The Depression Years

Building the Riverside Park Lagoon in Beloit, a Depression-era work relief project.

Chapter One | Book of Beloit II
Hard Times Visit Beloit

The Depression caught America by surprise, with terrible unemployment, bank holidays, and loss of life savings. Beloit and the nation struggled for economic survival.

The Great Depression of the 1930s, which swept the nation following the collapse of the stock market in October of 1929, didn't create an island of prosperity around Beloit, Wis., but it did take some time before the full impact of what was happening to the economy and the lives of Americans hit this small Midwestern community.

"There were breakups of families, there were breakups of families, crime increased alarmingly, and the social structure was toppling as World War I veterans sold apples on street corners in big cities, and business barons ended their dilemmas by jumping from business district windows."

Automobile maker Henry Ford announced as late as March of 1931, that "There's plenty of work to do, if people would do it." But he, Secretary of the Treasury Mellon, and President of the United States Herbert Hoover were all dead wrong. By 1932 there were 12 million Americans unemployed out of a population of 123 million ... and it wasn't because people didn't want to work. "The Roaring Twenties" of individualism - "dancing, drinking, spending, spending more, and doing it my own way" - continued pretty much as they had for several years. But "The Great Depression" soon settled around Beloit as it did cities big and small across the country.

And things did get tough. The depression changed lives and lifestyles. It changed nice little prosperous towns like Beloit. And it changed a nation of fun lovers into those who became desperate, those who lost hope, and those who rose above adversity to move on to to bigger things.

But following the "1929 Stock Crash" and into the middle 1930s, things were beginning to pinch. Banks were feeling the crunch in a shortage of cash just as families were tightening belts. Bank dividends dropped. People were drawing on their savings to buy groceries and pay rent; unemployment was mounting to worrisome and almost desperate levels; shortages were showing up in stores and on pantry shelves, and family-owned businesses of long standing were beginning to liquidate and close.

There were things called "Bank Holidays," a shortage of actual cash, and the use of paper "scrip" to replace available money to pay for goods and services. Welfare agencies were swamped with requests for aid, soup kitchens sprang up in churches, and the state and federal governments initiated "public works programs" to give men something to do, to earn a few dollars, and to keep their self-respect.

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Beloit was "one of the most prosperous communities of its size in the middle west in the 1920s," says the Book of Beloit I. The population was around 20,000, and the city had "line substantial industries, and a prosperous neighboring agricultural community." This enlarged the city's "retail district, and the founding of new jobbing units."

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Brother Dutton, the school was a monument to the courageous devotion and unselfish sacrifice of Brother Joseph Dutton, "The Saint of Molokai." Brother Dutton spent 40 years ministering to the lepers of the famed Pacific island colony. Father Hanz founded the school in Brother Dutton's adopted area, and envisioned the Thirteenth Wisconsin Infantry in March of 1966, being commissioned a captain. He spent his childhood in this area, and always was proud of this.

Beloit College was doing well in the 1920s, although the student body had shifted from area farm boys to the sons and daughters of families in metropolitan areas. It was an era of a new sophistication in learning. Athletics were important — the college fielded great football teams — and for a small liberal arts college, Beloit was known far and wide. It was more than "The Yale of the West" built for President Dwight Eaton, the Rev. Steven Peet, Prof. Joseph Emerson, Aratus Kent, the Rev. Dexter Clary, Lucius G. Fisher and others.

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Another project undertaken by the government during the Depression was construction of the Beloit Natatorium, at the site of the Old Samp Stone Quarry. These pictures were taken on July 9, 1938.
Beloit College, community struggled against long odds

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Beloit was a "modern college" with Dr. Irving Mauer as president. Two men's dormitories were built in 1927. These were followed in two years' time by the erection of the Theodore Lyman Wright Art Hall, and a year later by the Morse-Ingersol Recitation Hall.

Fraternities were flourishing, and the Sigma Chi and Beta built new houses; the Carnegie Library was expanding worldwide, and football and track were supreme. Tommy Mills, of the Class of 1924, left Beloit to become assistant athletic director at Notre Dame. Laffin, Jack McAuliffe, Johnny Connell, McAuliffe, Bernard Darling, "Pit" Purdy, Pat Dawson, "Pill" Nelson, "Bud" Butler, Stan Kuick, Lefty Farren, Clayton Addie, and George Dahlgren. With E.J. Osgood coaching track, Beloit won the state championship twice, tied for first in the Midwest Conference, in 1923, and won second in the Minnesota football championships, and in six years captured two

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he years 1929 and 1933 may well be recorded as the worst years Beloit retail interests ever experienced," Commercial Club Director Nelson wrote in a Book of Beloit. Indeed, the bottom dropped out of retailing, banking and manufacturing suffered.

