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Neighbor to Neighbor: The Great Depression



◀ *Bellevue, Ohio in 1936 was typical of small towns as the country began to pull out of the Great Depression. The A & P Grocery store and other downtown businesses attracted customers still looking for low prices. CAC General Photograph Collection.*

Long before the stock market crash of 1929, the seeds of the Great Depression were sown in the small towns and farming communities of the nation. The period tested our concept of self-reliance and reshaped American Government.

During World War I, farmers were encouraged to increase their production to support the war effort. They took out loans to purchase land and mechanized farm equipment. When the war quickly ended, demand for crops fell and prices dropped, leaving farmers unable to repay their loans. New loans only delayed the inevitable, and banks in small towns and rural communities began closing by the end of the 1920s. The Center for Archival Collections includes records from a number of small town banks, both those which closed during this time period and those which were able to continue operating (**MS 5**, Farmers & Citizens Banking Company of Milan; **MS 11**, Delphos Savings and Loan; **MS 20**, Fremont Building & Loan; MMS 1, Lima Dime Savings Bank; MMS 7 Curtis State Bank; and MMS 38, Second National Bank of Sandusky).

The Farmers' Savings Bank of Stony Ridge, Ohio suffered as did other rural banks which held outstanding loans to farmers when crop prices fell. As these banks closed, the rural depression began long before the stock market crashed. CAC General Photograph Collection. Donated by Mike Sibberson. ▶

By late 1932, the ratio of debt-to-land value in Wood County, Ohio was 65%, the highest in the country, and 76% of mortgaged farms carried a debt higher than the market value of the land. Although the cost of living between 1930 and 1932 fell 18.5%, prices for crops fell 49%. (*Bowling Green, Ohio: A Sesquicentennial History, 1833-1983*, p. 26)



Small towns which relied on the farm economy were devastated. Business collections from this era include MMS 11 (Scioto Land Company), **MS 322**, (Graves Hardware of Oak Harbor), and **MS 528**, (George Hersh Lumber of Grand Rapids).



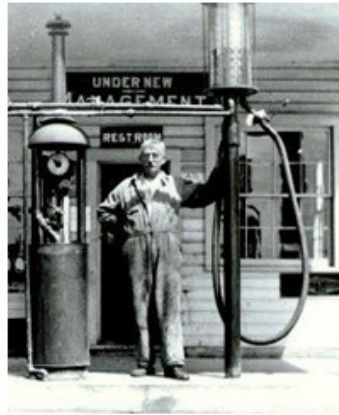
▶ *Rossbach & Hoffman's Ladies Store in Perrysburg (1938) displays fashions popular during the Depression—simple lines in dresses and hats that fit close to the head. CAC General Photograph Collection.*

Newspapers of the time provide a glimpse of the effect of the collapse—at least until they, too, were forced to close. The problem was clearly so large that in most communities, local charities combined their efforts to provide more efficiently for the needy. Throughout the community news sections, the economic situation is acknowledged in many telling ways. Until that time, welfare cases were handled by local government boards or by private charities and were few enough in number that they attracted little notice.

By 1930, however, Willard, Ohio in Huron County (population about 2,000) found that it had 35 families—about 180 people—dependent upon relief (the number rose to 59 families the following year), and this situation was not unusual. New London, Oakwood, and Findlay lowered taxes and cut public employees' salaries (teachers in Findlay received a 40% cut in pay, for instance).

Men earned relief payments from these cities by clearing brush piles and repairing the sewer systems. School lunch programs were established and PTA fundraisers and other school functions donated their proceeds to the local relief fund and even took I.O.U.'s in place of admission. A community canning-for-food-relief was sponsored by the New London service clubs and local farmers donated a portion of their wheat crop to Cleveland charities. Many of the women's clubs manuscript collections available at the CAC may provide other examples of relief efforts.

Full service gas stations provided auto repair as well as fuel. Many small businesses never disappeared from their communities during the Depression, but they changed ownership frequently as a succession of people tried to make their livings. CAC General Photograph Collection. ▶



Still, the burden was more than small town economies could handle. In 1933, the federal government stepped in with an "alphabet soup" of assistance programs of all kinds. Most well-known was the Works Progress Administration, responsible for the construction of sewer systems, roads, bridges, and public buildings in small towns as well as urban centers. The Civilian Conservation Corps Camp #3523 near Findlay employed up to 218 men for reclamation projects in a seven county region. Historians and artists were also employed to inventory local government records or to paint murals in courthouses and town halls.

