

THE IMPACT OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION
ON PUBLIC EDUCATION
IN
JOHNSTON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
1927 - 1940

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by
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Bernard F. Proctor. THE IMPACT OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION UPON PUBLIC EDUCATION IN JOHNSTON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, 1927-1940. (Under the direction of Joseph F. Steelman) Department of History, November, 1965.

The purpose of this study is to describe the impact of the Great Depression of the 1930's on public education in Johnston County, a typical rural county of North Carolina. The period surveyed commenced with the school term of 1926-1927, when the first effects of the depression were felt in Johnston County, and extended to the school term 1940-1941, when definite progress had been made toward economic recovery.

To grasp the impact of the times on the schools of the county, the total effect of the Great Depression upon the people in general must be understood. The affairs of public education were closely enmeshed with those of other phases of political, economic, social, and cultural life of the county. This study attempts to arrive at such an understanding, through discussion of the cause and effect relationships of the events which marked the rapid decline from prosperity to depression, and the slow ascent to recovery.

While the Great Depression was not recognized as such, nationally, until 1929, the decline in Johnston County, which had begun in 1926, progressed rapidly, and by 1928 the economic deterioration was serious. In a county almost wholly dependent upon agriculture, steadily declining farm

prices spelled financial disaster, not only for individuals, but for the county government as well. With the property tax as the principal source of revenue, and property owners, in large proportion unable to pay their taxes for years on end, the county treasury became all but bankrupt. Deficit spending, which began in 1927, steadily increased as more and more borrowing was necessary to produce the funds to meet payments on debt service and current obligations.

The county debt, which assumed such huge proportions by 1930, when tax revenues were but a fraction of tax assessments was the result of maturing bonds which had been issued during the prosperous years of the twenties, for the construction of a half-million dollar courthouse, a fine network of county roads, and a considerably expanded school building program. While only fifteen per cent of the tax levy was for debt service on school buildings, and twenty-four per cent of the levy was for other debt service, the political campaign conducted by the strong local Republican party in the elections of 1928 blamed the financial difficulty of the county on extravagances in public education. The Republicans won seats on the Board of County Commissioners and set out to make good their promises of economy.

Conflicts over the school budget between the Democratic Board of Education and the county commissioners resulted in turmoil for the schools during the two years the Republicans were in office. Differences between the two boards which

reached the courts saw the demands of the Board of Education upheld, but the victory was a hollow one; money was not available to meet appropriations for the public schools on the scale which had prevailed during the prosperous years. Democratic county commissioners, elected in 1930, were forced to continue, and even increase the austerity program for the schools begun by their predecessors.

It is problematical whether or not, under the existing circumstances, the schools of Johnston County could have continued beyond the 1930-1931 school term. At the end of that school year the county treasury was so depleted that there were no funds to pay the teachers for their last month's work, and little hope was held for a betterment of financial conditions for the county during the coming year.

When the General Assembly convened in 1931, the crisis in public education was as critical elsewhere in the state as it was in Johnston County. Legislation passed that year provided that the state assume the support of all except fixed charges for the operation of the schools for the constitutional six-months term. The plan to raise the money for state support through a state-wide property tax to be administered by the counties produced insufficient revenue to meet the appropriations, however, as too many property owners still could not meet their tax assessments, even though they had been reduced. The General Assembly of 1933 faced up squarely to the issue, abolished the state property

tax, and imposed a general sales tax to provide the revenue for support of the schools for an eight-month term.

Johnston County schools suffered in many ways during the depression, but the worst conditions were due to crowding. Consolidation, which had become imperative under the state teacher allotment formula, had caused large increases in the population of the schools which were retained, with no additional classrooms being provided to take care of the influx of new students. Even with the easing of the tax burden on the property owners, meeting the payments on debt service and current expense was still a great problem with the county government, and, for years, there were no funds available for school construction purposes.

The coming of the New Deal in 1933 brought early relief to the beleaguered farmers, the unemployed, and the destitute of Johnston County, but the schools, which had felt the effects of the depression first, were the last to receive direct aid. It was late in 1935 before matching funds, under the Works Progress Administration, were available for school construction. Proceeding as rapidly as local funds could be raised to match the federal grants, the county government worked steadily through the late 1930's to remedy the bad school situation.

Under the impact of the Great Depression the people of Johnston County were brought closer together, and the one bright spot, as the depression wore on, was the fine spirit

of cooperation and understanding which prevailed, between school, community, and county government, as well as between the races.

The curriculum of Johnston County schools underwent changes, as directives of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction promoting character training and "enrichment" programs received the endorsement of local school groups. The many projects of the WPA, NYA, and other New Deal agencies were of considerable help to individual pupils in Johnston County and furthered the trend toward improved occupational education. The contributions of 4-H Club activities toward a more practical program of education for farm youth were outstanding.

Although the school age population grew only slightly between 1927 and 1940 there were material increases in average daily attendance and in the number of students who completed high school. Public education in Johnston County was in better condition in 1940 than it had been in 1927, in spite of all the trials and hardships suffered under the impact of the Great Depression.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION.	1v
I. BLOOM TURNS TO BLIGHT, 1927 - 1930.	1
II. DEPTHS OF THE DEPRESSION, 1930 - 1933	35
III. THE COMING OF THE NEW DEAL, 1933 - 1935	69
IV. THE ROAD TO RECOVERY, 1935 - 1940	96
V. CONCLUSION.	129
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	139

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to show the impact of the Great Depression of the 1930's on public education in Johnston County, a typical rural county of North Carolina. The period covered begins with the school term of 1926-1927, when the first effects of the depression were felt in Johnston County, and extends to the school term 1940-1941, when definite progress was being made toward economic recovery.

To grasp the effect of the times on the schools of the county, the total impact of the Great Depression upon the people must be understood. The affairs of public education were closely enmeshed with those of other phases of political, economic, social, and cultural life of the county. This study attempts to arrive at such an understanding, through discussion of the cause and effect relationships of the events which marked the rapid decline from prosperity to depression, and the slow ascent to recovery.

Johnston may be considered a typical rural county, due to the fact that its area of 807 square miles contained no large centers of urban population. Of the ten incorporated towns, the county seat, Smithfield, was the largest. Its population in 1930, 2,543, increased to 3,678 by 1940, while the population for the whole county rose from 57,621 in 1930 to 63,798 in 1940. Other towns, all of which were considerably smaller than the county seat, were Benson,

Clayton, Four Oaks, Kenly, Micro, Pine Level, Princeton,
 Selma, and Wilson's Mills.¹

Located in the western part of the Coastal Plain region of North Carolina, Johnston County is bounded by Wake, Nash, Wilson, Wayne, Sampson, and Harnett counties. It ranked tenth in size among North Carolina's one hundred counties.

The principal events in the history of the public schools of Johnston County up to the school year 1925-1926, were reported in an unpublished master's thesis submitted to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1927, by Edgar T. Boyette, entitled "Growth and Development of Education in Johnston County".² Mr. Boyette's work described the progress of the schools up to the time when prosperity was considered to have reached a plateau, which is the point selected for the beginning of this survey.

¹ Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930. Population (Washington, 1932), III, Part II, 370, 394; Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940. Population (Washington, 1942), II, Part V, 312, 390.

² Edgar T. Boyette, "Growth and Development of Education in Johnston County" (unpublished master's thesis, University of North Carolina, 1927).

CHAPTER I
BLOOM TURNS TO BLIGHT

1927 - 1930

As the summer of 1926 ended and preparations were made for the opening of the public schools of Johnston County for the 1926-1927 term the warm glow of prosperity which had marked the earlier years of the decade appeared as bright as ever. Community leaders and average citizens alike in Johnston's small towns and rural areas were as blissfully unaware of the impending economic chaos that would soon engulf farm, hamlet and metropolis alike, as were the great financiers on Wall Street, and the political seers in the nation's capital.¹ In the county seat of Smithfield the pronouncements of highly placed national figures, who declared that the nation could be expected to remain permanently on a high plateau of economic well being were hopefully received.² The two money crops, cotton and tobacco, which were the backbone of the Johnston County economy, were counted upon to bring rich returns to growers when placed on the fall markets. There had been a record cotton crop that

¹ George Soule, Prosperity Decade. From War to Depression: 1917-1929, Volume VIII of Henry David and others (eds.), The Economic History of the United States (New York, 1947), 5, 275-281.

² Raleigh News and Observer, August 4, 1926; Smithfield Herald, September 2, 10, 14, 17, 1926.

summer, with Johnston leading every county in the state in production. Tobacco, although not as abundant as usual, due to the dry weather, was expected to make up in price what it lost in volume.³

That these high expectations would not be met was unforeseen. It was not realized that the huge cotton crop would become more of a liability than an asset when the time came for it to be placed on the market. The price of 12¢ per pound which it would bring, an amount half that of 1925, would mean to the farmer, in many instances, less than the cost of production.⁴ The tobacco crop was smaller than anyone realized and, in spite of continuing good prices that averaged above 25¢ per pound,⁵ brought, in the aggregate, so little to the average farmer that he was left with scant earnings after paying expenses.

Nor could it be foretold, as the time approached for the opening of the county schools, that the winter of 1926-1927 would be one of the hardest on record. The number of needy cases applying for welfare aid during the year would exceed all expectations.⁶

³ Raleigh News and Observer, August 20, 1926; Smithfield Herald, September 14, 1926.

⁴ Smithfield Herald, November 23, 1926.

⁵ Ibid., September 17, December 7, 1926.

⁶ Ibid., March 27, 1927.

As summer turned to autumn in 1926, any fears which found expression seemed to be concerned, not with a possible end to financial well being, but rather with the dangers to a society which might not use its wealth wisely. Typical of this sentiment was the topic of an address, "Perils of Prosperity", delivered in Smithfield on September 8, 1926, by the principal speaker for the annual harvest Thanksgiving services, an event which had become a custom in Johnston County during the period when farmers had enjoyed bumper crops and satisfactory market prices. On this occasion Dr. John E. White, President of Anderson College, cautioned his audience against losing appreciation for the finer things of life which could not be bought and sold in the market place. He urged that the people revere learning and promote the cultivation of the fine arts.⁷

The remarks having to do with betterment of education were well received that year in Johnston County, for local interest in public schools was then at a peak. There was visible evidence of this throughout the county, in the many new school buildings, newly-added classrooms, additional equipment, and increased pupil transportation facilities which had been provided for the 1926-1927 school year.

When the school year opened, figures compiled later showed that the seventy-nine white schools and thirty-four

⁷ Ibid., September 10, 1926.

8
 Negro schools had record enrollments of 13,902 and 4,528
 respectively.⁹ Altogether, there was a record number of
 classrooms,¹⁰ 461 in white schools and 99 in Negro schools.
 Many of these children entered fine new buildings just
 erected, and in some others work was still continuing on
 new construction or renovations that would be completed
 during the year. Among the new school buildings was the
 \$75,000 structure at Cleveland,¹¹ a new six classroom addi-
 tion at Four Oaks,¹² and an all new, brick building, erect-
 ed at a cost of \$16,000, at the Negro school at Short
 Journey.¹³ Work was in progress on teachers' homes (popu-
 larly known as teacherages), solidly built brick structures
 of twelve rooms each, at Four Oaks, Corinth Holder, Archer
 Lodge, Micro, and Meadow.¹⁴

8
Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public
Instruction of North Carolina, 1926-1927 (Raleigh, 1927),
 Part II, Section I, 227.

9
Ibid., 179.

10
Ibid., 227.

11
Smithfield Herald, October 22, 1926.

12
Ibid., September 17, 1926.

13
Ibid., December 7, 1926.

14
 Minutes of the Johnston County Board of County Commis-
 sioners, June 15, 16, 17, 18, 1926, Johnston County Court-
 house, Smithfield, North Carolina, hereinafter cited as
 Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners; Smithfield Herald,
 September 17, 1926.

That the people wanted, and expected to pay for more and more school improvements was evidenced by the fact that a larger number of schools than ever before opened for the 1926-1927 school year for terms that would last longer than the constitutionally required six months. This had come about as district after district followed the trend established in earlier years to petition the Board of Education for elections on increased district taxes to provide the funds needed for longer terms.¹⁵

Most of the schools in Johnston County had already come into the county system, which meant that they were under the direction of the County Board of Education. Three schools, however, still retained their charters, and operated as independent districts. These were white schools in Smithfield, Clayton, and Benson. Selma was operating under the countywide system for the first time in 1926-1927, having petitioned to relinquish its charter to the county in June, 1926.¹⁶ Smithfield and Clayton were to find before the end of the 1926-1927 term that they could no longer finance

¹⁵ Minutes of the Johnston County Board of Education, January 1, March 8, April 6, 17, June 7, July 5, August 2, September 6, October 4, 1926; February 7, May 2, 1927, office of the Johnston County Board of Education, Smithfield, North Carolina, hereinafter cited as Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education.

¹⁶ Ibid., June 18, 1926.

their schools alone, and joined the county system the following year.¹⁷ Benson held out until 1931.¹⁸

The schools at Smithfield, Clayton, and Selma were operated for nine months in 1926-1927 and the school at Benson was operated for eight months. Others which had eight months sessions that year were the white schools at Kenly, Pittman, Glendale, Carters, Brogden, Princeton, Cleveland, Ingrams, Corinth, Parker, Four Oaks, Meadow, Micro, Pine Level, Yelverton's Grove, Archer Lodge, Corinth-Holders, Hales, Emit, and Wilson's Mills. Operating for seven months were the white schools at Royal, Sandy Springs, and Powhatan. The remainder of the schools, white and Negro,¹⁹ operated for terms of six months.

Transportation to and from school was provided in 1926-1927 by school trucks (they were not called buses for many years) for 2,778 white pupils and 67 Negro pupils. Ninety-two trucks served the white schools and two served the Negro schools.²⁰

Better educational facilities than ever before were brought to the children of Johnston County in 1926-1927.

¹⁷ Ibid., June 7, September 7, 1927.

¹⁸ Ibid., December 7, 1931.

¹⁹ Johnston County School Principals' Annual Reports, 1926-1927, in files of Johnston County Superintendent of Schools, Smithfield, North Carolina.

²⁰ Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1926-1927, Part II, Section I, 237.

Larger appropriations from the county treasury required increases in the school tax to meet the costs. A larger amount of revenue from county property taxation was expected to bring in the money to meet the payments on bond issues and loans which had been arranged to raise the funds for new building construction, as they came due, and to pay for the increased transportation facilities and other advancing costs of operating the schools. The self-imposed taxes on the districts having schools of extended terms were expected to meet the additional costs for the longer school year.²¹

That the people would not be able to pay these taxes because of a rapidly sagging economy in the county was not expected. What at first appeared to be a temporary decline, in the fall of 1926, was actually the beginning of a period of economic deterioration which progressed steadily. While it did not become evident for several years that the county was in real trouble in financing its public schools, a study of the financial data of the times tends to show that the beginning point of decline occurred during the 1926-1927 school year, when surface appearances were so good. Although the people were unaware of changes, bloom was already turning to blight. Their hopes for continued growth and improvement of the schools were to be dashed before the onslaughts of the Great Depression.

²¹
Personal Interview of the author with H. B. Marrow, Superintendent of Johnston County Public Schools, 1922-1951, October 21, 1964.

The report of the financial condition of Johnston County schools at the end of the 1926-1927 school year showed a balance on hand of \$70,240.54. Such a balance that remained after total expenditures for the schools of the county that year reached the amount of \$1,475,050.44 would seem to indicate financial well being. However, when a closer look is taken, as may be done by examining the Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina for 1926-1927, where tables of facts and figures on every phase of public school reporting by the county superintendents are set forth, one may see that this was not the case. This balance was not actually a surplus, but was instead only the unspent amount of sums borrowed on a temporary basis during the year to provide the bulk of the funds needed for debt service. As shown in the Biennial Report, the "Summary of Receipts" for 1926-1927 listed the total debt service for that year as \$545,512.56, and listed the amount borrowed as \$377,913.37. The same table reveals that the capital outlay for the year amounted to \$504,462.24, and that county school bonds had been sold in the amount of \$455,770.50.²²

It is evident that anticipated revenues from 1926 taxes, earmarked for debt service on previous school building

²² Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1926-1927, Part II, Section I, 16-17.

programs, were falling behind even as new indebtedness was incurred for more buildings and improvements. Clearly, deficit spending had already begun, as early as 1927.

In 1924, under the provisions of the North Carolina school law of 1923,²³ the Johnston County Board of Education, meeting with all the local school committeemen, had adopted the "county-wide plan" for bringing into the county system any of the special charter schools then operating in the county which petitioned the board for such action.²⁴ There had been a number of these schools, all of which had experienced financial difficulty in maintaining, as individual administrative units, the standards which were possible for the large body of county schools, operating under the central administrative authority of the Board of Education.²⁵ The new plan, already adopted in many counties of the state, not only offered economy of operation but provided a uniform quality of education which had been impossible where there had been so many districts, entirely independent of each other.²⁶

²³ Public Laws of North Carolina, session 1923, chapter 135, pp. 309-310.

²⁴ Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, August 1, 1924.

²⁵ Ibid., August 1, 1924.

²⁶ Samuel H. Hobbs, Jr., North Carolina. Economic and Social (Chapel Hill, 1930), p. 261.

Under the county-wide plan, the county Board of Education took over all the bonded indebtedness of the former special charter schools, along with their assets. Therefore, it was the shift of financial obligations from districts to county which had been partly responsible for swelling the school debt to \$1,088,187.57 by the end of the 1926-1927 term. With the issuance of school bonds in the amount of \$750,000 in December, 1927, to finance the current building program, the indebtedness for the schools rose to \$1,838,187.57.²⁷

Before the December, 1927, school bond issue, the school indebtedness had accounted for only half the total county debt. A financial statement for the county in October, 1927, showed a total indebtedness for all purposes of \$2,120,000. Large amounts of the total were for road and bridge bonds, and for balances due on the new court house which had been erected during the early twenties.²⁸

The largest proportion of indebtedness incurred during the period of growth and expansion of the schools, which had begun during the earlier twenties and continued until the end of the decade, was connected with new building construction and additions to existing school structures. One source for securing loans for such purposes, at low interest

to

²⁷ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, December 15, 1927.