By January of 1933, the depression was catching up with Beloit in earnest, according to Prof. Robert H. Irmann writing in his history of the First National Bank of Beloit. Doubts were raised about the viability of the nation's banks, and here in Wisconsin a "Bank Holiday" was declared by gubernatorial proclamation. "Issued during the night, the 14-day bank moratorium caught Beloit bankers by surprise on the morn-

ing of March 3," Prof. Irmann reports.

While Beloit banks were in good shape, there were closings in nearby cities with banks never reopening. To reassure depositors and investors, the presidents of the four Beloit banks issued a March 3, 1933, statement regarding the conduct of banking in the city.

According to Prof. Irmann, the statement said, "The decree of the lieutenant governor was issued during the night. It came as a complete surprise to us, and it was in no wise made necessary by the condition of the banking institutions in Beloit. However, the order is mandatory upon all banks in the state, and it is necessary for Beloit banks to comply with it. Beloit banks have been able during these difficult years to keep themselves in a liquid position..."

Herbert Hoover had been in the White House, and while the depression may or may not have been of his making, he was replaced by New York: Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Eloquent Roosevelt, who later was to tell Americans that the only thing they had to fear was fear itself, ordered all banks in the nation closed. The Daily News reported that in Beloit no funds could be withdrawn and that the credit situation was "sound," and that eventually would be redeemed once banks were open again. By the middle of March all Beloit banks reopened, but it was far from business as usual. Bank profits were few, and the Roosevelt administration drew up laws and regulations "to shore up the economy," as Prof. Irmann puts it. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) was created, for the safety of depositors, and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) was formed to help banks stabilize and move ahead.

"Scrip" replaced hard-to-get cash

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During the depths of the depression, kids went to school without breakfast, and received a half-pint of free milk just before recess. Teachers brought pants, shoes, dresses, socks and... Continued on page 38.
underwear to school for children without proper clothing in their classes. Homes without heat were common, robberies increased, and words like “gangsters,” “gun molls,” and “moonshinners” were common in the language.

Gangsters became tools and allies of corrupt politicians in major cities, carrying out programs of intimidation, and murder of critics and protesters. Gang activities, many of them centered in Chicago, reached dramatic heights of violence as rival gangs sought revenues from “bootleg” liquor in competing territories. After the repeal of the Prohibition Act in 1933, gangsters continued to produce and sell liquor illegally, but most entered new fields of activity.

Prostitution was widespread, counterfeiting was on the rise, extortion was more common, the drug traffic boomed, and more and more bank robberies were reported. Newspapers carried news reports detailing the activities of “Scarface” Al Capone, “Machine Gun” Kelly, “Ma” Barker, John Dillinger, and other notorious thugs and gangsters. Major crime slopped over into Walworth County from Chicago, and there were stories that Capone, “Bugs” Moran and others operated in Southern Wisconsin.

Crime hit
Beloit, too

Police in the Beloit area expanded their equipment and stepped up their training activities. A firing range was set up in the old Samp Store Quarry, site of the present Krueger swimming pool, and squad car exercises using rifles through windshield portholes were conducted. Beloit banks installed tear gas systems, and staff members were lectured on bank robbery procedures.

Some said it was inevitable because Beloit was so close to Chicago’s gangland. On the morning of Aug. 18, 1932, seven gunmen armed with submachine guns and high powered rifles entered the Second National Bank (now First National) at 10 a.m. They slugged President B.P. Eldred and a customer, and forced them to the floor.

Fanning out over the bank, the gunmen intimidated the staff, and demanded that President Eldred open the vault. Responding that he couldn’t, Mr. Eldred was slug on both sides of the head with a pistol butt, and he fell to the floor. The bank’s cashier was then forced to open the vault.

The Beloit Daily News story of the robbery says: “The cashier did everything in his power to save the money in the vault. Every time that he opened a compartment, he said that there was no more money. He finally opened several empty compartments and the gunmen said: ‘Guess you’re honest. There doesn’t seem to be any more.’