Bowling Green State College was affected as well. Reduced tax revenues encouraged the state to consider converting the college to a mental hospital. Thanks to a vigorous campaign, the proposal was defeated, and by the end of the decade, the college had become a full-fledged university. For the first time, too, federally subsidized employment and loan programs enabled students to complete their educations.



◀ A forerunner of today's convenience store, this Perrysburg sandwich shop located on US 20, offered soft drinks, ice cream, candy, and nineteen-cent gasoline. CAC General Photograph Collection. Photographer Ariel Walker.

The Center for Archival Collections hopes to acquire more photographs, newspapers, diaries, and collections of letters from the 1920s and 1930s. Should you have knowledge of or wish to donate such material, please contact the Center at +1-419-372-2411.

—Lee N. McLaird

Famous Fakes 3: The Declaration of Independence Facsimiles

Who hasn't come home from a vacation or a flea market without picking up a copy of The Declaration of Independence, just to have it as a souvenir of the occasion? The brown crispy look of age lends these souvenirs a purely romantic air of authenticity, even if they were produced in endless quantity with no real value beyond the sentimental.

The original copy of The Declaration of Independence has been housed at the National Archives since December 13, 1952. This copy was made from Jefferson's final draft, with Congress' corrections. It was engrossed, or copied in large, legible hand on parchment (leather) almost thirty inches square, and signed by the delegates on August 2, 1776. However, other copies appeared in printed form both before and after this date. Of greatest interest to collectors have been the July 4, 1776 text broadside, the 1818 and 1819 engraved facsimiles, and the 1823 parchment editions.

During the evening of July 4, 1776, printer John Dunlap produced the first broadside edition of the Declaration, to be distributed to the members of the Continental Congress. It was typeset and printed on light-colored rag paper. One copy was attached inside the journal of the proceedings of the Continental Congress. Clearly printed in hand-set type across the top of the broadside are the words—"In Congress, July 4, 1776, A Declaration By The Representatives Of The United States of America, in General Congress Assembled." The only names which appear (in printed form) are those of John Hancock and Charles Thomson. One source believes that there might have been one thousand copies printed, of which twenty-five survive. In July 2000, one of these copies sold at auction for \$8.14 million.

In the years following Independence longhand style copies were produced. In 1818 Benjamin Owen Tyler made the first noted for the accuracy with which the Founding Fathers' signatures were copied. In this version, 29" wide by 42" long, the words "In Congress, July 4th, 1776" are artfully arched at the top of the document. In 1819 John Binns created a more elaborate copy in which the text was surrounded by seals of the thirteen colonies with portraits of Hancock, Washington, and Jefferson at the top. Both of these rag paper editions were private commercial ventures, but the quantity produced was not noted.

In 1823, William J. Stone was commissioned to prepare a copy plate to be struck from the original Declaration, perhaps using a "wet sheet transfer" to produce an exact facsimile. Press copies were made by placing a damp sheet of thin paper on the manuscript and pressing it until a portion of the ink was transferred. The ink was reimposed on a copper plate, which was then etched so that copies could be run off on a press. The official press run of 200 copies on parchment were identified at the top right in small print "Engraved by W. J. Stone for the Department of State, by order of J. Q. Adams, Secretary of State, July 4th, 1823." These copies were to be given to government officials and departments, surviving signers of the Declaration, the houses of Congress, and so on. Today, these remain among the most valuable copies made of the Declaration.

Later, Stone struck a number of unofficial copies, probably on paper, identified in the lower left "W. J. Stone SC Washn." Some copies were still being made from this copper plate in the 1890s. In 1895, the Coast and Geodetic Survey made electrotype plates from the copper plate, thus enabling still more copies to be produced. In 1976 six paper copies were struck from Stone's original plate to commemorate the Bicentennial.

From W. J. Stone's plate came the potential to produce endless facsimiles. The many copies we see today are the result. Author Leonard Rapport observed that "Many are on what the printers hoped would be taken for, and the present owners believe to be, parchment. But there can be only one original Declaration, engrossed and signed, and it is on exhibit in the rotunda of the National Archives."

For further reading:

Rapport, Leonard. "Fakes and Facsimiles: Problems of Identification," in *American Archivist*, vol. 42, 1979.

National Archives and Records Administration web site <http://www.nara.gov/exhall/charters/declaration/decmain.html>

—Eric Honneffer

Because people often contact the CAC wishing to authenticate documents, this article is the third of a series devoted to historic document reprints and the characteristics that distinguish them from the originals.