²⁸ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, October 3, 1927.

and on long terms for repayment, had been the North Carolina school building loan fund, which had been established by the General Assembly in 1921.²⁹ Full advantage of this opportunity had been taken, and by 1927, when the total amount loaned by the state reached \$17,500,000,³⁰ Johnston County owed \$251,000 to the fund. This sum was the largest owed by any county in the state, with the exception of Guilford, a county of far greater wealth in property valuation, which at that time owed \$280,000.³¹ Another state source for borrowing had been the Literary Fund, which made state money available for aid in the construction of school buildings for Negroes. A loan of \$10,000 had been secured from this fund to finance the construction of the \$16,000 building at Short Journey, occupied for the first time in 1926-1927.³²

However, the greatest amount, by far, of the necessary funds for the school building program had been obtained by the issuance of school bonds. The General Assembly of 1925

²⁹ Public Laws of North Carolina, session 1921, chapter 147, pp. 422-426.

³⁰ David Leroy Corbitt (ed.), Public Papers and Letters of Angus Wilton McLean, Governor of North Carolina, 1925-1929 (Raleigh, 1931), p. 375.

³¹ Consolidated Report of the State Education Commission on the Public School System of North Carolina (Raleigh, 1928), pp. 263, 264.

³² Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, February 7, 1927.

enacted a law which authorized the largest of these, in the amount of \$750,000.³³

The county debt increased rapidly after 1927. Plummeting farm income and resulting hard times for the people of a county so dependent upon agriculture caused tax collections to diminish steadily. The county commissioners had no choice except to borrow from commercial lending agencies, on a temporary basis, the money needed to meet current expenses and pay principal and interest on maturing bonds. By November, 1928, the total county debt had climbed to \$4,032,000.³⁴

An examination of the minutes of the Board of Education and the Board of County Commissioners for 1927 and 1928 shows graphically the rapid escalation of the county deficit. On June 7, 1927, the Board of Education passed a resolution to borrow \$100,000 to cover unpaid amounts of the 1926-1927 school budget, and cited figures to show that uncollected taxes at that time due the schools amounted to \$200,000.³⁵ On June 7, 1927, the Board of County Commissioners passed a resolution to borrow \$100,000 to pay principal and interest on maturing bonds and notes.³⁶ On December 19, 1927, the county

³³ Public Laws of North Carolina, session 1925, chapter 149, p. 356.

³⁴ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, November 28, 1928.

³⁵ Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, June 7, 1927.

³⁶ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, June 7, 1927.

commissioners passed a resolution to borrow \$125,000 to pay principal and interest on bonds due within four months.³⁷

On June 4, 1928, the county commissioners resolved to borrow \$400,000 to pay principal and interest on maturing bonds, and pay balances due on current county expenses.³⁸

A clearer picture of the difficulties experienced during the late twenties in keeping tax revenues abreast of expenditures is obtained when the tax structure, in addition to the declining personal income of the taxpayers, is considered. County records available for the prosperous years of the middle twenties show that while the tax rate for school purposes had increased considerably, the valuation of property for tax purposes had decreased.³⁹

In 1924, when the county-wide plan had been recommended, the school law had provided that special elections be held to ascertain the will of the people in the matter of a special county school levy to provide money for county assumption of the former district indebtedness.⁴⁰ This additional county school tax of 30¢ per \$100 property

³⁷ Ibid., December 19, 1927.

³⁸ Ibid., June 4, 1928.

³⁹ Ibid., February 10, 1926; October 3, 1927; April 29, 1930.

⁴⁰ Public Laws of North Carolina, session 1923, chapter 135, pp. 309, 310.

valuation, which was assessed in 1924⁴¹, was not sufficient to meet the rising costs as additional schools continued to come into the county-wide program. Consequently, the tax was increased periodically. To take care of the bonds assumed by the county from the Selma School, on its acceptance, and to meet the rising costs of operation in general, the school tax was increased, in 1926, by 7¢ per \$100 of property valuation.⁴²

It must be borne in mind that this county tax was for the support of the schools for the constitutionally required six months period. Districts that desired to have their schools operate for seven, eight, or nine months terms were assessed an additional tax on their property. Most of those which voted for an extended term sought an eight months school year, and the additional tax for them was 50¢ per \$100 property valuation.⁴³

Much of the fault in the taxing program of the county, which was failing to produce, at higher tax rates, sufficient revenue to meet public needs pointed to the fact that property valuations were too low. Indeed, Johnston in 1926, according to the University of North Carolina News Letter, was forty-first in rank among the one hundred counties of

⁴¹ Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, August 1, 1924.

⁴² Smithfield Herald, September 10, 1926.

⁴³ Ibid., October 4, 1926.

the state in property valuation.⁴⁴ Revaluation of property at higher rates was seriously considered in 1927, but no action was taken.⁴⁵ Taxes were levied on even smaller valuation in 1927, \$43,420,000, as compared to \$43,750,000⁴⁶ for the previous year.

Where it had been thought that 1926 had just been an "off year", which would be redeemed by good harvests and high prices in 1927, Johnstonians were doomed to disappointment. Adverse weather conditions caused cotton production to be but a fraction of the usual yield, so the higher price of 24¢ per pound failed to add any appreciable amount received by individual farmers when the crop was sold. The prices received for tobacco, on a market that opened with averages of 22¢ per pound, failed to help much, since the crop was greatly curtailed that year.⁴⁷ The people were even less able to pay tax assessments in 1927 than they had been the year before and therefore the large amount of uncollected taxes increased.⁴⁸ The total county budget for the fiscal year 1927-1928 had been set at \$996,387.21, yet

⁴⁴ Smithfield Herald, September 14, 1926.

⁴⁵ Ibid., June 21, 1927.

⁴⁶ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, February 10, 1926; October 3, 1927.

⁴⁷ Smithfield Herald, September 9, 1927.

⁴⁸ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, December 15, 1927.

when the county commissioners accepted the books from the tax collector for that year, only \$761,770.72 had been taken in.⁴⁹ Recourse to further borrowing was inevitable.

Again it was hoped that farm prices would revive and Johnstonians read hopefully the remarks of President Calvin Coolidge's official family that there were "...better times ahead for the farmers."⁵⁰ However, with another autumn came another disappointment, with prices for tobacco sagging to 13¢ per pound, and cotton to 15¢ per pound.⁵¹ Early offerings of tobacco showed the crop to be of large quantity and poor grade. Farmers were urged to destroy the poorest grades in order that the price might be pushed upward on better grades, but little heed was shown to the suggestion.⁵² The wagons and trucks bringing the crop to the Smithfield market came in such numbers that traffic was held up frequently near the warehouses.⁵³ Total market averages for tobacco for 1928 were little more than 19¢ per pound, as compared with 22¢ per pound in 1927.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Ibid., December 6, 1928.

⁵⁰ Smithfield Herald, August 9, 1928.

⁵¹ Ibid., September 7, October 12, 1928.

⁵² Ibid., September 7, 1928.

⁵³ Ibid., September 11, 1928.

⁵⁴ Ibid., February 12, 1929.

There was no bumper cotton crop that year, for rains which had swept over the South in the wake of the heavy tropical storms that battered at Florida in September cut production in North Carolina by 150,000 bales,⁵⁵ and Johnston felt its share of the damage. Cotton farmers were urged by the North Carolina Cotton Growers Cooperative Association to place cotton in their warehouses, for later sale. It was expected that this would insure a higher price when the early, heavy sales period had passed.⁵⁶ The price did not rise, however, due to the fact that nationally there was greater production than had been expected.⁵⁷

Signs of depression, though they were not recognized as such at the time, made appearances in the business world. In November, 1928, the Johnston County Hospital advertised that it would take cotton in lieu of money as payment on hospital bills, if farmers would bring their warehouse receipts to the hospital. The further incentive to farmers to pay up came in the offer of 2¢ per pound above the market price.⁵⁸ The advertising columns of the Smithfield Herald in November, 1928, also called attention to the "going out of business" sale of the B. M. Davis Department Store of

⁵⁵ Ibid., October 2, 1928.

⁵⁶ Ibid., October 5, 1928.

⁵⁷ Ibid., December 11, 1929.

⁵⁸ Ibid., November 6, 1928.

of Smithfield,⁵⁹ the first of many such advertisements to appear as the depression deepened.⁶⁰ On December 8, 1928, the First National Bank of Benson closed its doors. The front page story in the Smithfield Herald stated that "...the gradual withdrawal of deposits over a sixty-day period is said to have been a factor...people having been disturbed since the failure of the bank in Dunn some time ago. The immediate cause was notice received Saturday that the Federal Reserve Bank had refused to extend further credit." Further in its report on the bank's closing, the Smithfield Herald pointed out that the Benson bank had in recent years invested the sum of \$170,000 in its new building, and that this might be a contributing factor to its failure. The news story quoted L. L. Levinson, attorney for the bank, as saying that he "...expected depositors to recover seventy-five to eighty percent of their deposits."⁶¹

While the Great Depression was not recognized as such until 1929,⁶² the situation in Johnston County had already shown great deterioration by 1928. The amount unpaid in

⁵⁹ Ibid., November 13, 1928.

⁶⁰ Ibid., May 29, 1929.

⁶¹ Ibid., December 11, 1928.

⁶² Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Crisis of the Old Order, 1918-1933, Volume I of The Age of Roosevelt (Boston, 1957), 156-160; John Kenneth Galbraith, The Great Crash, 1929 (Boston, 1955), p. 93.

property taxes when settlement was made by the tax collector for 1928 had reached \$975,000. The total county debt had risen to \$4,072,000, and the high interest rate of six percent was the best obtainable for the loans that the county commissioners felt bound to authorize in order to secure the money to carry on the schools and meet other county obligations.⁶³

In retrospect, it is apparent that the prosperity of the twenties began to diminish rapidly in Johnston County, long before the "crash" of 1929. Depression had begun at the time most of the people thought the future seemed most promising. An era of growth and improvement in the public schools, brought about by a desire of the people for betterment in education for their children, and attempted by a county government that believed in the ability and willingness of the people to pay the costs, ended in a period of dissension when the crisis struck. The heavy indebtedness incurred by the county government for school improvements became a major issue in local politics during the campaign of 1928.⁶⁴

With the people suffering from financial distress the criticism against public spending gained ready listeners.

⁶³ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, December 6, 12, 21, 1928.

⁶⁴ Smithfield Herald, September 18, October 12, 19, 23, 26, 30, November 2, 6, 1928.

Although the county debt included large sums which had been expended for other purposes, the great weight of the argument used by Republican candidates seeking election to county offices was leveled at the expenditures which had been made for school buildings, building improvements, and purchases of new trucks.⁶⁵

The results of the election showed as great a majority in favor of the Republicans for local political positions as had been in favor of Herbert Hoover for President of the United States.⁶⁶ Every office for which an election had been held was filled with a Republican.⁶⁷

The new Board of County Commissioners began carrying out its promised economy program with its very first meeting in January, 1929, when it gave notice to the Johnston County Home Demonstration Agent, Miss Minnie Lee Garrison, that her salary would be discontinued.⁶⁸ At its next meeting, January 8, 1929, salaries were cut for all county offices, and amounts

⁶⁵ Personal interview of the author with H. B. Marrow, Superintendent of Johnston County Public Schools, 1922-1951, October 21, 1964.

⁶⁶ The outcome of the national election in Johnston County was typical of what happened in counties all over North Carolina and many other states of the usually Solid South. Herbert Hoover received 444 of the electoral votes, with only eighty-seven going to Alfred E. Smith, the latter not even carrying his own state of New York. Schlesinger, Crisis of the Old Order, 129.

⁶⁷ Smithfield Herald, November 9, 1928.

⁶⁸ Ibid., January 4, 1929.

allowed for the operation of offices for all county departments were reduced. The annual budget allowance of \$12,315 for the sheriff was reduced to \$8,200. The salaries of the sheriff, two deputies, and travel expense were paid from the reduced amount. The salary of the county treasurer was reduced from \$3,600 to \$3,120, with all office assistance paid for from that amount. The amount allowed for the office of county auditor was reduced from \$6,000 to \$4,800, with \$2,700 of that amount designated as salary for the auditor and the remainder paid for office help. Allowance for running the office of the clerk of the county court was reduced from \$8,400 to \$7,400, with the clerk's salary set at \$3,500, that of first deputy at \$1,800 and that of second deputy at \$900. The remainder was allowed for general office expense. The reduction in the amount with which the office of the register of deeds operated was from \$7,300 to \$5,000, with salary set at \$3,300 and the remainder used for office assistance.

At the February meeting of county commissioners it was decided that the further economy measure of abolishing the office of Negro farm agent should be taken. It was

ordered that the Negro agent, McKay McNeil, should be paid⁷⁰ up and his services discontinued.

Reductions in expenditures for county offices and county services did little to help meet the financial difficulty with which county government was faced, however. A resolution was passed at the January 8, 1929, meeting to issue short term notes for \$180,000 to raise funds for immediate needs until tax collections brought more money into the county treasury. This was the beginning of a series of many such resolutions, for tax collections did not improve sufficiently to keep up with expenditures during the entire time the Republicans were in office. They were forced to borrow to meet payments which came due on maturing notes and bonds, and then to borrow again to repay the short term notes when they, in turn, came due. Six issues of "revenue anticipation" notes were authorized in 1929 alone, in addition to two bond issues. Resolutions for loans included, besides the \$180,000 amount of January 8, \$75,000 on April 22; \$50,000 on April 30; \$380,000 on June 8; \$75,000 on August 1; \$370,000 on October 30, and \$50,000 on December 18. The bond issues

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Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, February 5, 1929.

included \$86,000 for roads and bridges and \$240,000 for the schools, authorized on May 6.⁷¹

The change in the climate of public opinion toward the schools which had taken place in 1928 continued in 1929. During the ten months period between April, 1929, and February, 1930, six district elections were held to vote on levying a special 50¢ per \$100 property valuation tax. These elections, called after proper petition by patrons of the districts desiring them, to provide revenue for extension of the school term from six to eight months, failed to carry in three of the districts. The majority in Meadow, a Smithfield rural district and Rock Hill voted against the proposal; the majority in Glendale, Archer Lodge, and Princeton-Brogden were in favor of the additional tax.⁷²

This change from previous years, when nearly every similar election carried successfully, is even more noticeable, in the face of action taken by the 1929 General Assembly to increase equalization funds to provide more state aid for school districts which tried to help themselves.⁷³

Johnston County's Equalization Fund allocation for

⁷¹ Ibid., January 8, April 22, 30, May 6, June 8, August 1, October 30, December 18, 1929.

⁷² Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, April 5, May 17, June 3, July 18, 1929; February 3, April 7, 1930.

⁷³ Public Laws of North Carolina, session 1929, chapter 323, pp. 377-379.

the 1929-1930 school year was increased by \$27,600, which was the largest additional amount granted to any county in the state.⁷⁴

Under the equalization plan, counties were eligible to share in the fund if they maintained schools according to the minimum standards established by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, and met the necessary requirements in regard to the levying of local taxes for school support. Eligibility started with the approval by the Department of Public Instruction of the annual budget for the operation of the county schools. Among other things, the budget was required to include amounts for the payment of teachers' salaries according to prescribed schedules. As to local taxation, the county was required to show figures on the amount of revenue which would be produced, on property valuations which were standardized across the state, if levied at 30¢ per \$100 valuation. This amount was changed to 40¢ by the 1927 General Assembly.⁷⁵ The difference between the amount it would be possible for the county to raise if it levied taxes at the prescribed rate, and the amount of the approved budget was the equalization

⁷⁴ Smithfield Herald, August 2, 1929.

⁷⁵ Public Laws of North Carolina, session 1927, chapter 256, pp. 621-624.

amount. Counties shared in the Equalization Fund according to the need thus demonstrated.⁷⁶

Friction which developed early in 1929 between the Board of County Commissioners and the Board of Education deteriorated into a bad situation for the public schools, at a time when they were already having difficulty. On February 4, 1929, the Board of Education went in a body before the county commissioners to ask what the policy would be in regard to appropriations for several needed additions to existing schools. Crowding in some schools had resulted from consolidation which had been carried out to eliminate a number of smaller schools. The county commissioners did not promise any appropriations, but agreed that consolidation offered a better plan, in their opinion, than continued operation of schools which were too small, and urged the Board of Education to economize wherever possible.⁷⁷

While offering some economies, in addition to educational advantage, consolidation required the purchase of additional trucks to take care of the extra students going to school beyond walking distance from their homes, and, of course, extra classroom space in some schools. So it was

⁷⁶ Fred Wilson Morrison, Equalization of the Financial Burden of Education Among Counties in North Carolina (New York, 1925), pp. 16-22.

⁷⁷ Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, February 4, 1929.

that only a limited number of reductions could be included in the budget which the Board of Education prepared for the 1929-1930 school year. In spite of economies in operating expense which were effected, the finished budget was for a larger total amount than that for the previous year. Increased debt service, because of maturing school bonds, a matter over which the Board of Education had no control, was responsible for the increase. The 1929-1930 budget was for \$555,606.71 for the constitutional six-months term, whereas⁷⁸ the 1928-1929 budget had been for \$547,900.84.

The county commissioners refused to accept the budget and demanded a reduction of \$75,000 before they would consider it. They requested that the Board of Education meet with them. In a formal reply to the request for a joint meeting, the Board of Education stated that they were "...fully aware of the acute tax situation, brought about by high taxes, coupled with poor business methods in the collection of taxes, and further emphasized by bad crops...." The reply further stated that in the proposed budget, "...debt service increases of \$24,292.06 over 1928-1929 are due to the issuance of \$240,000 funding bonds, necessitated by insufficient tax levies and failure to collect taxes."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid., June 3, 1929.

⁷⁹ Ibid., July 18, 1929.

As the two boards met together on July 18, 1929, the Board of Education pointed out the fact that it had no control over debt service and had reduced the amount for operational expense. They said that they felt a reduction in the number of teachers employed would impair the instructional program. Teacher salaries could not be cut, they maintained, since the wage scale was prescribed by the State Department of Public Instruction, and must be adhered to if there were to be continued participation in the Equalization Fund program. The county commissioners' rejoinder to this was that further reductions could be made in the areas of maintenance and transportation. They suggested that further savings could be made by reducing principals' salaries by ten per cent. Another point they made involved the employment of more beginning teachers since the salary schedule for them was lower than that for experienced teachers. While agreeing to the salary reduction for principals, the Board of Education would not agree to replace experienced teachers with those who were inexperienced, in any large number. However, they decided during the discussion that consolidation which was being planned could reduce the total number of teachers by fourteen. Since consolidation brought with it the necessity of providing transportation for more children the Board of Education expressed unwillingness to reduce the amounts which were included in the proposed budget for the purchase of new trucks. They pointed to the

good record of transportation costs for the previous year of \$250 per truck for 142 trucks. The lengthy discussion, with some compromise on both sides, brought the two boards to within \$25,275.62 of agreement, but at that point an impasse⁸⁰ was reached, and the meeting recessed.