The curiosity of workers in the downtown area was aroused when the bank’s burglar alarm was tripped as the robbery began. When an employee in a nearby bank phoned to ask what was going on, B.P. Eldred, Jr., later president of the bank, said: ‘Everything’s all right.’ He had a pistol barrel pressed to his temple at the time!

When the alarm continued to jangle, the curious caller walked across the street, entered the bank, and was met by a smiling bandit with a sawed-off shotgun. “We’re after money here today,” the gunman smiled and said. It appeared the gunmen previously “had cased the bank premises,” because they seemed to know their way around. Taking something like $70,000, the robbers forced six women employees to exit the building with them through the back door, where a seven-passenger Studebaker car awaited them.

The six young women were taken as hostages during the escape, and were forced to stand on the car’s running boards down an alley behind what is now the Ty-Mar Industries headquarters on East Grand Avenue, into State and Broad streets. There the women were told to jump off. One of the women, an employee, memorized the car’s license number, and the robbers later were arrested although the money never was recovered.

Delavan also experienced a bank robbery. On Feb. 8, 1932, a solitary bandit shot his way out of the Citizen’s Bank of Delavan, escaping with more than $6,000. Edgar Sikes, who operated a pool hall near the bank, was shot twice when he entered the bank after hearing a burglar alarm. Terrorized during the holdup was a teller by the name of Lillian Wilson, who was widely interviewed and pictured in newspapers following the robbery.

‘Gangster era’ in the Midwest

The same year Chicago crime experts were brought to Lake Geneva to aid Walworth County authorities in solving the gangland slaying of Joe Peradi, 35, alias Biggie Pinto of Chicago. Police

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said Biggio was an "alcohol runner" for a Chicago mob.

Kidnappings were numerous during the "Gangster Era" of the Great Depression, leading to new types of magazines, sensational newspaper stories, and even movies on the lives of mobsters. A rich Okalahoma oilman was abducted by Machine Gun Kelley, a St. Paul banker was held for $200,000 ransom, and the story kept being repeated in all parts of the country.

Among the worst of the mobsters was John Dillinger of Chicago ... and Wisconsin. He is credited with a score of bank robberies in Indiana, Wisconsin, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and as far afield as Arizona. Headlines told of his escaping a trap at a Northern Wisconsin recreation lodge, in an Indiana dentist's office, and even in jail in Lima, Ohio, where three confederates killed a sheriff who resisted Dillinger's delivery.

G-Men — federal agents — shot Dillinger to death in a hail of crossfire bullets as he walked out of a Chicago theater in 1934. He was heralded as "arch criminal of the age," and No. 1 on the FBI most wanted list.

It took Will Rogers again to get a chuckle out of Americans ... and Beloiters ... who were sick of crime, and poverty and uncertainty.

"We got more wheat, more corn, more food, more cotton, more money in banks, more everything in the world than any nation that ever lived, yet we are starving to death. We are the first nation in the history of the world to go to the poorhouse in an automobile."

Times toughened at Beloit College. Endowment stocks dropped, salaries were reduced, and students found difficulties paying their bills and staying in school. A self-help program was initiated, aiding students with tuition as they worked at campus janitorial jobs, assisted at Smith gymnasium in the athletic program, waited on tables and cleaned rooms in the "commons" and dormitories, mowed lawns and hauled garbage.

John Smiley of Orfordville, who was to become principal for 25 years of Lincoln Junior High school following graduation, was a night clerk at the Hotel Hilton, waited tables, and was a tutor in the mathematics department. Delos Clow of Crystal Lake, Ill., lived in the bowels of Strong Stadium "working his way" around Hancock Field. Larry Raymer and Marion Brown were part-

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The weather was just as fickle in the Beloit area during the Depression as it is today. The pictures above and left show the results of a flood, during the 1930s.

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High winds or a tornado played havoc with sections of town in the 11th Street area. The photographs above and left were dated June 1939.

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OF IT'S
150
years
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Beloit people pulled together to ease economic hardship

Continued from page 40. Time reporters for The Beloit Daily News; and other students washed dishes in local restaurants, set pins in bowling alleys, and scoured the community for jobs. Dr. William Fitzgerald, one of the founders of Beloit Clinic, worked for the city of Beloit’s parks department, trimming shrubs, watering flower gardens, and cutting brush. Jim Miller of Madison assisted in the first aid “hospital” at Fairbanks-Morse & Co. Frank Hamlin of Little Rock, Ark., was the student manager of self-help, running what amounted to an employment agency.

