people in this state recognize this responsibility, there is no further reason why we should "tear our shirts" in trying to take care of your own problem.

If this thing is real to you, if you are concerned about the very existence of over twenty-five per cent of your population, then you will take proper action and we will go along and do our share, and more. The form of legislation which you decide to use in meeting this problem is your business. We are convinced that there can be legislation passed which will produce funds for relief in this state. We are not at all interested in arguing about what kind of legislation you pass—we are not interested in arguing back and forth about some isolated, actual or imaginary case of poor local relief administration, but we are intensely interested in seeing this great state of West Virginia make a reasonable effort to take a reasonable share of its own local problem.

At the conclusion of the address by Mr. Hunter, on motion of Mr. Hodges the joint assembly was dissolved.

On motion of Mr. Thomas,

House Bill No. 129—"A Bill to authorize and empower the county court of Kanawha county, West Virginia, to convey property, and to enter into a contract and/or lease with the United States government, or other federal agency authorized to make or enter into such contract and/or lease, for the building, construction, equipping, leasing and renting of a county infirmary, workhouse, and other improvements necessary for the use and benefit