At a meeting on July 29, 1929, the Board of Education reviewed a list of suggestions for budget reduction sent over by the county commissioners, in the amount of \$25,275.62. These were for reduced amounts to be expended for fire insurance on school buildings, purchases of new trucks, transportation allowances, fuel, water and lights, clerical help, Board of Education per diem allowances, attorney's fees, instructional supplies, supervisors' salaries, janitors' salaries, and repairs to buildings.⁸¹ In its efforts to cooperate with the county commissioners the Board of Education carefully went over the entire 1929-1930 school budget. After a series of meetings, several of them held jointly with the county commissioners, the Board of Education agreed to further reductions in the number of teachers to be employed and cut maintenance allowances for many schools far below the figure which had been requested by local school committees. Reductions in the full amount demanded by the county commissioners could not be made, they insisted, with-

⁸⁰ Ibid., July 18, 1929.

⁸¹ Ibid., July 29, 1929.

out seriously impairing the effectiveness of the instructional program. At the time they came closest to agreement there was still a difference of \$7,705.⁸²87.

In an attempt to break the stalemate, both parties agreed to place the matter before the clerk of the superior court, Herschel V. Rose, to act as referee.⁸³ The decision of the clerk was that the Board of Education's reduced budget should be accepted. The county commissioners appealed the decision to Johnston County superior court.⁸⁴

When the normal time arrived for the nine-months schools to open in Smithfield, Clayton and Selma, the matter of the budget was still in controversy. With no funds having been budgeted for the operation of the schools, the school authorities were in a dilemma. Although they had some money coming in from the state Equalization Fund, and from special district tax revenues levied for the support of extended terms, these funds could not be used until after the expiration of the constitutional six-months terms. However, confidence at local levels that the outcome of the

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Smithfield Herald, August 2, 1929.

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This was normal procedure, since the duties of the clerk of the superior court included action as judge of special proceedings, hearing and deciding questions of practice and procedure between terms of court. Hobbs, North Carolina, Economic and Social, p. 238.

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Smithfield Herald, August 12, September 6, 1929.

pending litigation would be in favor of the Board of Education resulted, after a week's delay, in a decision to open the schools.⁸⁵

In the Johnston County superior court hearing, before Judge H. V. Sinclair, in September, the amount of the budget demands, and the amount the Board of County Commissioners would accept differed in the amount of \$10,175. The Board of Education had revised to \$559,176.46 the minimum amount it felt it needed, and the Board of County Commissioners had revised its stand from the first reduction requests. Judge Sinclair held with the Board of Education, and ordered that the funds be appropriated in the amount of \$559,176.46, with taxes to be levied in sufficient amount to meet the need. The Board of County Commissioners appealed the case to the North Carolina Supreme Court. Judge Sinclair ordered that, pending the Supreme Court decision, funds would have to be made available to operate the schools.⁸⁶ To carry out the orders of the court, and to meet other county obligations, the county commissioners found it necessary to continue deficit spending on a grand scale. Tax revenues failed to keep pace with the payments which came due, for current expenses, as well as for debt service.

⁸⁵ Ibid., September 6, 10, 1929.

⁸⁶ Proceedings of the Superior Court of Johnston County, October 2, 1929, Minute Docket No. 15, p. 564, office of the Clerk of Superior Court, Johnston County Courthouse, Smithfield, North Carolina.

The new harvest season brought no rebound of the economy. Disappointing farm prices made business as well as agricultural conditions worse than the year before. Prices for tobacco, which had opened at the low average of less than 14¢⁸⁷ per pound, spelled disaster for many who had hoped to realize enough profit to catch up, to some extent at least, on debts carried over from the previous year. Included here were back taxes owed by so many. Cotton was so low in price that more and more farmers placed their crops in storage with the North Carolina Cotton Growers Cooperative Association, which offered a 12¢⁸⁸ per pound advance. It was expected that having it held off the depressed market would enable the cooperative to get higher prices for the grower on future sales. The advances that were paid for stored cotton were made possible due to a loan of \$2,500,000 to the cooperative from the Federal Farm Board.⁸⁹ While the advance gave some help in providing a small amount of cash for

⁸⁷ Smithfield Herald, September 6, 1929.

⁸⁸ Ibid., November 12, 1929.

⁸⁹ Upon recommendation by President Herbert Hoover, the Congress, in special session in the spring of 1929, established the Federal Farm Board, with the control of temporary surpluses as one of its principal objectives. Schlesinger, Crisis of the Old Order, 155.

pressing needs, prices obtained when the stored cotton was sold were so low that very little more was realized.⁹⁰

The revenue from real estate and personal property taxes, expected to flow into the county treasury during the fall as crops were marketed and more money was placed into circulation, failed to materialize in anything like satisfactory amounts necessary to keep up with expenditures. Besides the large amount needed for the support of the public schools, there had been appropriated, in the total county budget for the fiscal year 1929-1930, the sums of \$107,487.50 for expenses charged to the county general fund, \$125,131.65 for the road and bridge fund, and \$193,050 for debt service.⁹¹ Where it had been expected that the unpaid 1928 taxes, amounting to \$135,566,⁹² would be paid, along with the currently due assessments for 1929, a report of the tax collector on October 30, 1929, showed that little of the back taxes had been settled, and

⁹⁰ Smithfield Herald, March 14, 21, June 10, September 16, 1930.

⁹¹ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, October 7, 1929.

⁹² Ibid., July 18, 1929.

collections of 1929 taxes were lagging far behind.⁹³ There was due in county taxes the amount of \$1,496,849 when the county commissioners met in special session on October 30, 1929, to raise money for immediate needs.⁹⁴

As late as April 29, 1930, there was still uncollected in county taxes, for 1929 and prior years, the total of \$926,690. Viewed in proportion to the total anticipated income of \$1,126,500 for the county for the 1929-1930 fiscal year, this amount of unpaid taxes stood out starkly.⁹⁵

The decision of the North Carolina Supreme Court in the school budget case between the county commissioners and the Board of Education, made during the court's spring, 1930, term, upheld the superior court ruling. The decision stated, in part, that "...the tax, or a large part of it, had been collected and applied to the support of the schools, and the term of six months has almost expired.... The

⁹³ Ibid., October 30, 1929. Having on its tax books a large amount in delinquent taxes was not peculiar to Johnston County during this period, of course. North Carolina counties in general were experiencing great difficulty in making tax collections. Even in 1928 when conditions were considered to be better than in 1929, the state average of taxes advertised for sale in the counties had been ten per cent of the gross levy. Hobbs, North Carolina. Economic and Social, pp. 196-197.

⁹⁴ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, October 30, 1929.

⁹⁵ Ibid., April 29, 1930.

appeal, therefore raises a question which is abstract and academic....In any view of the record, we find no error."⁹⁶

While it was hoped that a decision by the Supreme Court would settle completely the controversy between the Board of County Commissioners and the Board of Education, and that affairs would go more smoothly for the public schools of the county, that was not the case, as the events of the months succeeding the court's decision demonstrated.

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"Board of Education of Johnston County vs. Board of County Commissioners of Johnston County," in North Carolina Supreme Court Reports, CXVIII (1929-1930), 430-432.

CHAPTER II
DEPTHS OF THE DEPRESSION
1930 - 1933

As financial difficulties increased in 1930, more and more of the people of Johnston County felt the pinch of "hard Times." The full impact of the Great Depression on public education in Johnston County, however, was not yet realized by the people. This was evidenced by the attitude of the patrons of many of the county schools toward reductions in expenditures which became necessary for the 1930-1931 term. Friction between the rural schools and the Board of Education developed, following a second budget squabble between the Board of Education and the county commissioners.

When the proposed budget for operating the schools for the 1930-1931 term was presented to the county commissioners in July it was rejected in¹ much the same manner as had been the case the previous year. There were increased amounts in the new budget for debt service. Consequently, the 1930-1931 budget was even larger than that of the previous year, to which the county commissioners had objected so strenuously. Reductions from the previous year in current expense matters made little impression on the county

¹ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, July 14, 1930.

commissioners, for they demanded that the total amount be reduced by at least \$21,359.97. That would cut the total budget request for the constitutional six-month school term from \$590,250.12 to \$568,890.15. In refusing the budget the county commissioners advised the Board of Education to revise its figures in such a manner that the increased amounts needed for debt service would be absorbed by decreases² in operating expense.

It appeared that the issue of the budget might again go before the courts, but the Board of Education declared that it would not "...in these hard times..." force the county to bear the costs of further legal action.³ They voted to leave to the discretion of the county commissioners the decision of which items of operating expense should be retained in the new budget, and which should be left out. Consequently, the proposed budget, as it had originally been prepared, was returned to the county commissioners, with the request that they indicate the individual expenditures which they would not approve, or which they wanted reduced. The Board of Education urged that amounts for transportation not be reduced, however. They reminded the county commissioners that consolidation of several schools, just put into effect, would

² Smithfield Herald, July 18, 1930.

³ Ibid., July 29, 1930.

require the use of more trucks, and pointed to the saving of \$5,277.97 in operating expense which the consolidation had made possible.⁴

The county commissioners refused to approve or disapprove particular items of the budget, but asked for a joint meeting of both boards to consider the whole matter. The Board of Education assented. At this meeting, held on August 7, 1930, the Board of Education was asked to approve reductions, not of \$21,359.97, but of \$51,775.12. The county commissioners declared that a total amount for school expenditures for the coming year could be no more than \$538,500. They maintained this was the maximum they could endorse since the tax burden upon the people should not, "...with any degree of safety, be increased."⁵ Among the suggestions advanced by the county commissioners to effect lower costs for maintaining the schools was that of cancelling fire insurance on the buildings. They proposed that janitors be discharged, and that janitorial duty be performed by the teachers and the pupils. The two boards were unable to come to an agreement as to how reductions could best be effected, but the Board of Education promised to

⁴ Ibid., July 29, 1930.

⁵ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, August 7, 1930.

bend every effort to bring the budget total in line with the county commissioners' demands.⁶

On August 26, a mass meeting of all district school committeemen was called by the Board of Education to discuss the grave problem of finances. More than one hundred attended. It was explained that no cuts could be made in the salaries of teachers, since they were figured on a schedule prepared by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, and should be adhered to if Johnston County were to participate in the Equalization Fund program. This meant that the greater part of the reduction in expenditures for the coming year would have to be made in the number of teachers employed. The Board of Education urged districts to consider further consolidation and to eliminate as many of the smaller schools as possible. It was apparent to all present that in any arrangement, drastic reductions in the total number of teachers would mean unusually large classes for each teacher who was employed. Committeemen from rural schools, which were already crowded, objected to this. Many objections were also raised to the proposal that teachers and pupils perform the work of janitors. The consensus of those present was that it would be unwise to allow inexperienced persons to operate the expensive heating systems of the new schools. The proposal to cancel the fire insurance coverage on the school

⁶ Ibid., August 7, 1930; Smithfield Herald, August 22, 1930.

buildings was not considered favorably by most, although some endorsed cutting the amount of coverage, \$1,373,350, in half. The suggestion that the schools run as long as the money lasted, then close for the year was answered by Superintendent of Schools, H. B. Marrow, who reminded the committeemen that the county was bound, under the state constitution, to operate schools for six months. After exploring the whole problem, with no easy solution in sight, it was voted that the Board of Education work out the best arrangement possible under the circumstances.⁷

With no choice of substantial budget reductions, except in the number of teachers to be employed, the final decision of the Board of Education was to reduce the number of teachers by eighty-four; the total for all the schools was reduced from 433 to 349. In order to deal as fairly as possible with all the schools the following formula was devised under which teachers would be allotted:⁸

<u>Average Daily Attendance, Previous Year</u>	<u>Number Teachers</u>
Elementary Schools:	
56	2
90	3
125	4
High Schools:	
20	1
35	2
45	3
95	4
130	5

⁷ Smithfield Herald, August 29, 1930.

⁸ Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, August 26, 1930.

In the larger schools, one additional teacher was provided for each additional 45 pupils above the number of 125, and in the high school grades, one additional teacher was provided for each additional 40 pupils above 130 in average daily attendance during the previous year. The proposed reductions in the number of teachers meant the loss of fifty-eight elementary teachers and thirteen high school teachers in the white schools, and the loss of thirteen elementary teachers in the Negro schools.⁹

Bitter complaints arose from school patrons in many of the districts when these reductions were announced. A meeting of the local school committeemen from the rural districts, to protest the method of teacher allotment, was held in Smithfield on September 1, 1930. At this meeting, the prospect of having one teacher responsible for as many as 90 pupils was assailed by representatives from some of the schools. They contended that the formula for allotting teachers, based as it was on the average number of pupils attending the various schools during the previous school year, did not give a true picture of the classroom situation which they expected for the 1930-1931 school year. The belief was expressed that more of the children who enrolled would now attend regularly, since the compulsory attendance

⁹ Ibid., August 26, 1930.

10

law was to be strictly enforced. It was contended that parents would not be as likely to keep pupils at home to work during the school term, as had so often been the case in the past. Larger attendance and fewer teachers would cause too many students to be crowded into the classrooms of some of the schools. Fears were expressed that the health of the children might thus be impaired, and that fire hazards might be increased.

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At the conclusion of the meeting, the district committee members drafted a public statement, to the effect that they did not believe "...for the sake of a temporary financial showing, that the health and educational opportunities of the children of our county should be sacrificed...." A vote was taken to make another appeal to the county commissioners. To carry out this latter decision, a committee was named and instructed to go before the county commissioners, "...in a spirit of cooperation and mutual interest...", to urge that "...the present emergency be met in the only practical way that it can be, by letting the interests of the children and

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The validity of this contention may be seen by reading the report of the Superintendent of Public Welfare, Mrs. D. J. Thurston, acting in her capacity as school attendance officer, to the Board of Education. Her report stated that she had sent notices to 698 parents regarding the compulsory attendance law. It stated further that 42 parents were prosecuted in court, and that 47 children were sent to training schools and other institutions. Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, June 3, 1929.

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Smithfield Herald, September 2, 30, 1930.

the observance of the law as it now is be the sole purpose and guide." Before the meeting adjourned, the group also endorsed the idea of an approach being made to the 1931 General Assembly to make changes in the school laws, "...in the face of present circumstances."¹²

The county commissioners received the representation from the rural schools at their monthly meeting on September 4, 1930. The plea of the committeemen that more money be provided for school operations for the coming year was rejected, and the commissioners declared their intention of standing by their previous decision that the school budget for the 1930-1931 term be held to \$538,500. In the regular business session which followed the hearing granted to the rural school committeemen, the county commissioners set the county tax rates for the year 1930. The tax rate for school purposes was reduced by 15¢ per \$100 property valuation.¹³

The action of the county commissioners in cutting the school tax rate brought condemnation from the editorial columns of the Smithfield Herald, which declared that the Republican officials sacrificed the schools for the sake of the votes of those who favored tax reductions.¹⁴

¹² Ibid., September 2, 1930.

¹³ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, September 4, 1930.

¹⁴ Smithfield Herald, September 5, October 10, 1930.

More than condemnation came forth from the patrons of some of the rural schools. A suit was filed in Johnston County superior court against the Board of Education by a group of school committeemen on the grounds that "...it is mandatory upon the defendant, the Board of Education of Johnston County, to provide the schools during the year 1930-1931 with the number of teachers provided for by ¹⁵the Act of ¹⁵the General Assembly of 1929, known as the Hancock Bill...." Plaintiffs were listed as the local school committees of the white schools of Beulah School District Number One, Meadow School District Number Two and Pleasant Grove School District Number Two. The complaint included "...other school districts in Johnston County in like circumstances."¹⁶

In the superior court on September 24, 1930, Judge W. A. Devin refused to issue a mandamus against the Johnston County Board of Education. In his ruling he stated that in spite of the fact that offices of the Attorney General, the

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The Hancock Bill of 1929 had increased appropriations for the Equalization Fund, and extended its coverage to include aid in paying the costs of school operation for the extra two months beyond the constitutional six-months term for districts which voted to tax themselves additional amounts to support costs of extended terms. The law specified that teachers might be allotted on the basis of a revised formula established by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Public Laws of North Carolina, session 1929, chapter 245, pp. 289-290.

¹⁶

Proceedings of the Superior Court of Johnston County, September 26, 1930, Minute Docket No. 16, p. 322; Orders and Decrees, Johnston County Superior Court, September 26, 1930; Vol. No. 5, p. 457, office of the Clerk of Superior Court, Johnston County Courthouse, Smithfield, North Carolina.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the State Board of Equalization agreed on the number of teachers upon which state equalization funds "...may be distributed....," he held that "may" meant may, and not "must," and that therefore the school board had acted within its rights. He concluded, therefore, that the Board of Education had followed regulations, and that it might employ the number of teachers provided for under the Hancock Bill, but that it was not compelled to do so.¹⁷

The tumult in Johnston County had caused eyebrows to be raised in Raleigh, and the State Board of Equalization requested that both the Board of Education and the Board of County Commissioners appear before them on October 3, 1930, to show cause why the equalization funds allocated for Johnston County should not be cut off for the 1930-1931 school term. The county commissioners still had not accepted the school budget proposals, even after drastic reductions had been made. Evidence brought out in the court proceedings against the Board of Education had raised some doubt in the minds of members of the Equalization Board as to whether or not the terms of the school law under which equalization

funds were distributed were carried out in Johnston County.¹⁸
 The members of the Board of Education appeared in due course,¹⁹
 but the county commissioners declined to attend. The Board
 of Equalization postponed the meeting until October 15, and²⁰
 issued subpoenas to both Johnston County boards to appear.

It was nearly time for the eight-months schools to
 begin, with the opening date set for October 6, but with no
 assurance of obtaining funds with which to pay operating
 costs. Consequently, the Board of Education voted to delay
 the opening until October 20. Uncertainty as to the number
 of teachers the board would be able to employ constituted a²¹
 particularly vexing problem at this point.

In Raleigh, on October 15, 1930, all members of both
 boards were present and, confronted with the cold reality
 of the possible loss of \$139,000 in state funds, proceeded
 to discuss a compromise. The Board of Education reduced its
 original figure from \$590,250.12 to \$569,300.12 and the
 Board of County Commissioners raised its original figure of
 \$538,500 to \$546,000. Although further discussion brought
 the two boards closer to agreement there still remained a

¹⁸ Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, October
 3, 1930.

¹⁹ Smithfield Herald, October 7, 1930.

²⁰ Ibid., October 7, 1930.