Patience at Beloit College

Business Manager Victor Emilson, who has served the Beloit City Council and has been one of Beloit’s outstanding civic leaders, was a friend of every student in college. He and Jim Gage of Beloit were liberal in their scholarship programs, and Emilson was compassionate, understanding and smilingly patient and lenient in his collection policies. He listened sympathetically when students needed extensions to meet their obligations, and even accepted "payment in kind" and produce from student in college. He and Jim Gage of Beloit, and has been one of Beloit’s outstanding educators. He listened sympathetically to others, and the Smith gymnasium was made available to local citizens.

The Beloit College Class of 1934 graduated without the publication of a yearbook, breaking a traditional line of “annuats” at the college and in community and area high schools. Student editors of “The Cold” couldn’t muster adequate advertising support among community businesses and industries to publish the book. They just couldn’t afford the expense.

As the number of jobless rose, more students moved from town to town looking for jobs, and there developed a sort of “Hobo Culture.” Vast numbers of men “hopped freighters” on railroads, became “Knights of the Road,” and lived in hobo camps or “jungles” near railroad yards. Beloit had such a jungle along Rock River and the railroad tracks south of the Shirland Avenue bridge. “Panhandling,” or begging, became commonplace on city streets and in residential neighborhoods as itinerants sought handouts of food and clothing. Some hobos went so far as to mark the home of generous housewives with signs and symbols on sidewalks and mailbox envelopes, signaling sympathetic receptions to begging.

Fairbanks-Morse was expanding rapidly in the late 1920s with the production of diesel engines, both stationary and marine; electrical line generators and motors of many sizes and types; hydraulic machinery including centrifugal, rotary and reciprocating pumps; magnetos, gasoline engines for farm uses, and power machinery for natural gas and the oil fields.

Factories at St. Johnsbury, Vt., and Moline, Ill., produced the famous “Fairbanks Scales.” Railroad motor cars, hand cars, push cars, standpipes, and other railroad equipment was produced at the Three Rivers, Mich. works. In Indianapolis refrigerators, radios, washing machines, and other household appliances were made. Air conditioners and stokers also were F-M products.

The late 1920s, and even 1930s, were a time of prosperity, but the depression put a great strain on Fairbanks Morse & Co. Gross business in a single year had amounted to more than $30 million, and that dropped to a fraction as the depression mounted. Salaries were reduced, layoffs followed, and entire departments were shut down.

In the three years of 1931, 1932 and 1933, F-M suffered losses aggregating $9,862,000. The management faced unprecedented difficulties, but by 1934, sharp practice and new ideas enabled the company to turn the corner, and build the business again. Executives, workers, and stockholders were united in determining that the company again would take its place as a giant among power equipment producers.

Agencies tried to help people

The Red Cross was an important and busy agency during the depression years, and served the community well. In 1931-1933 the Beloit Red Cross chapter distributed 50,000 yards of cotton cloth which housewives turned into clothing; 6,000 sweaters, shirts and overalls; 1,000 blankets, 17 carloads of flour in 42,040 sacks weighing 50 pounds each, and conducted a sewing center which made and distributed 1,500 garments.

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The Community Welfare association, organized by Prof. Lloyd Ballard of Beloit College, carried a big burden of family relief in 1930, 1931 and 1932. During the winter of 1930, the association raised $20,640 for general relief, and during 1931 more than $50,000 was dispensed in emergency situations resulting from unemployment. The association financed a free medical clinic. Later with the organization of the Rock County Department of Outdoor Relief, a large part of the relief work was turned over to that public agency.

Farmers were hard hit by the depression with prices zeroing and production rising to surplus levels. Congress adopted an Agricultural Adjustment Act, offering something called "subsidies" to farmers who agreed to restrict their planting of basic crops. The bill also gave the president authority to curb inflation by reducing the gold content of the dollar and issuing "greenbacks."

Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace stirred up a national hornet's nest by "plowing under crops and pigs," and then came the Dust Bowl in areas of thin top soil in The Plains. Dust clouds filled whole states, and people deserted their farms in migration caravans from the Dakotas to Oklahoma. "The Oakies" and "The Arkies," who sought a promised land in the far west, became a part of the literature in "The Grapes of Wrath." Farm foreclosures were common elsewhere, but in Beloit farmers generally managed to hang on to their homes and land with the cooperation of understanding financial institutions.