²¹ Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, Octo-
 ber 3, 1930.

difference of \$8,000 at the end of the conference. However, the Board of Equalization expressed satisfaction that there had been no violation of the school law. The delegations from Johnston County were assured that equalization funds would not be withheld.²²

On returning from Raleigh the county commissioners met and reconsidered the stand they had taken on the budget. Their final decision was that they would approve the 1930-1931 school budget in the amount of \$569,300.12, the figure which the Board of Education had said was the minimum with which it could operate the schools.²³

The schools opened for the 1930-1931 term with no further delay and teachers were employed according to the allotment formula of the Board of Education. The reductions in expenditures resulted in an over-all program which was considered at the time to be one of severe austerity, and by comparison with previous years, it was. However, as the Great Depression deepened, the retrenchment in 1930-1931 proved to be only the beginning.

The teachers immediately felt the effect of the changes that were taking place. The increased work load due to much larger classes meant more hours spent in preparation,

²² Raleigh News and Observer, October 16, 1930; Smithfield Herald, October 17, 1930.

²³ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, October 22, 1930.

besides the more strenuous task of conducting classes. They were affected financially, too, although they were protected during 1930-1931 from salary reductions. The Board of Education had ruled that rent would be charged to occupants of the teachers' homes. Teachers were now charged \$5.00 per month for rent, if they lived in teacherages which were steam heated, and \$2.50 per month if the homes were not steam heated.²⁴ The salaries paid to white teachers in 1930-1931 averaged \$106.03 per teaching month, while those paid to Negro teachers averaged \$80.46 per teaching month. While the number of eight-months schools had increased there were still a large number of the 404 teachers employed in 1930-1931 who drew salaries for only six months. As for principals, who received pay for one additional month, the salary average was \$304.16 per month for white principals and \$187.50 for Negro principals.²⁵

²⁴ Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, April 7, 1930. With the large number of teachers living in the teacherages during the period of this study, the total amount realized by the county from rental charges became considerable. After a time, in figuring school budgets, it became a regular practice to enter the anticipated amount from teacherage rents as a regular item of expected revenue. Typical amounts which appeared in budget proposals were \$4,000 for 1934-1935; \$3,500 for 1935-1936; \$5,500 for 1938-1939; \$5,900 for 1939-1940 and \$6,000 for 1940-1941. Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, August 6, 1934; October 7, 1935; July 24, 1939; July 22, 1940.

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Smithfield Herald, August 5, 1930.

Wages for truck drivers were decreased. Drivers of trucks with self-starters received \$5.00 per month for driving twenty-five miles per day, and \$6.50 if their routes covered more than twenty-five miles. Those who drove trucks without starters were paid \$7.00 per month for driving twenty-five miles, and \$8.00 per month if there were additional miles to be covered.²⁶

Janitors' salaries were ordered to be reduced according to local school situations, and the funds for maintenance and upkeep of school buildings were reduced almost to the vanishing point. The average for 1930-1931, was little more than \$100 per building.²⁷

The gloom of depression deepened with every succeeding month. Frustration, want, and loss of hope had psychological effects on the people of Johnston County as was the case in many parts of the nation.²⁸ As the Smithfield Herald stated editorially "...many saw nothing in the future but continued hard times and distress..." due to the general situation brought about by "...widespread unemployment, low

²⁶ Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, September 16, 1930.

²⁷ Personal interview of the author with H. B. Marrow, Superintendent of Johnston County Public Schools, 1922-1951, October 21, 1964.

²⁸ David A. Shannon, The Great Depression (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1960), pp. 6, 7, 26, 27, 66, 67.

prices and losses of every kind of business. Many felt that they could never recover their losses."²⁹

There was a very noticeable increase in crime in the county, with charges of larceny predominating. So large a number of cases accumulated during the fall and winter of 1930-1931 that the criminal court calendar for the spring term of Johnston County superior court in 1931 was of unprecedented length. The regular term of two weeks was found to be far from sufficient in the time needed for disposing of all the cases on docket. After disposition had been made in eighty-five cases there were still two hundred defendants awaiting trial. Charges in the cases ranged all the way from petty misdemeanors to homicide.³⁰ The bulging jail needed to be cleared, if possible, and so a special term of criminal court was arranged for April.³¹

Low market prices for tobacco and cotton caused the bad economic situation to grow worse. On the 1930 tobacco market, sales averages of 8¢ per pound brought demands from growers for mass meetings to discuss holding the crop off

²⁹ Smithfield Herald, July 11, 1930.

³⁰ Ibid., March 17, 1930.

³¹ Ibid., March 24, 1931.

the market until prices improved.³² At one of the meetings held in Smithfield on September 15, 1930, a representative of the Federal Farm Board sought to learn the local feeling toward the formation of cooperatives for the marketing of tobacco, similar to those which had become prevalent among cotton producers. It was implied that federal loans, such as those made to the private cotton cooperatives, might possibly be made through the Farm Board.³³ The proposals for tobacco cooperatives became less attractive, however, in the face of reverses suffered by the cotton cooperatives; They had lost money, and so had individual farmers, when the market price for cotton dropped below the amount which had been advanced to growers when they placed it in storage. Advances of 9¢ per pound had been made when the market price had been 10¢ per pound. Instead of the anticipated increase in prices which was expected to result from taking some of the surplus off the market, there was a decline. Cotton

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Addressing a meeting of farmers and warehousemen at North Carolina State College, held under the auspices of the Eastern Carolina Chambers of Commerce on September 11, 1930, Governor O. Max Gardner predicted that, at the prevailing prices, North Carolina tobacco and cotton growers would receive \$40,000,000 less in 1930 than they had received in 1929. The 1929 figure, he pointed out, was \$42,000,000 less than that for 1927. David Leroy Corbitt (ed.), Public Papers and Letters of Oliver Max Gardner, Governor of North Carolina, 1929-1933 (Raleigh, 1937), 221.

33

Smithfield Herald, September 12, 16, 19, 1930.

prices dropped to 9¢ during the fall, and even lower before
the end of the year.³⁴

Tobacco prices, however, took an upward turn as the season advanced, and talk of holding the crop off the market subsided. The average price for the Smithfield Tobacco Market for the entire 1930 selling season was slightly more
than 12¢ per pound.³⁵

As welcome as the improved tobacco prices were to Johnston County farmers, due to the smallness of the crop that year, the total amounts realized did little to enable them to pay expenses and keep up with their taxes. In January of 1931 there was still unpaid, in county taxes levied for years prior to 1930, the unprecedented amount of \$669,917.54. Included in this figure were the sums of \$102,194.43 for 1927; \$155,674.48 for 1928, and \$412,048.63 for 1929. The total amount of uncollected taxes, including the amounts unpaid on the current levy, added up to
\$1,513,906.29.³⁶ Clearly, the property owners of Johnston County, in a large measure, had become "tax owers," rather than tax payers. The most disturbing feature to the owners of real estate, in the matter of taxes and tax collections,

³⁴ Ibid., September 16, 1930; February 6, March 31, June 16, 1931.

³⁵ Ibid., December 16, 1930.

³⁶ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, January 21, 1931; Smithfield Herald, January 30, 1931.

was the fact that year after year, many assessments against personal property had been written off. On the other hand, numerous land owners faced the prospect of losing real property through tax foreclosure suits.³⁷

Another thing which was disturbing, to those in county government as well as to owners of real estate, was the rapidly shrinking valuation which owners of personal property placed on their possessions when taxes were listed. The Board of County Commissioners became quite concerned in June, 1930, when they received the annual report on the listing of taxes from tax supervisor, R. L. Fitzgerald. Unusually low valuations had characterized the listing of personal property, all across the county, the report revealed. So great was the shock which the county commissioners felt that they had the statement entered into the official minutes for the June 3, 1930, meeting that they found the low valuations "...astounding and disappointing."³⁸

The personal property listings had dropped, from a total valuation of \$6,418,088 in 1929 to \$4,136,462 in 1930. Besides the drastic reductions placed by owners on the value.

³⁷ Smithfield Herald, January 30, 1931.

³⁸ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, June 3, 1930. Boards of County Commissioners across the state were faced with the same situation at that time, since there was no uniformity in arriving at valuations for personal property. The tax lister was allowed to declare values at whatever figures his conscience dictated. Hobbs, North Carolina, Economic and Social, pp. 197-199.

of personal items and stocks of merchandise, the county commissioners noted sharp decreases in the number of mules and motor vehicles listed, in spite of the fact that about as many of both seemed to be in evidence in the county. They ordered that a comparative listing of 1929 and 1930 personal property figures be published in the newspapers.³⁹ Going a step further, they reviewed the listers' abstracts, and in many instances raised the amounts of personal property valuations. In an attempt to encourage the payment of the large amounts due the county in taxes, the county commissioners endorsed the recommendation of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, which suggested the payment of taxes on the installment plan. Their efforts seemed to avail little, however, and tax collections remained small. Appropriating money for the operation of schools and maintaining county services was one thing; collecting taxes from poverty stricken citizens proved to be quite another matter.⁴⁰

In the election in November, 1930, the people of Johnston County reversed themselves at the polls and voted out the Republican incumbents from county offices by

³⁹ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, June 3, 1930; Smithfield Herald, June 13, 1930.

⁴⁰ Smithfield Herald, June 13, August 19, October 14, 24, 28, 31, 1930.

majorities as great as those which had put them in office in
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 1928.

The new Democratic Board of County Commissioners installed on December 5, 1930, found the matter of raising money to keep the schools going its first order of business. Failure of the outgoing board to meet the requirements of the state Board of Equalization in the matter of levying taxes in sufficient amount caused part of the funds for the 1930-1931 school year to be held up. The reduction of 15% per \$100 valuation in the school tax made by the old board had resulted in a shortage of \$2,287.83 in the amount the county was expected to levy, and the Equalization Board had sent notification that further payments to Johnston County schools would be suspended until proper adjustment was made. To meet this emergency, a resolution was passed to produce "...by borrowed money or current revenue, \$2,287.83, and
⁴²
 place in the current expense fund of the schools."

The new Democratic Board of County Commissioners was forced to begin its term in office by following the same practice of deficit spending as had its predecessor. At the same meeting in which the resolution was passed to provide funds to meet the immediate needs of the schools, a

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Ibid., November 7, 1930

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Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, December 5, 1930.

loan was authorized in the amount of \$50,000, at six per cent interest to meet payments coming due on the county's bonded indebtedness.⁴³ At many succeeding meetings the new board found that the matter of borrowing money was the principal business to be transacted. The condition of the county treasury continued to be poor, for the returns of the tax collector showed no improvement. The minutes of the county commissioners on many occasions revealed how hard pressed they were to keep the county solvent. In addition to the problem of meeting payments on short term loans which came due, the commissioners were confronted with maturing county bonds which had been issued during the prosperous years of the twenties. The most pressing, in January, 1931, were those which had been issued for the building of roads and bridges. The decision was made to refinance the road and bridge bonds, coming due in the amount of \$185,000, with maturity spread out over an extended period, from 1934 to 1961.⁴⁴

Another difficulty for the county commissioners developed in 1931. There were few bidders for Johnston County notes, as a general "tight money" situation spread over the investment market. On January 21, 1931, revenue anticipation notes were authorized by the county commissioners

⁴³ Ibid., December 5, 1930.

⁴⁴ Ibid., December 5, January 21, 1930.

in the amount of \$340,000, but valid offers to purchase them were coming in too slowly to meet the need for payments due on previous short-term loans. To meet the emergency it was necessary for the chairman of the board, R. P. Holding, to make a personal trip to New York to seek buyers for the county notes.⁴⁵

The county commissioners and the tax collector worked diligently but with little success during the early months of 1931 to bring into the county treasury the money so long overdue for back taxes. For two days, February 2 and February 3, 1931, the sound of the auctioneer's voice was heard, as he stood on the steps of the Johnston County courthouse, calling off parcels of land to be offered for sale under foreclosure proceedings for 1927 taxes. There were no bids offered for the property.⁴⁶ Legal advertising for 1927 delinquent taxes, inserted in issues of the Smithfield Herald beginning on February 6, 1931, covered fourteen pages.⁴⁷ Pressure was applied to these delinquent in personal property taxes by announcements that attachments would be ordered for items listed on the tax books, and that wages and salaries would be subject to garnishee.⁴⁸ Definite arrangements were

⁴⁵ Ibid., January 21, 1931.

⁴⁶ Smithfield Herald, February 10, 1931.

⁴⁷ Ibid., February 6, 1931.

⁴⁸ Ibid., June 19, 1931.

made~~to~~toaccommodate those who would make installment payments of back taxes, and the sheriff was authorized to put off delinquent tax advertisements for those who paid half the amount due before the end of June, 1931.⁴⁹

Still the money did not come in, except in small and insufficient amounts. The backlog of unpaid taxes, during the last quarter of the 1930-1931 fiscal year remained above the million dollar mark. In May, 1931, the balance on hand in the Johnston County treasury amounted to only \$46,772.62, and that was in the road fund account.⁵⁰ With current expenses for the remainder of the fiscal year, which ended on June 31, amounting to \$126,393.76, and debt service amounting to \$89,258.24,⁵¹ the condition of county finances had become critical.

Recourse to borrowed money, through the issuance of revenue anticipation notes was no longer possible. The "Local Government Act," recently passed by the 1931 session of the North Carolina General Assembly had already gone into effect,⁵² and under its provisions boards of county commissioners could no longer borrow at will on the credit of their counties. All sales of bonds and notes issued against

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Ibid., June 16, 1931

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Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, May 15, 1931.

⁵¹

Ibid., May 15, 1931; Smithfield Herald, June 9, 1931.

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Public Laws of North Carolina, session 1931, chapter 60, pp. 60-84.

counties and municipalities were brought under the supervision of the new state commission, which insisted that deficit spending be curtailed. Counties were ordered to meet financial obligations by collecting the taxes due on their books, rather than indulge in further borrowing. Furthermore, payments which came due for debt service were ordered to take precedence over expenditures for current operating costs.⁵³ This latter stipulation accounted for the dearth of cash on hand in May, 1931, for in meeting short term notes which had come due at that time, the resources of the county were all but exhausted.⁵⁴ Although the operating costs of all county departments had been reduced by twenty per cent soon after the Democratic board took office, expenditures had continued to run ahead of collections.⁵⁵

Such a state of affairs in May, 1931, meant that no money was available to pay the last month's salaries of school teachers and principals. The school truck drivers also were unpaid for their last month's work. There was no pay forthcoming for any employee of the county, with the exception of those connected with the road department. None of the county's current bills of any nature could be met,

⁵³ Smithfield Herald, June 12, 1931.

⁵⁴ Ibid., May 19, 1931.

⁵⁵ Ibid., May 19, 1931.

and County Accountant W. P. Holt notified all departments⁵⁶ that no vouchers could be approved until funds were on hand.

As bleak as things looked for public education in Johnston County at that point, there was the assurance that the schools would be operated for the 1931-1932 session. Action had been taken by the 1931 General Assembly to assume the support of the constitutional six months schools. Teachers's salaries, and most other items, exclusive of fixed charges, were to be assumed by the state. Salaries were reduced by ten per cent, however, and new formulas were established for teacher allotment. Further consolidation of schools was ordered which would eliminate the operation of elementary schools which had less than twenty-two pupils in average daily attendance for the previous year, and high schools of less than forty-five in average daily attendance for the previous year.⁵⁷

Friends of education in Johnston County had devoted their full share of effort in promoting the movement to bring about state support for the public schools. There had been

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Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, May 15, 1931; Smithfield Herald, May 19, June 9, 1931. As bad as these conditions seemed in Johnston County, many counties in the state were far worse off in the matter of maintaining the public schools. Across the nation the strain of providing the funds to keep the schools going had already reached the breaking point, and 1931 saw many cities and counties with closed schools. Hugh T. Lefler and Albert R. Newsome, North Carolina: The History of a Southern State (Chapel Hill, 1954), p. 358; Shannon, The Great Depression, p. 94.

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Public Laws of North Carolina, session 1931, chapter 430, pp. 728-748.

tremendous agitation of the issue among the tax-burdened owners of real property. Property holders had formed the Johnston County Tax Relief Association, which held a series of well attended mass meetings in Smithfield. Johnston County was well represented at the inter-county meetings of the Eastern Carolina Chamber of Commerce, held at Fayetteville on December 9, 1930, and March 19, 1931. The plight of the property owners under county taxing practices had steadily worsened. With declining income, the cost of supporting the public schools had become a staggering burden.⁵⁸

Hope had been expressed in Johnston as in other counties, for state support of an eight-months school term, following Governor O. Max Gardner's suggestions to that effect, before the General Assembly.⁵⁹ While little ground was gained in that direction in 1931, the people of Johnston County were glad to settle for six months support, although it meant a state tax of 15¢ per \$100 of property valuation.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Smithfield Herald, April 4, 8, 15, December 12, 1930; March 19, 21, 1931.

⁵⁹ Journal of the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of North Carolina, session 1931, p. 29; Journal of the Senate of the General Assembly of North Carolina, session 1931, p. 25.

⁶⁰ Public Laws of North Carolina, session 1931, chapter 427, pp. 499-643.

The addition of the 15% tax did not mean that the total tax bill was higher. Indeed, due to the state school-support program, the Johnston county commissioners were able to reduce county taxes by 45% for the taxable year 1931-1932, to \$1.30 per \$100 property valuation.⁶¹

One of the problems which the 1931 school law did not solve was that of support for extended terms beyond the constitutional six months. There had been suggestions in Johnston County in 1930 that all schools operate for just the six months term, but these suggestions had gained little support.⁶² However, the proposal of the Johnston County Board of Education⁶³ to reduce to eight months the terms of the former nine-months schools was agreed to by the local committees of the schools concerned.⁶⁴ Even with the bulk of the school support burden shifted to the state, meeting the costs of extended terms and keeping up with debt service on the schools buildings was a difficult matter with county revenues remaining so low.

Of benefit in keeping operational costs at a minimum was the consolidation of smaller schools, or, in some cases

⁶¹ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, September 21, 1931.

⁶² Smithfield Herald, December 12, 1930.

⁶³ Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, January 5, 1931.

⁶⁴ Smithfield Herald, September 22, 1931.

the transfer of pupils to larger schools in order that small ones might be eliminated. Consolidation, which had been urged on local committees by the Board of Education and the county commissioners for some time, became mandatory under the new school law. Accordingly, the 1931-1932 school term witnessed the greatest reduction in the number of schools operated, from that of the previous year, since the early consolidation movement of the mid-twenties. The number of white schools dropped from forty-two to twenty-nine and the number of Negro schools dropped from seventeen to fifteen.⁶⁵ One big difference in the consolidation moves during the depression years as compared with those in the twenties was that formerly the students had entered new, spacious buildings, while in the early thirties they were crowded into buildings that were already filled nearly to capacity.

Another cost still borne by the county was that of transporting children to the schools from rural areas. By the 1931-1932 school year fully sixty per cent of those attending Johnston County schools rode the school trucks.⁶⁶

There was a trend toward larger enrollments and higher average daily attendance throughout the early nineteen-

⁶⁵ Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1930-1931, Part II, 64, 65; Ibid., 1931-1932, Part III, 64, 65.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 1931-1932, Part II, 73.

thirties.⁶⁷ Increases for 1931-1932 were notable, with 360 more children entering the county schools than for the previous year, making a total enrollment of 15,173. Even greater gains were noted in average daily attendance, with the total of 13,543 representing an increase of 949.⁶⁸

While due credit for the increase must be given to better enforcement of the compulsory attendance law, it appears quite clear that the impact of the Great Depression was an important factor.⁶⁹ Fewer jobs for young people were available in the communities, and a far smaller number were employed on the farms. Indeed, the low level to which the price of cotton had fallen by 1931 meant that it often did not sell for enough to pay the cost of harvest. Consequently, much of it was left in the fields.⁷⁰

Even with more pupils to be taught than ever before, reduced expenditures for school operation and maintenance were a vital necessity in 1931-1932. An additional economy

⁶⁷ Ibid., 1930-1931, Part II, 8-9; ibid., 1931-1932, Part II, 8-9; ibid., 1932-1933, Part II, 8-9; ibid., 1933-1934, Part III, 10-11.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1931-1932, Part II, 8-9.

⁶⁹ This trend toward larger high school enrollment prevailed across the nation during the depression period. To attend school was the alternative to idleness for many, as the labor market swelled, due to the stagnation of industry. Frederick Lewis Allen, Since Yesterday (New York, 1961), p. 51.

⁷⁰ Smithfield Herald, March 31, June 16, October 23, 1931; October 28, December 13, 1932.

step was taken in reducing the number of school supervisors from three to one. The single supervisor who was retained worked with all the rural white schools; for the Negro schools supervision was temporarily discontinued, except for the attention which could be given by the county superintendent. The size of janitors' salaries was further reduced, on an individual school basis, to bring them within the allowances provided by state funds.⁷¹ The reduction of ten per cent in teachers' salaries, reductions in expenditures for other items taken care of under the new plan of state support, ^{plus} plus economies effected in expenditures for which the county was responsible, resulted in a much smaller total for current operating costs for 1931-1932. The report of the county superintendent of schools to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction for the year shows that the entire amount expended for instructional services for the six months constitutional period was \$313,373.54, whereas the amount for the 1930-1931 term had been \$362,461.33.⁷²

The high average daily attendance during 1931-1932 served a good purpose in bringing about an increase in the allotment of teachers to Johnston County for the next school

⁷¹ Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, August 3, 1931.

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Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1930-1931, Part II, 136, 137; ibid., 1931-1932, Part III, 124, 125.

⁷³
 year, but the extra number of pupils to be cared for during the 1931-1932 term worked hardships on all concerned. When the state assumed support for the six-months terms, a new teacher allotment formula went into effect, and resulted in a loss of eighteen teachers ⁷⁴ while enrollment and average daily attendance showed great gains. The schools which had received large numbers of new students because of consolidation became overcrowded, and with increased attendance all the schools were badly in need of additional classroom ⁷⁵ space.

Here the impact of the Great Depression on Johnston County schools was the greatest. With tax collections staying in arrears it was with difficulty that the county government was able to meet current expenses and fixed charges. With no avenue open for borrowing sufficient money for new construction, the county was unable, for years, to provide adequate classroom space. Only in instances where crowding reached the critical point were any additions made. This was the case in Four Oaks during the 1931-1932 school year.

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⁷⁴ Ibid.. 1932-1933, Part II, 38, 39.

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 Part II, ⁷⁵ Ibid.: 1930-1931, Part II, 38, 39; ~~ibid.~~, 1931-1932.

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Smithfield Herald, October 16, December 22, 1931; November 22, 1932.

and the budget was strained to provide six more classrooms
for the 1932-1933 term.⁷⁶

The impact of the Great Depression was evident in many other ways. The ability of the pupils to pay for books, school supplies, and other needs was greatly lowered, and indeed non existent in many cases. At principals' meetings, Superintendent H. V. Marrow urged that book exchanges be conducted in the schools to help the students procure second hand textbooks. It was also suggested that high school seniors be discouraged from ordering the traditional high school rings.⁷⁷

The health of the children was affected by the depression. School authorities observed, as early as 1930, a worsening of the general health situation among their students. By 1933 it was realized that there had been further deterioration, much of which was attributed to malnutrition. Deaths of children, as well as adults, from pellagra, which was believed to be caused by defective diets, had been reported by state health authorities in 1932 as "...astonishingly high..." in Johnston and other eastern North Carolina counties.⁷⁸ At the end of the 1931-1932 school year, Dr. B. A. Hocutt of Clayton had said,

⁷⁶ Ibid., November 22, 1932.

⁷⁷ Ibid., October 23, 1931.

⁷⁸ Smithfield Herald, March 8, 1932.

after reviewing school health reports for the term, that fully three and one half per cent of Johnston County's school children were sub-normal in weight.⁷⁹ At the end of 1932, the Johnston County Health Department reported a much higher incidence of tuberculosis in the county than in previous years.⁸⁰

Johnston County school administrators and classroom teachers made valiant efforts to impress upon the children, through subject matter and in other ways, the importance of good diet to health.⁸¹ While the lessons were well learned, there was little opportunity to put them into practice in the homes of parents who were hardest hit by the depression. Physical examinations in the schools in December, 1934, showed that 9,017 of the total enrollment of 16,606 pupils had physical defects, with ten per cent of those with defects being underweight.⁸²

Community recognition of the health problem was evident in the formation of canning clubs by members of the Women's Home Demonstration Clubs. They undertook to prepare canned tomato soup to be distributed to families who

79

Ibid., June 17, 1932.

80

Ibid., February 3, 1933.

81

Ibid., February 3, 1933.

82

Ibid., December 18, 1934.

had undernourished children.⁸³ Other activities directed toward better health practices included the holding of Parenthood Institutes, by the health department, with sessions for both white and Negro citizens.⁸⁴

Public education in Johnston County suffered from the impact of the Great Depression throughout the decade of the nineteen-thirties. The worst of the depression for the schools as well as the people seemed to be the winter of 1932-1933, as one may ascertain by reading the official records of the period, and by following the day-to-day events as reported in the Smithfield Herald. Paradoxically, the county government was better off, financially, than it had been since 1930, and a further reduction in taxes had been made in 1932.⁸⁵ However, the balanced budget and lower taxes in 1932 had come about by adhering to a program of rigid austerity which had brought another round of reductions in salary for all county employees and further curtailment of county services.⁸⁶

⁸³ Ibid., April 4, 1933.

⁸⁴ Ibid., April 11, 1933.

⁸⁵ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, July 21, 1932.

⁸⁶ Smithfield Herald, August 5, 1932.

CHAPTER III
THE COMING OF THE NEW DEAL
1933-- 1935

In spite of the hardships which marked the winter of 1932-1933, there was a note of optimism in the air. The people of Johnston County, like others around the nation, looked forward expectantly to March, and the inauguration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Campaign promises of the Democrats had been directed toward changes which they would initiate to bring relief from the distress caused by the Great Depression.¹ The general feeling in Johnston County seemed to be that any change would have to be for the better.²

The Smithfield Herald, in its editorial columns, attributed much of the success of the Democrats to the hope inspired by "...three commonplace words of Mr. Roosevelt, 'a new deal'...", and expressed the feeling that the great political victory would be followed by a dedicated attack on the economic problems of the day.³

Hopes were also expressed by the friends of education in Johnston County and across the state, that the North

¹ Schlesinger, Crisis of the Old Order, 413-439.

² Smithfield Herald, November 11, 1932.

³ Ibid., November 11, 1932.

Carolina General Assembly in its 1933 session would take action to improve the conditions for the public schools. Movements which had started earlier,⁴ to bring pressure on the legislature for a better program of school support, increased. Agitation for full state support of the schools was promoted by the Taxpayer's League, which sought relief from the burden of property taxes. Chief target of the Taxpayer's League was the abolition of the state property tax of 15¢ per \$100 valuation which had been levied in 1931 for the support of the six-months constitutional schools.⁵

During the first weeks of the 1933 legislative session, educational leaders, including Dr. Frank Graham, President of the University of North Carolina, petitioned the assemblymen to work out a program to provide state support for the public schools for an eight-months term, without property taxes as the source of revenue.⁶ Johnston County had been well represented at a mass meeting of more than 4,000 citizens, held in Raleigh on January 31, 1933, when the petition was presented. The steering committee for the education group included such notables as Dr. Clyde A. Erwin,

⁴ Ibid., June 10, 1932.

⁵ Ibid., January 3, 13, 18, February 3, March 3, 1933.

⁶ Ibid., February 3, 1933; Elmer L. Puryear, Democratic Party Dissension in North Carolina, 1928-1933, Volume XLIV of James Sprunt Studies in History and Political Science (Chapel Hill, 1962), 167.

President of the North Carolina Education Association, Kemp D. Battle of Rocky Mount, head of the North Carolina Bar Association, and Mrs. J. L. Henderson, President of the North Carolina Parent Teachers Association. Among the facts presented in arguments for stronger state support for the schools were tables of comparative figures showing the expenditures for public education and for the public highways in the state. These showed that \$16,943,000 had been expended for the public schools in 1932 while \$18,165,000 had been expended for the highways. It was urged that the General Assembly make appropriations in 1933 that would provide⁷ @...less for concrete and more for character...."

With so much of the burden of financing the road system resting on the counties, raising the money for school needs was all the more difficult. In Johnston County the debt service on road bonds exceeded that for school bonds by nearly five per cent. Certainly, in Johnston County as in the state in general, the contention was true that the schools were not responsible for the greatest portion of the public debt. A graphic presentation of the plight of the counties was made by the Smithfield Herald on February 7, 1933, when it published the report of comparative figures compiled by the North Carolina Tax Commission, along with

⁷ Raleigh News and Observer, January 29, 30, 31; Smithfield Herald, February 3, 1933.

Johnston County figures compiled by the county auditor. It was shown that the total bonded indebtedness of the state and all the counties for school purposes amounted to slightly over \$75,000,000 while that for other purposes combined, most of which was for roads, was \$457,000,000. Johnston County figures showed that twenty per cent of its property tax levy was earmarked for debt service on county road bonds; fifteen per cent for school bonds, and twenty-four per cent for other debt service. The largest item of indebtedness included in "other" debt service was for the retirement of bonds issued in 1922 to finance the construction of the \$500,000 Johnston County courthouse.⁸

The 1933 session of the General Assembly was consequently a tumultuous one.⁹ Action to benefit the schools, when it finally came, provided for an eight-months school term, to be gained through a three per cent general sales tax.¹⁰ Such action was a tremendous step forward in standardizing public education in North Carolina. It was also a great boon to the school districts, in Johnston as in other counties

⁸ Smithfield Herald, February 7, 1933; August 18, 1939.

⁹ Puryear, Democratic Party Dissension in North Carolina, 156, 167, 216, 217.

¹⁰ Public Laws of North Carolina, session 1933, chapter 445, pp. 768-795; chapter 562, pp. 916-931.

which had been striving, against great odds, to maintain their schools for the two months extended~~ed~~^{term}.

The 1933 school law was not designed to benefit teachers, however. Compromises, which had to be made to get the bill passed, brought drastic reductions in salaries. The monthly pay schedule for teachers was reduced by thirty per cent and that for principals by thirty-five per cent.¹¹ This meant that for teaching eight months, teachers would get less pay than they had received under the six-months state support program.

Teachers did receive consideration in one respect under the new school law. Those whose certificates were due to expire during the biennium were not required to go to summer school for renewal. The General Assembly ordered that certificates for principals and teachers remain valid¹² whether additional college training were taken or not.

The inauguration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt on March 4, 1933, and the meeting of the special session of the Congress which he immediately called, took place while the North Carolina General Assembly was still at work. The New Deal laws passed during the momentous "one hundred days"

¹¹ Ibid., chapter 282, pp. 417.

¹² Ibid., session 1933, chapter 562, p. 923. This consideration was continued until 1938 by legislative action taken in each of the next two sessions. Ibid., session 1935, chapter 455, pp. 762, 763; ibid., session 1937, chapter 394, p. 747.

were of great and immediate benefit to the poverty-stricken citizens of Johnston County. As federal relief funds reached North Carolina, through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration,¹³ Johnston County shared generously in the \$845,000,000 appropriation which the Congress made to provide relief for both the unemployed and the unemployable. Immediate aid was also forthcoming under other New Deal legislation for beleaguered Johnston County farmers. The Emergency Farm Act¹⁴ and the Agriculture Adjustment Act (to become well known as the AAA), provided, respectively, protection against the loss of farms through tax foreclosures, and a program of government price support for agricultural products.¹⁵

Federal aid in many forms reached Johnston County as relief machinery went into operation. Money which cotton growers received through government purchases of stored ~~cot~~ cotton was shortly in circulation. When the market price had stood at 6¢ per pound in the fall of 1932 and winter of 1933, large amounts had been placed in storage. The Federal Farm Bureau bought this stored cotton for 12¢ per pound from farmers who agreed to comply with an acreage reduction

¹³ Arthur M. Schlesinger, The New Deal in Action, 1933-1939 (New York, 1940), pp. 5-6.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 20-21.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

program being effected. Cotton checks totalling \$188,540 were received by Johnston County growers under this arrangement.¹⁶ Other cash payments were made under the terms of the contracts they signed for acreage reductions, which required the plowing up of part of the 1933 acreage they had planted. This action made Johnston County farmers eligible to collect a total of \$75,000,¹⁷ and guaranteed them a fair price when the crop was ready for market in the fall. The cotton program was enthusiastically received in Johnston County, with 1,643 contracts having been signed by mid-July to take 5,782 acres out of cotton production.¹⁸

The serious conditions which the Great Depression had brought on for the owners of farm land is attested to by the large number of applications for loans through the Farm Credit Administration. In a twelve month period following the passage of the Emergency Farm Act of 1933, Johnston County farmers had secured loans totalling \$323,000.¹⁹

Steps necessary to help the unemployed had been taken promptly by the Johnston County Welfare Department, as soon as plans for procedure were announced. As funds became

¹⁶ Smithfield Herald, July 14, 1933.

¹⁷ Ibid., July 21, 1933.

¹⁸ Ibid., July 21, 1933.

¹⁹ Ibid., June 23, 1933; November 20, 1934.

available under the CWA (Civil Works Administration),²⁰ a Reemployment Bureau was set up in Smithfield. Applications were on file from 1,130 Johnston County men and women seeking jobs. Of that number, 560 were then on the county relief rolls. CWA funds were allotted to the counties through a state headquarters under a quota system, which required that at least half of those employed must be taken from the number on relief.²¹ Under the early arrangement for employing workers on CWA projects, the maximum of thirty hours was allowed for a work week, with wages varying from \$13.00 to \$33.00 per week, depending on the job and the skill of the employee. Under the guide lines of the CWA, civic projects which could be completed in a short length of time were undertaken, with employment spread over as much of the needy population as possible.²² The payroll for the workers in Johnston County amounted to \$60,000 a month by December, 1933. Often times the work available was the first earning opportunity for many in months, or even years.²³

CWA jobs were available for women as office assistants, clerical workers, case workers, distribution supervisors, and helpers in many capacities. The task of those working on the distribution jobs was connected with supplying the

²⁰ Schlesinger: The New Deal in Action, pp. 6-7.

²¹ Smithfield Herald, November 21, 24, 1933.

²² Ibid., November 21, 24, 1933.

²³ Ibid., December 15, 1933.

needy with meat and other foodstuffs made available through the Emergency Relief Administration, and clothing and other items supplied by the American Red Cross. School children in destitute families were thus provided with shoes and other articles of clothing which enabled them to be properly dressed to attend school. Many had been kept at home²⁴ for the lack of the absolute necessities.

By mid-winter of 1933-1934, as the CWA program became more fully developed, some jobs were provided for unemployed school teachers. Nursery schools were set up for the children of the needy, to provide services which the public schools did not render. Beginning with one school at Princeton in January, the nursery schools across the county²⁵ numbered eleven when the program terminated in April.

Jobs for other skilled and semi-skilled workers were provided, on projects to benefit schools and communities in many ways. Among them were a large number of minor, and sometimes major repairs to the school houses. Other services for the schools included the cleaning of all septic tanks and termite treatment of buildings. Community projects included a community building for Smithfield, an outdoor theatre at the rear of the Smithfield Woman's Club, a

²⁴

Ibid., May 30, November 24, 1933.

²⁵

Ibid., January 16, 30, April 6, 1934.

playground for children in the North Smithfield area, and the building of rock walls around many of the cemeteries in the county. The county welfare services benefitted through the construction of another building for inmates at the Negro county home, in addition to the tubercular ward already²⁶ undertaken.

The end of the CWA program came all too soon for Johnston County, although the amount of relief it offered to a suffering people was immeasurable. By the time the appropriations were exhausted in April, 1934, the amount distributed in Johnston County for civic projects totaled²⁷ \$128,597.66.

Help for the farmers of Johnston County during the first year of the New Deal, under the AAA of 1933, was extended to include aid for the tobacco growers during the winter. Mass meetings held in August, throughout the tobacco belt, resulted in resolutions being sent to the United States Department of Agriculture asking for help on the same²⁸ basis as that offered to cotton producers. The tobacco markets opened before a plan was forthcoming, with the disappointing price average of only 12¢ per pound, which dropped

²⁶
1934. Ibid., November 24, December 29, 1933; January 5,

²⁷
Ibid., April 13, 1934.

²⁸
Ibid., August 11, 1933.

in a few days to 10¢ per pound. Another round of farmers' mass meetings in Johnston County and across the state resulted in an appeal by North Carolina tobacco growers to Governor John C. B. Ehringhaus for help. His response was to call for a sales holiday on North Carolina tobacco markets, "...to provide an opportunity for the federal government to act...."²⁹ The offer of a federal government support price of 17¢ per pound was made to growers who would sign contracts to reduce tobacco acreage by thirty per cent for the coming year. The support price could be put into effect immediately with payments to be made at the end of the season to those who signed contracts.³⁰

The eagerness of the growers in Johnston County to learn how they might qualify for aid was attested to by the huge crowd which packed the courthouse in Smithfield to hear the proposals put forward by representatives of the United States Department of Agriculture.³¹ The plan was received with enthusiasm and the tobacco market reopened on September 25, with sales averaging 16¢ per pound.³² Contracts were signed promptly by the farmers when they became

²⁹ David Leroy Corbitt (ed.), Addresses, Letters and Papers of John Christoph Blucher Ehringhaus, Governor of North Carolina, 1933-1937 (Raleigh, 1950), pp. 70-72.