Prior to 1930 "relief" or "welfare" in Rock County was a small item, a nuisance handled from a Janesville office. But by 1930 a Beloit office and department were required to handle the increasing case load. The work was under the direction of Frank Fagen, and it was taken over successively by Charles Garrey, a former sheriff, and Guy Anderson of Beloit. Anderson resigned in September of 1932, and A.D. Telfer of Beloit was named. It was a brilliant choice.

Mr. Telfer, later to become Beloit's capable and much loved and respected city manager, provided an expert and sympathetic administration of emergency assistance during the years of local, national and worldwide depression. While some cities changed administrators with every ill wind and scandal, Mr. Telfer devoted his full energies to his task, gaining national attention.

At one time, in March of 1933, when the depression was perhaps at its worst, more than 1,500 families in the southern half of Rock County around Beloit were receiving some measure of emergency assistance from the Beloit office of the County Relief Administration. Under Mr. Telfer's administration, and various recovery programs, by 1936 this number had dropped to 500.

A fund drive by the old Community Chest in November of 1931, and the work of "the Good Fellows" at Christmas time, and the Red Cross and Salvation Army, took care of relief needs in the community. But by February of 1932 things had reached a state where it became necessary to set up a countywide relief program to coordinate approaches.

After a small office was opened in Beloit the welfare headquarters was moved to a vacant store on north end of State Street about where the First National Bank drive-in is located. In 1932, approximately $225,000 was spent for "direct relief" ... groceries, clothing, rent ... in Beloit alone. This was a huge sum when a dollar was worth a dollar, and men worked for a dollar a day.

By Jan. 1, 1933, the federal government entered the picture, assisting the county government by providing one-half of all relief costs. In 1933 direct relief costs climbed to $361,272.59. Mr. Telfer reported. In March the office was moved to the old Goodwin block at State and Grand, and expenditures for 1934 were divided as follows: direct relief — $304,228.13, and work relief projects, $104,500.67.

Yeoman work for the needy

These expenditures of money were augmented by yeoman work by the Red Cross, Salvation Army and other agencies. The Red Cross alone provided more than three-fourths of all clothing distributed to the needy in Rock County.

Expenditures for direct relief in 1935 were $362,361.31 while work projects relief amounted to $129,917.80. In addi—

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**Government projects helped cope during difficult times**

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...the following "commodities" were distributed to the needy:

- 34,910 pounds of beef
- 15,115 pounds of veal
- 1,900 pounds of butter
- 2,097 pounds of condensed milk
- 3,240 pounds of mutton
- 4,800 pounds of prunes
- 9,165 packages of garden seeds.

At the request of the federal government, the Beloit relief office operated a mattress factory from October 1934 through May 1935. The shop produced 3,901 mattresses, which were shipped countywide. The relief office also administered the government, county and city work relief programs. Principal among these were the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and later the Works Progress Administration as a separate program known as the WPA.

Among WPA projects were enlarging the Municipal (Krueger) Golf Course, building up Big Hill Park, creating the first Natatorium and swimming pool complex (Krueger Park) in the old Samp Stone Quarry on the city's northwest side, and Riverside Park along Rock River between Portland and Henry Avenues.

The city's golf course of 9 holes was opened in May of 1927, and was enlarged to 18 holes under the WPA. Parks and Public Works Director Ross Yost is credited as "father of the city golf course," supervising the planting of 2,100 trees and 10,000 shrubs as well as directing overall work on the course and swimming pool.

A clubhouse was constructed, shelters were built, sprinklers were introduced, picnic and play facilities were installed at Big Hill along with nature trails and rustic roads for nature lovers and motorists. The natural motif was preserved in one of the last tall stands of timber in the area consisting of 86 acres. The view from the crest of Big Hill looking north along the river has been a favorite of generations of Beloiters, and once was the site of a ski scaffold torn down and sold to the Westby, Wis., Ski Club. Widely heralded competitions were held with jumpers coming all the way from Sweden and Finland.

**Federal aid was a key**

It has been estimated that the federal government spent more than half a million dollars on work relief projects in Beloit. Most of the money went for wages, and the city of Beloit matched federal funds with thousands of dollars.

At the peak of the federal make-work programs, approximately 2,500 people were drawing checks from the Civil Works Administration. In charge of all this activity was G.E. Heiblak, former city engineer, and a dedicated public servant. He was assisted by C.J. Popelka, Boy Scout booster and city engineer, who insisted that things of lasting benefit to the community be built with relief monies.