³⁰ Smithfield Herald, September 12, October 17, 1933.

³¹ Ibid., September 12, 1933.

³² Ibid., September 26, 1933.

available and totaled more than 3,200 before the end of the selling season.³³

Agriculture in Johnston County in 1934 experienced a real economic revival. Tobacco brought average prices, as the market opened that year, of 26¢ per pound, and advanced as the selling season progressed to 28¢ and later to 34¢³⁴ per pound. Prices for cotton, which averaged \$65 a bale, plus \$18 per bale for cotton seed, were received gleefully by farmers who had sold cotton in 1932 for \$30 per bale, with only \$5 per bale being paid for seed.³⁵ Besides the good market prices, the income of the farmers who had contracted for acreage reductions was further augmented by the receipt of government checks at the end of the 1934 season. Payments on unused cotton acreage totaled \$101,000 for 1934 contract signers,³⁶ and tobacco growers who cooperated received nearly \$500,000 in "parity" payments.³⁷ Parity was figured by federal economists as the differential between market prices received, and the amount needed to equalize

³³
1934. Ibid., November 14, December 5, 1933, January 23.

³⁴
Ibid., August, 28, October 16, 1934.

³⁵
Ibid., October 19, 1934.

³⁶
Ibid., November 2, 1934.

³⁷
Ibid., October 19, 1934.

their average purchasing power in the ratio which had prevailed during the period of 1919-1929.³⁸

The betterment of conditions for cotton and tobacco producers, which continued at a steady pace during the early New Deal years, was not matched by equally steady improvement for others.³⁹ One of the side effects of the AAA program was an increase in unemployment. Reduced acreage devoted to the growing of the money crops brought about a reduction in the number of tenant families and extra workers needed on the farms. Among the unemployed in Johnston County were many young men who had dropped out of school to work, during the "good years," when jobs for unskilled or semi-skilled labor were plentiful. Also, there were boys who had been forced to stop school to seek work to help support their poverty stricken families. Great numbers of them sought to enter the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps),⁴⁰ established under the New Deal to help the "down and out" young men between the ages of seventeen and twenty-six.⁴¹

The CCC quotas for Johnston County were not large enough to take care of them all, however. Preference was

³⁸ Ibid., August 10, 1934.

³⁹ Dwight L. Dumond, America in Our Time (New York, 1947), pp. 475-476.

⁴⁰ Schlesinger, The New Deal in Action, pp. 9-10.

⁴¹ Smithfield Herald, October 9, 1934; December 13, 1935.

always given to the boys whose families were on relief, and so great did the number of such families in Johnston County remain, that it was not until 1937 that applicants whose families were not on relief were accepted.⁴² With food, clothing, housing, and medical care furnished to them by the CCC, the boys in the camps did not grumble over the \$22 per month deduction from their \$30 per month pay, which was sent back to their families. Indeed, many of them sent all or part of the remaining amount home as well.⁴³

There was no New Deal for public education, but changes in curriculum and teaching methods which began to take place during the mid-thirties, as a result of the impact of the Great Depression, were of lasting significance. State and local leaders, as well as educators, had begun to feel that the school curriculum and the approach taken to help the children with new problems had not changed sufficiently to meet the needs of the changing times. While new emphasis had already been placed on the teaching of better health practices and the importance of proper diet, it was felt that definite steps needed to be taken to counteract the bad psychological effects of the Great Depression. The place to begin, it was believed, was in the public schools, with greater stress placed on character training. All across the

⁴²

Smithfield Herald, October 19, 1937.

⁴³

Ibid., October 19, 1937; January 12, 1940.

state speeches and discussions pertaining to public education, more often than not, became occasions for pointing out the need for more than the academic training of school children. Typical of this was the address of Governor John C. B. Ehringhaus, delivered over Radio Station WPTF, Raleigh, October 6, 1933, during National Education week.

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The governor said, in part:

In the first place, I can heartily endorse the seven cardinal objectives of education. I believe that every child has a right to achieve sound health. I would have every child well schooled in the fundamental processes and trained for worthy home membership. I believe in vocational education and in civic education. And, I look forward to the day when the citizens of our land -- largely because of their public school training -- will know how to make worthy use of their leisure and when ethical character will be a general characteristic of our people.

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The increase in crime in the state and nation had its parallel in Johnston County. Several sensational incidents of vandalism and juvenile delinquency in 1933 and 1934 drew increasing attention to youthful offenders, and it was realized that they figured in all too many of the cases which

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Corbitt, (ed.), Addresses, Letters and Papers of John C. B. Ehringhaus, Governor of North Carolina, 1933-1937, p. 98.

45

Allen, Since Yesterday, pp. 145-149; Shannon, The Great Depression, pp. 63-65. Governor Ehringhaus, in an address before a national crime conference in Washington, D. C., expressed concern for the rise of juvenile crime in North Carolina and other states. Corbitt, (ed.), Addresses, Letters and Papers of John C. B. Ehringhaus, Governor of North Carolina, 1933-1937, pp. 164-169.

46

Smithfield Herald, May 23, July 18, December 8, 15, 22, 1933; August 17, 21, 1934.

47
were crowding the criminal dockets in the county court.

Consequently, the administrators and teachers in the Johnston County public schools were quite receptive to the many suggestions, recommendations, and directives that pointed toward the responsibility of the school for character training. So it was that Saturday, January 13, 1934, found the teachers of the county schools, not enjoying a day off from the arduous activities of instructing too many pupils in too little space, but attending a teachers' meeting in Smithfield. There they heard representatives of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction urge greater 48
attention to teaching for "enrichment of life."

Local education leaders, Parent Teacher's Associations, civic groups and others endorsed the ideas being propounded 49
by the North Carolina Education Association and the State Department of Public Instruction for taking human relations more into account in the instructional program. T. E. Browne, head of the Department of Education, North Carolina State College, addressing Johnston County teachers on November 6,

47
Ibid., December 8, 1933.

48
Ibid., January 16, 1934.

49
J. K. Long, "Desirable Changes in the Elementary Curriculum," North Carolina Education, I (September, 1934), 18-19.

1934, urged them to stress moral values and good citizenship⁵⁰ in their teaching.

Academics of later years argued that the trend thus started toward "socialized" education went too far, at the expense of subject matter, in the public schools. However true this might have been in the years which followed, the teachers and administrators in Johnston County schools during the Great Depression sought to help their students adjust to the very difficult times in which they lived. The Smithfield Herald, in praising the work of the Johnston County Schools, congratulated the teachers on their willingness to change with changing times. The editorial writer concurred heartily with the views of Dr. Edgar Knight of the Department of Education of the University of North Carolina, who had said that one of the needs was for school children to "...learn to interpret the issues."⁵¹

The school teachers in Johnston County were praised by their superintendent for the good work they were doing. In addressing a teacher's assembly as the school year 1934-1935 opened, County Superintendent of Schools, H. B. Farrow declared that they had "...delivered more than was required, and had supplemented their state pay with patriotism...." He commended the teachers for having faithfully kept up the

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Smithfield Herald, November 6, 1934.

⁵¹

Ibid., November 16, 1934.

work of the schools in spite of reduced salaries and increased work loads. He told the assembly he hoped for the day when there would be a New Deal for teachers.⁵²

The numerous good deeds performed by, or inspired by Johnston County school teachers during the "troubled thirties" gave strong evidence that the compliment paid to them by the county superintendent was not an idle one. Much ingenuity was displayed in helping the pupils to help themselves. Typical of this was the action of Misses Hilda Peedin and Mary Slaughter, teachers at the Carter's Chapel school during the 1932-1933 term. So many of the pupils were unable to buy books that their teachers asked if they could each bring four or five pounds of tobacco to school since they did not have any money. The tobacco began to come in, and in a few days the two teachers loaded it on a trailer, along with thirty-five children, and headed for the tobacco market in Smithfield. There the floor space was donated by the management of Peoples Warehouse, and with a bright-eyed little girl perched on top of each of the piles of tobacco, buyers began to name their bids. The total sale for the one hundred forty-six pounds of tobacco came to \$32.94.⁵³ The price of better than 22¢ per pound was high.

⁵² Ibid., September 28, 1934.

⁵³ Ibid., October 28, 1932.

considering the market average at the time of little more than 11¢ per pound.⁵⁴

Many and varied were the activities of school children, under the direction of their teachers, in seeking to help the "down and out" during the Great Depression. To cite them all would be a lengthy undertaking, but a few typical examples may be given. On Sunday, April 3, 1932, forty students of the Johnston County Training School gave a musical program at their school, with an offering being taken up to raise money for needy families of the school district.⁵⁵ The Smithfield High School Band, in March, 1933, gave a series of concerts to raise funds for poor relief.⁵⁶ A singing group from the Johnston County Training School undertook the collection of food and gifts for Christmas baskets in December, 1933, to present to thirty-six inmates of the county home for aged Negroes, and provided them with an afternoon of musical entertainment.⁵⁷

Many of the children would not have been able to attend school, due to the lack of sufficient clothing to wear, had not the welfare department and the Red Cross been able to provide for them. The teachers were active in assisting

⁵⁴ Ibid., September 9, October 28, 1932.

⁵⁵ Ibid., March 29, April 5, 1932.

⁵⁶ Ibid., March 28, 1933.

⁵⁷ Ibid., December 29, 1933.

with the distribution of the items which were donated, through local sources at first, and federal relief agencies later.⁵⁸

The Smithfield Herald made editorial comment and heaping praise on the good work being done by the teachers who were "carrying on in crisis." In the issue of December 22, 1933, withholding the name of the teacher, at her request, tribute was paid to a first year Negro elementary teacher in the county who purchased from her own salary a number of the educational materials for her pupils. Fully half the class was unable to pay for reading supplements she felt were essential, so she made up the amount of \$9 still needed from her own pocket in order that all forty-five children might have the readers. Her monthly wage at the time was \$48.⁵⁹

The matter of the low salaries paid to teachers was a matter of great concern to community leaders in Johnston County throughout the depression period. The salaries paid to teachers following the assumption of the eight-months school program by the state in 1933 reduced their annual wage to an amount far below that of the average skilled worker. Support was strong for the salary goals to be sought in 1935 by the North Carolina Council on the Emergency in Education, which advocated a minimum of \$900 annually.

⁵⁸ Ibid... May 30, 1933.

⁵⁹ Ibid... December 22, 1933.

Annual salaries in Johnston County in 1933-1934, averaged ⁶⁰ \$600.08 for white teachers and \$429.36 for Negro teachers. The lowering of salaries in 1933 was followed by a rising cost of living. The stimulus to the general economy supplied by the New Deal had the effect of increasing the "pinch" on the pocketbooks of the teachers. The limited financial resources of the county government prevented the use of local funds to augment the low state wages. In order to stretch the school budget to meet the amounts the County commissioners were willing to appropriate for fixed charges, the Board of Education decided that, beginning with the 1933-1934 term, the occupants of the teachers' homes would pay in addition to the rent, the bills for the use of electric ⁶¹ current.

Community leaders expressed feelings of distress over the fact that a number of experienced teachers and some principals who had served in the Johnston County schools for many years were quitting the profession. ⁶² With other employment difficult to find, the bulk of them did not seek to leave the schools, however, and with new graduates from the teachers' colleges seeking positions there was a continuous surplus of teachers throughout the decade, in spite

⁶⁰ Ibid., September 4, October 26, 1934; February 15, 1935.

⁶¹ Ibid., October 20, 1933.

⁶² Ibid., September 21, 1934; February 15, March 2, 1935.

of the small salaries. Typical of the situation in that respect was the fact that seventy applications were received for the thirty vacancies which existed in Johnston County schools as preparations were being made for the 1934-1935 school term.⁶³

The supply of teachers in excess of demand enabled local school committees to be highly selective in their choices of the teachers for their schools. The Board of Education urged that the positions available go to those most qualified. One point which Superintendent L. V. Marrow stressed in his suggested criteria for selection was that the applicant be strong physically, in order to meet the demands of teaching and managing the large number of pupils which had to be assigned to each classroom under the existing teacher allotment formula.⁶⁴ Local school committees usually sought for their schools teachers who were willing to live in the community and take part in civic affairs in the districts where they would teach.⁶⁵ During the years when the depression was at its worst, considerable local sentiment was expressed against the employment of married women as teachers. Since the large number of applicants for the few available vacancies included many single women, the consensus

⁶³ Ibid., August 3, 1934.

⁶⁴ Ibid., July 19, 1935.

⁶⁵ Ibid., August 3, 1934.

among many of the school patrons was that the unmarried should be given first consideration, since the husbands of married applicants could provide financial support for them. Discrimination against married teachers was contrary to the policy of the Board of Education, however, and they urged that chief consideration be given to the applicant best
⁶⁶qualified.

During the depression years teachers lived and worked under conditions which were much different from those which had prevailed during the twenties. Enrollment and average daily attendance of pupils steadily increased, and extraordinary steps often had to be taken by individual school administrations, or the Board of Education, to deal with the problem of overflowing classrooms. Teachers who expected to teach at one grade level often found, after school opened, that they would be required to teach another grade instead. Some had to be shifted to entirely different schools as
⁶⁷pupils were transferred to prevent critical overcrowding.

The problem of classroom space became a major one, during the years when a dearth of funds for capital outlay made the construction of new buildings, or even the addition to existing structures, almost an impossibility. A typical

⁶⁶

Ibid., August 18, 1931; September 21, 1934.

⁶⁷

Ibid., October 16, 1931; October 7, 1932; September 28, 1934; October 5, 1935.

example of bad conditions for learning and teaching was that at the Cleveland School during the 1934-1935 school year, where partitions were put up to divide the auditorium into sections to accommodate five classrooms.⁶⁸

Hope had been held earlier, when the program for public works projects developed under the CWA, that money might be obtained to undertake school construction so badly needed, but the funds allocated for Johnston County were exhausted before the applications for the school buildings came up for consideration.⁶⁹ The schools were forced to get along as best they could, for some time to come.

The calamity which befell the Selma Negro school during the 1933-1934 school year presented the worst problem of the period. The \$20,000 wooden structure burned to the ground during the early morning hours of Sunday, February 4, 1933,⁷⁰ and for the remainder of that year, and for the succeeding term school was held in four Negro churches in Selma. While teachers and pupils strove valiantly to make the best of their situation and carry on the educational program as best they could, the conditions for learning and teaching were very bad. Every possible effort was made on the part of the

⁶⁸

Ibid., December 28, 1934.

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Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, January 5, February 16, March 5, 1934; Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, February 16, August 6, 1934.

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Smithfield Herald, February 7, 1933.

churches and the community, but the facilities were ill-adapted to school use and administration was difficult with classes going on in so many different places.⁷¹

The reduction in fire insurance coverage on the county school buildings, made in 1930 during the first of the austerity programs for public education in the county, had brought the insured amount for the Selma Negro school down to \$8,226,⁷² so there had been no hope of immediately replacing it. Plans were drawn for a new building late in 1933, however, and ways and means sought to raise the money to start rebuilding. The outlook appeared good for obtaining CWA funds, in January, 1934, and an application was made for \$23,485.71.⁷³ The prospects for federal funds soon faded, as more and more reductions were made in Johnston County quotas from the CWA. However, a loan was obtained from the North Carolina Literary Fund for \$15,000, and the generosity of the Selma school committee in offering to contribute the reserve fund of \$9,512.47 held by the county for the Selma white school enabled work to get underway, and a new school was erected. Many idle cotton mill workers were employed

71

Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, January 5, 1934; personal interview of the author with H. B. Marrow, Superintendent of Johnston County Public Schools, 1922-1951, October 21, 1964.

72

Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, January 5, 1934.

73

Ibid., January 5, 1934.

and some of the last of the CWA work quotas were taken advantage of, to build a fine brick structure at less cost by far, than had been anticipated. Original estimates had run as high as \$56,244.18,⁷⁴ yet through careful planning, rigid economy in the selection of materials, and the utilization of low cost labor, the finished job did not require half that expenditure.⁷⁵

While other building needs of the Johnston County schools could not be met, in spite of the very great need, and other educational deficiencies continued, due to a lack of money, the outlook for the future was good at the end of the 1934-1935 school term. Early responses on the part of the North Carolina General Assembly to the pleas of the friends of education for larger school appropriations had been favorable,⁷⁶ and it was felt that a better day was coming. An air of expectancy also prevailed in regard to action which the federal government might take in further New Deal legislation. President Roosevelt had gone before the Congress in January to ask for a two year appropriation

74

Ibid., January 5, 1934.

75

Personal interview of the author with H. B. Marrow, Superintendent of Johnston County Public Schools, 1922-1951; July 23, 1965.

76

Smithfield Herald, February 12, 15, 1935.

for relief spending in the amount of nearly three billion
77
dollars, and the chances for getting it were good.

77 Schlesinger, The New Deal in Action, p. 7.

CHAPTER IV
THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

1935 - 1940

The recession, which was experienced as the first flush of spending by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration ended in 1934, was dispelled by additional appropriations which the Congress made in 1935. With the creation in April of the WPA (Works Progress Administration), "pump priming"¹ began on a scale much larger than had been undertaken under the old CWA. The road to recovery in Johnston County was not without bumps and a few detours, but every year of the 1935-1940 period saw substantial improvement.

As the WPA became established, and procedures clarified whereby funds might be obtained for worthwhile community projects, Johnston County took full advantage of every opportunity to qualify for participation. Due to good planning to make the most of the widely diversified programs which became available, much was accomplished that was of lasting good.

While some of the projects were of greater value to particular areas than to the county in general, the larger proportion were of benefit, directly or indirectly, to the whole county. Steps were taken as soon as funds were

¹

Schlesinger, The New Deal in Action, pp. 7-9.

available to get approval for projects which had been on the planning boards when the end came for the CWA. Included were the building of new community and recreational centers, paving of streets and installation of gutters in many towns in the county, construction and repair of roads, and a number of landscape beautification projects.

Some of the first work performed, on malaria control, sanitation projects, street and gutter work, gave jobs to six hundred men at one time.² Busy at work in WPA sewing rooms at the same time were one hundred women, who were making dresses and overalls to be turned over to the welfare department. Sewing rooms for white and Negro women were in operation in Smithfield, Selma, Kenly, and Benson, on a five-day week, seven hour day schedule.³ By the end of 1935, the number taken from the county welfare relief rolls who were employed on WPA jobs totalled three hundred men and one hundred women.⁴ The relief situation grew steadily better, with new projects developing as others expired.

As organization of the PWA on a regional headquarters basis progressed, Smithfield became a hub of activity in the eastern section of the state, with an office set up to direct WPA work in Johnston and eight other counties in the area.

² Smithfield Herald, November 15, 1935.

³ Ibid., November 5, 1935.

⁴ Ibid., December 3, 1935.

Administrative work in the Smithfield office gave employment to twenty-three clerical workers and provided a monthly payroll of \$2,500. Establishment of the area office in Smithfield in 1937 came about through local cooperation, with the rental of the office space which was used being donated by the town and county governments.⁵

With the coming of the WPA, hope quickly revived for obtaining help for the long suffering public schools, and this time many of the hopes were realized. WPA financing for school construction purposes was offered on a matching-funds basis. This meant that all the needs could not be met at once, but offered the opportunity for a beginning to be made, with the schools needing the most attention getting consideration. The Johnston County Board of Education and the county commissioners promptly applied for projects to be started in the schools suffering the worst from cramped quarters.

The work of providing additional classroom space, remodelling old buildings to meet new needs, constructing toilet buildings and other auxiliaries got underway near the end of 1935 and continued until the spring of 1940. A total of \$207,000 was expended during this period, with forty-five per cent of the funds being provided by the WPA. Matching funds for the remainder of the costs were provided by the

⁵
Ibid., August 15, September 22, 1939.

county government and the individual school districts.⁶ At the end of the five-year period the additions of classrooms relieved the crowding which so many of the schools had been forced to endure for years, and provided, in many instances, splendid new recreational facilities. Improved sanitation systems and better heating plants for many of the schools were also obtained.⁷

The first of the series of applications for WPA school building projects was for additions and improvements to six white and two Negro schools, at a total cost of \$115,000. Of the amount needed, \$51,520 came to the county as a WPA grant. The initial projects were for classroom additions of six rooms each for the white schools of Meadow and Princeton, four rooms for the white schools at Kenly, and six rooms each for the Negro schools at Clayton and Smithfield. In addition, a principal's home was provided for the Pine Level School so that four classrooms of the old teachers' home could be converted to classrooms. Other items included were the remodeling of the auditorium of the Kenly white school, the erection of a toilet building at the Four Oaks white school, and the installation of a steel fence at Selma.⁸

⁶ Ibid., April 23, 1940.

⁷ Ibid., April 23, 1940.

⁸ Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, December 11, 1935.

When work was completed on the first project it was found that costs had been kept below the amounts of the original estimates on which the WPA grant had been made, so the Board of Education promptly filed application to have this amount made available to match funds of the county for other school building needs. There was no difficulty in deciding which school should get attention next, for the Cleveland School was so crowded that six teachers were holding classes in the auditorium. A six-classroom addition was begun there, and completed in the spring of 1937.⁹

To raise the county's share of the funds was no easy matter, and while the new construction was being undertaken all capital outlay funds were earmarked for the projects already started. While the new work was in progress there was hardly any money for maintenance needs for the older buildings, even in the matter of leaking roofs in many instances.¹⁰

With local funds having accumulated in sufficient quantity by 1938, another round of school improvements was undertaken. Four more of the white schools received attention with the addition of six classrooms each being made to the schools at Selma and Four Oaks, and the construction of a principal's home at Glendale and a toilet building at the

⁹ Ibid., November 24, 1936; March 18, 1937.

¹⁰ Smithfield Herald, November 27, 1936.

Cleveland School. The WPA grant of forty-five per cent of the total cost amounted to \$35,460 of the total expenditure of \$78,800.¹¹ In June of 1939, application was made for WPA funds to aid in the building of a six classroom addition to the Clayton Negro School. For the \$15,753.13 project, the WPA grant amounted to \$7,880.¹²

With the completion of the addition to the Clayton Negro School in 1940, most of the schools in the county were provided with adequate classroom space, with the exception of the schools at Kenly and Benson, which were still crowded.¹³ Prospects for relief for both these schools were in sight, however. The General Assembly in 1939 passed local bills making it possible for both districts to call elections on proposals to levy a special tax of 25¢ per \$100 property valuation, to accumulate funds for school building purposes.¹⁴ The elections had carried, by large majorities, and the county commissioners gave sympathetic attention to the committeemen of both schools as they petitioned for more

¹¹ Ibid., September 16, 1939; Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, November 29, 1938.

¹² Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, June 8, November 21, 1939.

¹³ Smithfield Herald, April 23, 1940.

¹⁴ Public-Local and Private Laws of North Carolina, session 1939, Chapter 414, p. 463.

¹⁵⁵
classrooms.

Public education in Johnston County benefitted in other ways than through school house construction, following the New Deal legislation of 1935. The NYA (National Youth Administration), came into being in June, 1935, as a branch of the

¹⁶ WPA. Under the NYA, needy children were given part-time employment within their schools, in order that they might be able to continue their education. Many were from homes so poverty stricken that it was with difficulty the children were provided with the necessities of life, much less the clothing they needed to attend school and the school supplies that had to be purchased. The NYA became effective in Johnston County in the fall of 1935, and was offering assistance to fifty-seven pupils by November.¹⁷ The NYA quota for the county at that time was \$288 per month, and was used to provide jobs in nine of the white schools for thirty-five pupils, and in three of the Negro schools for twenty-two pupils. The money earned was applied toward the purchase of books, lunches, or clothing for school wear.¹⁸

¹⁵ Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, June 3, July 1, 1940.

¹⁶ Schlesinger, The New Deal in Action, p. 10.

¹⁷ Smithfield Herald, November 29, 1935.

¹⁸ Ibid., November 29, 1935.

The NYA program was expanded in 1936 to include not only school children, but other young people, from the ages of sixteen to twenty-five. Any young person whose family was receiving public welfare assistance was eligible for a job, within the quotas provided. In January, 1936, there were eighteen youths of both sexes and races, who did not go to school, employed with the NYA, besides forty-seven boys and girls who were in school. The boys who did not attend school were assigned to work on sanitation projects, and the girls were employed in the sewing rooms which had already¹⁹ been established under the WPA.

In the field of vocational education and rehabilitation of the youthful "down and out" of the Negro community of Johnston County the WPA project known as "Opportunity Hall" gained recognition far and wide for the outstanding job²⁰ which was performed, principally under Negro leadership. Erected on the campus of the Johnston County Training School, and operated under the auspices of the Johnston County Negro Community League, "Opportunity Hall" provided industrial and vocational education for students of the Johnston County Training School and for Negro youths and adults of the county, in general, as well. In addition to the vocational building,

¹⁹ Ibid., January 14, 1936.

²⁰ Ibid., April 17, December 14, 1937; August 16, 1938; personal interview of the author with Thomas J. Lassiter, publisher of the Smithfield Herald, January 22, 1965.

a second building provided recreational facilities and a well rounded recreational program. The \$34,000 project was made possible through cooperative efforts of both white and Negro communities, in raising the \$12,000 which was needed to match²¹ the WPA grants awarded for the buildings. Contributions to the fund, as it was being raised, came from citizens of Johnston County from both races, and in all walks of life. Gifts ranged from amounts of a few pennies to one of \$953 in materials from building supply firms. One Negro woman of Smithfield, aged and poor, upon hearing the purpose of the fund-raising campaign, insisted upon making a donation. She had no money, but was the possessor of four chickens, one of which became her contribution. The donation was accepted and the 75¢ which the fowl brought in the market went into²² the building fund.

By 1939, as the vocational rehabilitation aspects of the NYA became fully developed, many Johnston County youths were placed in apprenticeship positions in local businesses and on WPA projects, to learn skills which might fit them for²³ better jobs in the future. In February, 1940, there were seventy NYA workers in Johnston County thus employed. The number included thirty-five white youths and thirty-five

²¹ Ibid., August 16, 1938.

²² Ibid., August 16, 1938.

²³ Ibid., September 15, 1939.

Negroes, employed in school lunchrooms, at the Johnston County Hospital, as office assistants in various county offices, in white WPA recreation centers in various parts of the county, and at the Negro recreation center operated in conjunction with "Opportunity Hall."²⁴ Even with the curtailment of the NYA activities late in 1940, there were twenty girls and thirty boys still on such jobs in the county.²⁵

Another benefit to public education in Johnston County was the WPA program for adult education. Such projects, which had gotten a start under the old CWA before its funds were used up, were revived and enlarged in 1936.²⁶ Besides teaching illiterates how to read, new classes in homemaking and vocational training were introduced. Unemployed school teachers in varying numbers were provided with positions in the adult education program. The interest in education on the part of the adults, which had been high from the start, continued unabated until the program ended in 1940. The curriculum for the adults, besides the basic instruction for illiterates, was designed to meet the needs and desires of those seeking training, and included courses in homemaking, handicraft, and citizenship, with some attention to academics.

²⁴ Ibid., February 3, 1940.

²⁵ Ibid., October 1, 1940.

²⁶ Ibid., March 10, 1936.

such as English and geography.²⁷ The largest number of the adult education schools in operation in the county at one time was fifteen, in 1937, when there were 300 white adults and 350 Negroes enrolled at one time.²⁸ The number of schools fluctuated from year to year. During 1934, when the beginnings were made under the CWA, there had been four white schools and eight Negro schools. Under the WPA, in 1936 there was one school for whites and nine for Negroes; in 1937 there were three schools for whites and twelve for Negroes; in 1938 there were three schools for whites and seven for Negroes. In 1939, curtailment of the program began. New WPA regulations at that time stipulated that any employee who had held a WPA job for longer than eighteen months would be laid off. This reduction in the number of teachers brought the number of schools for adult education in Johnston County down to three, for whites.²⁹

Still another benefit to public education in Johnston County, which may be attributed to the WPA, was the popularizing of the reading of library books. The coming of the WPA "bookmobile," in 1938 stimulated a desire for good books to

²⁷ Ibid., March 10, 1936.

²⁸ Ibid., November 23, 1937.

²⁹ Ibid., September 9, 1934; April 30, 1935; March 10, September 18, 1936; February 26, April 20, November 23, 1937; July 11, August 25, 1939; May 21, 1940.

read, among both children and adults.³⁰ In time, this interest helped to strengthen the movements promoted by Parent Teacher Associations and civic groups toward improvement of the public school libraries. Impetus was also given to the movement which developed later for the establishment of a public library for Johnston County.³¹ The bookmobile, which in later years became an integral part of the county public library program, was introduced to Johnston County as a part of a state-wide WPA library project, to encourage the sponsorship of libraries by local groups in individual counties and municipalities. The driver and the librarian drew WPA salaries.³² Reports of the first series of trips made by the bookmobile are indicative of the reception which Johnstonians gave to the idea of having good reading materials made available. An average circulation of more than 230 books a day marked the first of the bookmobile's demonstration visits in 1938, and, by public demand, the six-weeks period for which it was originally sent was extended to eight weeks.³³ In 1940, when the bookmobile returned, it was more enthusiastically received than it had been before,

³⁰ Ibid., November 11, 1938.

³¹ Ibid., April 23, 1940; April 15, May 2, August 8, 1941.

³² Ibid., November 1, 1938.

³³ Ibid., November 11, December 20, 1938.

with fifty localities in the county asking to be included as stops on the scheduled route.³⁴

The reductions in WPA spending in Johnston County, when they came, in 1939, were noteworthy, not because they spelled unemployment for those whose jobs had expired, but because there were opportunities for other employment. Whereas 401 had been on the WPA payrolls at the end of 1938, the completion of projects and the lay-offs of those who had been employed over eighteen months reduced the total still drawing WPA wages during the latter part of 1939 to less than 100. All these were absorbed into the active work force of the county in a short time after leaving the WPA rolls.³⁵

Signs of recovery in the county had been noted for some time, and were unmistakable by 1939. All five of the textile mills in the county had resumed operations by the summer of 1938, and gave employment to a total of 932 persons. The average wage was \$11.53 per week, for an average of 40.6 hours of work.³⁶

The Smithfield Herald commented editorially on March 7, 1939, on the improved status of the farming community, noting the large number of new dwellings and barns that

³⁴ Ibid., March 19, April 23, 1940.

³⁵ Smithfield Herald, January 24, April 7, July 25, 1939.

³⁶ Ibid., July 14, August 16, 1938.

could be observed in the rural areas.³⁷ The Johnston County Home Demonstration Clubs in April, 1939, were sponsoring landscape and beautification projects for twenty-nine homes, churches, and teacherages in the county.³⁸

The agricultural community of Johnston County enjoyed the most consistent improvement during the period of economic recovery of any segment of the population. To be sure, there were "ups and downs" during a period of dissatisfaction over the tobacco control program,³⁹ but since the start of the New Deal the farmer seemed to occupy a favored position in an improving economy.

So it was that at the close of the period covered in this study, with tobacco and cotton production being carried on under a controlled acreage plan which insured government price support, the growing of the two great money crops had again become an asset, rather than a liability to the agricultural economy of Johnston County.

³⁷ Ibid., March 7, 1939.

³⁸ Ibid., April 28, 1939.

³⁹ Most of the dissension stemmed from local assignments of the acreage allotments. The election to decide whether the program of controls would be continued was held in the fall of 1938 when warehouse prices for tobacco were unusually low. The election failed to carry, with a majority of Johnston farmers voting against the government program, as did others across the state. Prices in 1939 were lower than they had been in 1938, and a crisis developed when British buyers were withdrawn from the market as World War II started. A referendum in 1939 restored government price support and brought production under control again. Smithfield Herald, March 15, August 26, December 13, 1938; October 10, 20, 1939; September 13, 1940.

Other assets than stabilized prices for cotton and tobacco accrued to the agricultural economy during the last half of the thirties. Diversified farming, which had been urged for many years, became more prevalent following the setbacks in cotton and tobacco acreage. Farmers added considerably to their incomes by raising sweet potatoes, cucumbers, and other edibles for the market, in addition to producing more foodstuffs for home consumption. Most notable of all, the raising of livestock and poultry made great gains during the period between 1935 and 1940. The strength of the movement toward livestock raising is readily seen in market reports released in April of 1937 which showed that since February, 1936, Johnston County farmers had received \$110,000⁴⁰ from the sale of swine. Published farm reports in the summer of 1939, showed that marked increases were being made⁴¹ in the county in the production of Guernsey cattle.

While the sharp reductions in acreage devoted to growing cotton and tobacco under AAA regulations were largely responsible for the trend toward diversification, it seems evident, when the growth of the teaching of vocational agriculture in the schools and through the WPA rehabilitation centers is noted, that much of the credit for breaking the

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Ibid., April 23, 1937; September 13, 1940.

⁴¹

Ibid., August 18, 1939.

hold of the old two-crop system must also go to public education.

The teaching of better agricultural practices through the public school system, which was carried out chiefly by the activities of the 4-H Club organization, received a great boost in 1935, when the county commissioners voted to appropriate \$1,000 toward the payment of the salary of a director to conduct a stepped-up program.⁴² The appropriation was made to match state funds which were available through the North Carolina Agriculture Extension Service, and the program was carried out through cooperation with the office of the Johnston County Farm Agent.⁴³

Interest had been displayed, prior to the enlargement of the 4-H Club program, in the teaching of vocational agriculture as a part of the regular school work. However, even with state and federal funds available to pay half the salaries of such teachers, the county was unable, on its extremely limited budget during the depression years, to pay its part of the expense. The only schools which had desired to maintain agriculture departments before 1935 were the white school at Benson and the Johnston County Training School at Smithfield. The Board of Education had made

⁴² Minutes, Johnston County Commissioners, November 4, 1935.

⁴³ Ibid., November 4, 1935; Smithfield Herald, September 13, 1935.

provision, when Benson entered the county-wide system to continue the salary for the teacher there, and private contributions had supported the local expense for the salary of the Negro teacher at the Johnston County Training School. Many schools wanted the addition of agriculture departments by 1935, but with no funds to erect the buildings needed, or to pay the county's portion of the teachers' salaries, the requests were denied. At its July 5, 1935, meeting, the Board of Education made its position clear on the matter. They explained to petitioners from the Micro School, who were asking for an agriculture teacher for the 1935-1936 term to be supported by district funds, that a recent ruling by the North Carolina School Commission had stated that local funds for the addition of agriculture departments must come from the proceeds of a county-wide tax levy. This being the case, the consensus of the Board of Education was that, in spite of the fact they were heartily in favor of schools which wished to do so to add agriculture departments, it seemed unfair that patrons of schools which had no desire for the program should have to be taxed for their support. Consequently, the Board of Education voted to exclude from the budget any amounts for the salaries of agriculture teachers.

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⁴⁴ Minutes, Johnston County Board of Education, July 5, 1935.

In the matter of an enlarged 4-H Club program, however, the Board of Education gave its complete support to proposals which had come from the North Carolina Agriculture Extension Department.⁴⁵ The recommendation of the Board of Education to the Johnston County Commissioners resulted in the support of 4-H Club work by the county government, on a continuing basis.

The growth of 4-H Club membership in Johnston County was phenomenal. With interest in every rural school, and many of the town schools, running high, from the beginning of the 1935-1936 school year, the number enrolled grew steadily. County membership, which had stood at 67 in the summer of 1935, swelled to 1,790⁴⁶ by August of 1936. Of that number, 600 were Negroes. By May, 1938, Johnston County was second from the top, in enrollment of white club members, in a listing of all the counties in the state. Exceeded only by Durham County, which had 157 more,⁴⁷ Johnston County members included 810 girls and 459 boys.

As soon as the enlarged program got underway in Johnston County in the fall of 1935 a wide variety of individual as well as club projects were started. Many students were

⁴⁵ Ibid., September 9, 1935.

⁴⁶ Smithfield Herald, December 17, 1935.

⁴⁷ Ibid., August 28, 1936.

interested in raising pure-bred cattle and swine; others were anxious to learn to judge livestock, poultry and seeds, and all were interested in production contests. More than 360 such projects were completed by 1938, and many more were⁴⁸ then in progress.

Johnston County 4-H Club teams and individual members began capturing honors, in area and state competition, within a year after the accelerated program was launched. Seed and poultry judging teams, which had already made a name for themselves locally in January, 1936, captured first prizes at⁴⁹ the North Carolina State Fair, in October. At State Fair exhibits in 1937, Johnston 4-H'rs took first honors for their pure-bred swine, and rated fourth place in beef cattle exhibits.⁵⁰ Other typical honors, the receipt of which became a regular habit with Johnston County 4-H Club members, included state recognition for achievement at the annual short course, held under the auspices of the North Carolina Agriculture Extension Service, in the summer of 1939, and area recognition for exhibitions and judging exercises at the annual livestock show held in Rocky Mount in the spring of 1940.⁵¹

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1939. Ibid., December 12, 1935; January 31, 1936; March 7,

⁴⁹
Ibid., October 26, 1936.