Other "relief" projects included water system extensions, improved roads, laying of a storm sewer to Eastlawn cemetery, removal of miles of old car tracks on city streets, renovation of the police department, repairing and painting the old Carnegie Library on West Grand Avenue in the neighborhood of the Masonic Temple, extension of Olympian Boulevard from Tenth Street to Hackett Street through "crab apple jungle," street drainage work, and engineering studies.

**Basketball was big**

In Beloit during the 1930s, with consistently superior teams being fielded at Beloit High School. This photograph shows the 1936 team. Back row, left to right: manager A. Olen, L. Murphy, S. Terranova, A. Howard, R. Sauers, C. Chester, F. Podwell, M. Leffingwell, G. Hoffman. Front row, left to right: A. Farina, E. Polglaize, W. Reif, B. Salmos, J. Gilmore, E. May. Coach of the successful Beloit teams was Herman L. Jacobson.

While some cities staggered under corrupt administrations, and "boondogling" in relief work and policies, Beloit under Archie Telfer was a model. Numerous commendations were accredited Beloit for honesty, efficiency, and projects of lasting value while they kept children in school, food on tables, and families together.

Officials of South Beloit held a citizens' open meeting to "lay it on the line," asking public direction on whether to raise taxes or "float" a municipal bond "to keep the city afloat." Citizens were told frankly that city employees—including the police chief, the fire chief, the city clerk, and the street crew—had not been paid in two years! The mayor, commission, and city lawyer had never been paid since their election!

Employees of The Beloit Daily News voluntarily accepted a 10 percent wage reduction as several workers were dropped to tighten the newspaper's belt. Employees of factories, stores and municipalities followed suit. Twenty na-
Hard work, determination kept the community going

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Local labor unions in a Chicago convention in January of 1932 agreed to a 10 percent wage reduction in an effort to save the railroads.

The Consolidated Bank of Clinton, Wis., took over the assets of the Citizen's State Bank, and elected F.W. Herron as president. About the same time payment of 25 cents on the dollar for claims by depositors against the defunct Bower City Bank of Janesville was ordered by the special government official in charge of the affairs of the closed bank. Deposits totalled about $500,000, and it was announced that payment to depositors would be immediate.

Hog prices dropped to a new low on the Chicago market in 1932, while The Daily News continued to publish classified "want ads" by persons asking jobs as maids, household workers, janitors, and any types of jobs available. The Beloit Building and Loan Association, forerunner of Rock Savings, advertised "funds available for first mortgage loans." The Beloit Household Finance Co. advertised it would make confidential loans from $50 to $500 in its offices in the Strong Building.

The American Legion initiated a plan to find all possible jobs and put people to work under Commander Dick Moore. A coupon appeared in the Daily News, inviting people to list their training, capabilities, and willingness to work.

To boost morale a bit, Mrs. L.A. VanGelder of Shoptops wrote and the Turtle Grange produced a hometown opera, and Beloit Federation of Women launched a campaign for a recreation center for the unemployed. Rooms for the center were donated by O.T. and A.S. Thompson, and a Daily News plea was issued for donations of cash, chairs, coal stoves, rugs, tables, cots, magazines, bookcases, and pictures. Spearheading the project were President Mrs. F.G. Hobart and Mrs. B.E. Wood.

Proving again that people weren't isolating themselves in despair, but were talking, planning and hoping for better things, numerous meetings were held to encourage each other.

"I do not know that prosperity is just around the corner, but I do now that business is all set to go," President H.A. Von Oven of the Beloit State Bank told 200 farmers and their wives attending the 1932 annual meeting of the Rock County Farm Bureau, assembled in Footville.

"All that is needed," President Von Oven declared, "is a certain confidence and leadership." And leadership he gave, serving on state banking recovery groups, and giving the community his

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best, resulting in his election to the Beloit Hall of Fame at Bartlett Museum following his death.

Likening the fight against the plight of the depression to a war, Mr. Von Oven urged a war against bad times and the enlisting of business, and industry and agriculture in a common cause to bring better times.

Writing editorially in The Beloit Daily News, Editor Mason Dobson suggested: "It is possible historians a few years hence will date the beginning of the end of the present depression from the establishment of the Reconstruction Corporation.

'Tight money, always a phenomenon of hard times, has seldom been more in evidence than it has in the past year (1931). It has been responsible for a tremendous amount of industrial stagnation.' He admonished his readers that time and effort were required, adding: "Of course, the job can't be done overnight."

The Wisconsin Legislature passed an $8 million dollar relief bill in 1932, warning citizens that the measure would "double income taxes" to bring financial relief to the state. The first "unemployment insurance bill" was adopted by the legislature and signed by Gov. Phil La Follette ahead of all states in the union.

Beloit High School students demonstrated enthusiastic support for a new economic course to be taught by M.E. Testa, teaching them (apparently) some things their parents didn't know or heed. The course was heralded to cover "public finance, credit, supply and demand, the federal reserve system, wealth, income, and consumption of goods." It was announced that students would study "the problems of the day," using the newspaper as a textbook.

Americans kept a sense of humor even in the dark days of the depression. Helping them was a talkative cowboy by the name of Will Rogers. In 1933, Rogers said: "People haven't been this happy in three years," alluding to the new president. "No money, no banks, no work, no nothing, but they know they got a man in there who is wise to Congress and wise to the so-called big men. The whole country is with him, just so he does something. Even if what he does is wrong. If he burned down the Capitol, we would cheer and say: 'Well, we at least got a fire started.'"

One of President Roosevelt's "first" was to bring back legal beer, and this was greeted in Beloit with enthusiasm. Saloons, which henceforth would be known as "taverns," served up free beer on the first day of sales along with bar "free lunches." There were boiled eggs, cold cuts, rye bread, pickled herring, and other delicacies just for the taking, as customers quaffed "real legal beer."

Statisticians had a field day estimating that the amount of beer sold on the first day of legal sales "would float a battleship." Economists got out their sharpest pencils and reported that the first day beer sales would result in federal income of $7,500,000 to $10,000,000 from taxes based on $5 a barrel.

Congress passed a $500 million bill to create an army of new pioneers to go into the woods across 15 million acres of forest land owned by the state and nation. By the bill, $250,000 reforestation jobs were created, and camps were opened in Northern Wisconsin. Applications poured in, and many Beloit area young men joined the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

Social observers believe that citizens all across the country ... from Chicago to New York and from San Francisco to Beloit ... "grew up" during the Great Depression. The national "festival of naivete" of those "Roaring Twenties," and the false concept that "The American Dream" was realized, were replaced by a sobering sense of new direction.

The depression of the 1930s was a period of constant political and social struggle as men and women toughened under trying conditions. "Paradoxically," says Susan Winslow in her book covering the depression, the 1930s were years of "great optimism and faith." People mostly never gave up. They retained their ideals even though they might have abandoned a lot of superficial nonsense about "two chickens in every pot.

Americans during the depression here in Beloit and across the land fought for what they believed in, and most truly believed things would get better ... and that they could win. Relatively few gave up entirely, and cynicism never took over Beloit, Wisconsin.

by the closing of the decade (1930s), things were beginning to normalize. "The Great Depression" was moderating with more jobs opening up, factories getting orders, banks raising salaries and paying small dividends, the relief load lightening markedly, and wage cuts being restored in factories and stores and businesses.

More and more people were singing President Roosevelt's song, "Happy Days Are Here Again!"

In Beloit, The Daily News gave readers a good paper, and sponsored community projects for kids like The Silver Skates, and the Marbles Tournament. The City of Beloit planned and staged a great celebration for its Centennial Year in 1936.

There were parades, pageants, fireworks, concerts, and scores of activities as reported in the Book of Beloit I published for the occasion, and distributed by The Daily News. Copies today are somewhat rare, and bring $20 from the Beloit Historical Society.

It was a return to happier times, but not the frivolous kind of "happy times" of the "Roaring Twenties," considered at the beginning of this chapter.

There were too many memories, both good and bad, of the years just gone. Those years left not only memories of experiences nostalgic, but deep scars upon individuals, families, businesses, industries, and social institutions. But Beloit had come through. Beloit survived.

The Centennial with its message of hope, and faith in the future, and dreams of progress, gave citizens new things to think about. And it gave them a determination to make the future better than the past ... as the builders of the Beloit community had resolved in the first 100 years.

— Laurence A. Raymer

The Duke and Duchess of Windsor, left, made a brief stop in Beloit near the end of the decade. With them are Col. Robert Robinson, right, and Blaine Hansen, far right. The photograph was taken at the North Western depot, on the observation car.

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