⁵⁰
Ibid., October 22, 1937.

⁵¹
Ibid., August 1, 1939; March 19, 1940.

The profits which were realized by 4-H Club members from the sale of livestock became considerable as more and more projects developed. In the spring of 1936 twelve boys, representing five clubs in the county, shipped a whole car-load of hogs to the livestock market in Richmond, Virginia. By the fall of 1937, some were marketing steers at a good profit.⁵²

Publicity given to the honors gained by the young people, and to the profits they were making from the sale of hogs and beef cattle is credited by many with the growth of livestock raising in Johnston County. The increased interest in swine production brought about the demand to have a hog market in the county to provide a local outlet, and one was established at Four Oaks in 1937.⁵³

Another of the objectives of the 4-H Club program was that of stimulating interest in higher education. Success in that area, also, was achieved in Johnston County. By 1939 there were six college scholarships available to Johnston County 4-H Club members. Two of these were offered by the Smithfield Tobacco Board of Trade, which had sponsored a scholarship contest since 1936, and four were offered by

⁵² Ibid., April 17, 1936; October 22, 1937.

⁵³ Ibid., March 26, 1937.

North Carolina State College. Competition for the scholar-⁵⁴ships was keen, in every high school in the county.

The good work of Negro 4-H Club members and their leaders exerted a great influence on the Negro farming community, with lasting results. The first of the annual Negro Achievement Days, which have since become an institution in Johnston County, was held in Smithfield on December 10, 1935. Negro 4-H Club members with their leader, William H. Holtzclaw, teacher of vocational agriculture at the Johnston ~~Coe~~ County Training School, and "Opportunity Hall," participated actively in the event, in both the exercises of the occasion,⁵⁵ and in presenting exhibits.

The high degree of cooperation and good will between the white and Negro races in Johnston County during the whole period of depression and recovery was exemplary. On this score, the county received state and national recognition from the philanthropic organization known as the Rosenwald Fund.⁵⁶ Representatives of the fund in 1935-1936

⁵⁴ Ibid., April 10, 1936; March 28, 31, 1939.

⁵⁵ Ibid., December 10, 1935.

⁵⁶ Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck and Company from 1909 to 1924, and chairman of the board of directors of that company from 1924 until his death in 1932, established the \$40,000,000 Rosenwald Fund in 1928. He directed that the entire fund must be expended within twenty-five years after his death. Chief aim of the fund was to better the conditions for Negroes through education. Allan Johnson, Dumas Malone and Others (eds.), Dictionary of American Biography (New York, 1935), XVI, 170-171.

were conducting surveys in southern states to evaluate the effectiveness with which donations were being used. Johnston was chosen as the North Carolina county they would visit. The team of two men, Buford H. Junker and Lewis Jones, the latter a Negro, said that they picked Johnston County, after extensive conferences with N. C. Newbold, Director of Negro Education for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, "Because of its high standing among the counties of North Carolina in the consolidation of Negro schools." They indicated that the results of their survey, which kept them in the county for almost the entire 1935-1936 term, would serve as a guide for officials of the agency in making future appropriations.⁵⁷ Gifts from the Rosenwald Fund had provided the money for the purchase of several of the buses used to transport Negro students to schools, prior to the assumption of that responsibility by the state, and had helped materially in financing the construction of Negro school houses.⁵⁸ At the conclusion of their survey, during which time they observed activities in the white schools, as well as those in the Negro schools, the survey team complimented the county administration on the work which was going on in public education in Johnston County and remarked

⁵⁷ Smithfield Herald, October 29, 1935.

⁵⁸ Personal interview of the author with H. B. Marrow, Superintendent of Johnston County Public Schools, 1922-1951, October 21, 1964.

on the splendid cooperation between school and community which they had noted during their stay in the county.⁵⁹

As the decade of the thirties ended, there was the same high degree of cooperation, not only between school and community, but between the Board of Education and the school committees, and the Board of Education and county commissioners. Adversity had been faced with mutual understanding and forbearance, and the results which were obtained in public education by 1940 were a credit to all.⁶⁰

One of the surest signs of economic betterment for the whole county was the news early in March, 1939, that over half the assessments for the current taxes had already been collected. Also, the amounts in delinquent taxes, still due for previous years, were extremely small when compared to the amounts which had been listed at the midpoint of the decade, and but a fraction of those of the early thirties.⁶¹ With the total county budget remaining about the same for 1940 as it had been in 1935 (slightly over \$600,000), the tax rate for 1940, set at \$1.45 per \$100 valuation, was lower by 5% than it had been in 1935, even though it had been increased 10% over the 1939 figure. Compared to the 1930

⁵⁹ Ibid., October 21, 1964.

⁶⁰ Personal interview of the author with H. B. Marrow, Superintendent of Johnston County Public Schools, 1922-1951, October 21, 1964.

⁶¹ Smithfield Herald, March 10, 1939.

assessment of \$1.95 per \$100 valuation, quite a difference
62
is noted.

The revenue from the ABC stores in the county had been instrumental, since the stores were opened in 1937, in keeping taxes at their low level. While the forces working for better public education in the county had been opposed to the repeal of prohibition, they had held the hope that the additional tax revenue might be used to benefit the schools. This was not the case, however, as the records show that increasing revenues resulted in reduced tax rates, not increasing school appropriations. Johnston County had voted "dry," as did North Carolina, in the referendum for repeal in 1933, but in June, 1937, when the county commissioners had been petitioned to call an election on the proposition of county ABC stores, the "wets" won. Stores were immediately opened in Smithfield, Benson, Clayton, Selma, and Kenly. Early sales were heavy, and brought profits to Johnston County of \$14,000 during the first three months they operated. In spite of steady returns to the county treasury, mounting opposition to the continuance of the ABC stores grew. In the spring of 1940, at the insistence of 6,500 petitioners, the county commissioners called another referendum. That time the "drys" won, with a sweeping

majority. Johnston County had the distinction⁶³ of being the first county in the state which had voted to have ABC stores and then voted to close them.

Although the school appropriations were held to a minimum during the period of 1935-1940, when the county commissioners insisted that a low tax rate be maintained, school conditions were good. Among the improvements were the changes in curriculum and textbooks which had been made since the state took over the support of the instructional program. The establishment of a State Textbook Commission by the 1935⁶⁴ General Assembly, through which school books were rented to pupils had not only provided a great saving to the parents of school children, but insured that all the pupils in school would have text materials. The inability of many to buy books during the years when the impact of the Great Depression had been more pronounced had proved a great handicap, in both learning and teaching. The Legislature went a step further in 1939, and provided that the schools should receive basal textbooks for the free use of elementary pupils.

⁶³
Smithfield Herald, November 10, 1933; June 1, 8, October 15, 29, 1937; May 5, August 15, 1939; April 19, 30, May 3, July 2, 1940.

⁶⁴
Public Laws of North Carolina, session 1935, chapter 422, p. 716.

although continuing the book rental system for the high school grades.⁶⁵ Beginning with the 1940-1941 school term the book rental system underwent further changes, which allowed the counties to purchase the books from the state, and carry out the rental system on a county basis. Johnston was one of the first counties to make the change. The change-over enabled the students of Johnston County to obtain the use of school books at lower charges than the former state rental fees.⁶⁶

Johnston County and its Superintendent of Schools received state-wide recognition in 1940 when Governor Clyde R. Hoey appointed H. B. Marrow as one of seven professional school men to membership on the State Textbook Commission.⁶⁷

Another improvement which was noted in the Johnston County public school system during this period was in the area of teacher scholarship. The Smithfield Herald stated editorially that marked progress was being made in that direction, and quoted the University News Letter, which placed Johnston County in fifty-third place among the one hundred counties of the state in the scholarship of its

⁶⁵

Ibid., session 1939, chapter 185, p. 424.

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Personal interview of the author with H. B. Marrow, Superintendent of Johnston County Public Schools, 1922-1951, October 21, 1964.

⁶⁷

David Leroy Corbitt (ed.), Addresses, Letters and Papers of Clyde Roark Hoey, Governor of North Carolina, 1938-1941 (Raleigh, 1944), p. 669.

white teachers, and in seventh place in the scholarship of its Negro teachers. White teachers in Johnston County schools at that time averaged three and one-half years of college training, and Negro teachers averaged three and one-fourth⁶⁸ years.

Johnston County school teachers, along with those from other counties, who attended the annual meeting of the North Carolina Teachers Association in Raleigh on March 19, 1938, heard words of praise from Governor Hoey, who commended their diligence and consecration to duty during the years of the Great Depression. "The State owes a debt of gratitude to its teachers," he told the assembly, and added that "...the schools have not suffered in service through the depression anything in comparison with the reduction that was necessary⁶⁹ in expenditures."

While teachers' salaries continued to remain low, they were considerably improved from what they had been during the worst of the Great Depression. Urged on by Governor⁷⁰ Ehringhaus in 1935, the General Assembly had voted a salary increase of ten per cent for the teachers to go into effect

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Smithfield Herald, March 22, 1938.

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Corbitt (ed.), Addresses, Letters and Papers of Clyde R. Hoey, Governor of North Carolina, 1937-1941, p. 193.

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Corbitt (ed.), Addresses, Letters and Papers of John C. B. Ehringhaus, Governor of North Carolina, 1933-1937, pp. 52-53.

with the 1935-1936 term and an additional five per cent to be added for the 1936-1937 term.⁷¹ Governor Hoey, in his inaugural address on January 7, 1937, went on record as "...being definitely in favor of retrieving our lost ground, continuing the process of restoration of salaries of teachers to the former level...."⁷² The Legislature responded with another ten per cent salary increase for these teachers.⁷³

An examination of some of the statistics concerning the Johnston County schools during the period covered in this study reveals many interesting contrasts and comparisons. There was a fluctuation in the number of men who taught which corresponds with the economic trend of the times. The impact of the Great Depression is quite apparent, for the number of men who taught decreased sharply during the period when salaries were at their lowest level, and increased again as salaries improved. The records show that, in 1927, there were, in the white schools, twenty men and forty-four women teaching at the high school level; eleven men and 303 women taught in the elementary grades. In the Negro schools there

⁷¹ Public Laws of North Carolina, session 1935, chapter 306, p. 361.

⁷² Corbitt (ed.), Addresses, Letters and Papers of Clyde R. Hoey, Governor of North Carolina, 1937-1941, p. 10.

⁷³ Public Laws of North Carolina, session 1937, chapter 99, p. 144.

were five men and four women teaching at the high school level; thirteen men and seventy-six women taught in the elementary grades. Since the figures for white and Negro schools showed about the same rate of change, they may be combined to show graphically the decrease in the number of men who taught, as the depression progressed, and the increase as conditions grew better, and salaries for teachers increased.

<u>School Term</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Total</u>
1926-1927	51	425	476
1927-1928	54	420	474
1928-1929	48	418	466
1929-1930	43	379	422
1930-1931	46	358	404
1931-1932	33	351	384
1932-1933	32	389	421
1933-1934	26	406	432
1934-1935	25	390	415
1935-1936	30	381	411
1936-1937	26	385	411
1937-1938	31	381	412
1938-1939	32	389	421
1939-1940	36	393	429
1940-1941	30	406	436

74

Biennial Reports of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1926-1927, Part II, Section I, 206-207; *ibid.*, 1927-1928, Part III, Section I, 240-241; *ibid.*, 1928-1929, Part I, Section I, 224-225; *ibid.*, 1929-1930, Part III, Section I, 212-213; *ibid.*, 1930-1931, Part II, Section I, 38-39; *ibid.*, 1931-1932, Part III, Section I, 38-39; *ibid.*, 1932-1933, Part II, Section I, 38-39; *ibid.*, 1933-1934, Part III, Section I, 42-43; *ibid.*, 1934-1935, Part II, Section I, 60-61; *ibid.*, 1935-1936, Part III, Section I, 60-61; *ibid.*, 1936-1937, Part II, Section I, 64-65; *ibid.*, 1937-1938, Part III, Section I, 64-65; *ibid.*, 1938-1939, Part II, Section I, 64-65; *ibid.*, 1939-1940, Part III, Section I, 68-69; *ibid.*, 1940-1941, Part II, Section I, 58-59. It seems reasonable to assume that the demand for men in defense industries, as well as the military buildup in 1940 is reflected in the 1940-1941 figures.

Another item of interest, in viewing the whole period of 1927-1940, is that of school consolidation. Even at a time when consolidation was advancing rapidly across the state, the progress made in Johnston County was outstanding.⁷⁵ During the school year 1926-1927 Johnston County had operated seventy-nine white schools and thirty-four Negro schools. By 1940-1941 these had been combined into twenty-two white schools and nine Negro schools.⁷⁶

Consolidation brought about a reduction in the total number of classrooms in the white schools, from 461 to 432. However, in the case of the Negro schools, consolidation had been accompanied by greatly improved facilities over what they had been in 1927, with the result that the number of classrooms was increased from 99 to 127.⁷⁷

There was considerable fluctuation in the values placed on the property of the Johnston County schools during the 1927-1940 period. Valuations at the beginning of the study were undoubtedly affected by the inflationary real estate prices of the Nineteen-twenties. The small increase in the valuation of the figures shown for 1940, over those of

⁷⁵ Bill Sharpe, A New Geography of North Carolina (Raleigh, 1962), II, 949.

⁷⁶ Biennial Reports of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1926-1927, Part II, Section I, 227; ibid., 1940-1941, Part II, Section I, 70-71.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 1926-1927, Part II, Section I, 227; ibid., 1940-1941, Part II, Section I, 70-71.

1927, in spite of the large amount of building which had taken place between 1935-1940, reflected the depressed real estate values which still prevailed at the end of the period studied. The valuations, as reported to the North Carolina Superintendent of Public Instruction, were placed at \$2,298,477.00 in 1927 and at \$2,352,468.00 in 1940. The highest valuation reported at any time during the period studied was \$2,422,972.00 in 1931, and the lowest was \$1,906,050 in 1935.⁷⁸

The number of pupils transported by school bus, the number of buses in operation and the mileage traveled, changed significantly between 1927-1940. In 1927, 92 buses, traveling an average of 1,543 miles daily, transported 2,778 children to 50 white schools. In 1940, 111 buses, traveling an average of 2,865 miles daily, transported 8,071 pupils to 15 white schools. The transportation figures for the Negro schools show that in 1927, 2 buses, traveling an average of 32 miles daily, transported 67 pupils to 3 schools. In 1940, 37 buses, traveling an average of 1,244 miles daily, transported 2,307 pupils

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Ibid., 1926-1927, Part II, Section I, 227; ibid., 1930-1931, Part II, Section I, 64-65; ibid., 1934-1935, Part II, Section I, 72-73; ibid., 1940-1941, Part II, Section I, 70-71.

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to seven schools.

Attention given to data concerned with pupil population, enrollment, and attendance affords a better understanding of many of the problems and accomplishments of the Johnston County schools which have been referred to in this study. It is interesting to note that while the school age population increased by less than 1,000 during the 1927-1940 period, the number of students in average daily attendance increased by nearly 2,000. Statistics show that the school age population rose from 16,212 in 1927 to 17,104 in 1940, while the average daily attendance rose from 12,836 in 1927 to 14,796 in 1940. The manner in which school attendance was affected by the impact of the Great Depression is evidenced by the high figures shown for the years when few jobs were available to tempt young people to leave the school room to accept employment. Average attendance had declined somewhat in the late Nineteen-twenties, dropped from a pre-depression high of 13,073 in 1927-1928 to 12,594 in 1930-1931. Consistent increases were recorded from 1932

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Ibid., 1926-1927, Part II, Section I, 237; ibid., 1940-1941, Part II, Section I, 93.

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to 1940, as shown by the following table:

<u>School Term</u>	<u>School Age Population</u>	<u>Average Daily Membership</u>	<u>Average Daily Attendance</u>
1931-1932	22,048	15,173	13,543
1932-1933	22,469	16,134	14,198
1933-1934	22,117	16,066	14,344
1934-1935	22,307	15,764	14,074
1935-1936	22,169	15,748	14,067
1936-1937	21,775	15,346	14,008
1937-1938	23,220	15,653	14,362
1938-1939	22,926	15,921	14,910
1939-1940	22,569	16,079	15,102
1940-1941	22,903	15,732	14,796

Such statistics show, quite clearly, that, in many ways public education in Johnston County had made progress, even during the Great Depression. As the new decade of the Nineteen-forties commenced, the outlook for the future of the schools was good.

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Ibid., 1926-1927, Part II, Section I, 179; ibid., 1927-1928, Part III, Section I, 204-205; ibid., 1928-1929, Part I, Section I, 136-137; ibid., 1929-1930, Part III, Section I, 136-137; ibid., 1930-1931, Part II, Section I, 8-9; ibid., 1931-1932, Part II, Section I, 8-9; ibid., 1932-1933, Part II, Section I, 8-9; ibid., 1933-1934, Part III, Section I, 10-11; ibid., 1934-1935, Part II, Section I, 10-11; ibid., 1935-1936, Part III, Section I, 10-11; ibid., 1936-1937, Part II, Section I, 10-11; ibid., 1937-1938, Part III, Section I, 10-11; ibid., 1938-1939, Part II, Section I, 10-11; ibid., 1939-1940, Part III, Section I, 10-11; ibid., 1940-1941, Part II, Section I, 10-11.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

An assessment of the facts revealed in this survey shows that public education in Johnston County suffered greatly under the impact of the Great Depression. However, it seems clear that, in spite of all the hardships of the Nineteen-thirties, the schools of the county were better at the end of the period than they had been at the beginning.

Had the desire of Johnston County citizens for good schools been less, it is probable that the impact of the Great Depression on public education would have been lighter. During the prosperous years of the early Nineteen-twenties the county had incurred heavy indebtedness for new schools, a new courthouse and a greatly improved road system. In the latter part of the decade, the county government, spurred on by the interest of its constituents in improved schools, authorized additional indebtedness for another big school construction program. Trouble developed as prosperity vanished and high taxes remained. When the full force of the depression struck, the schools alone were blamed by many for the heavy burden of the taxpayers. The change from prosperity to depression took place so quickly that the people were, at first, unable to comprehend what was happening. While many, as individuals, felt the pinch of the declining economy as early as 1927, few seemed to realize the plight of their county government, which experienced real difficulty

in maintaining financial stability. Tax revenues diminished steadily, at the same time that greater expenditures became necessary to meet maturing county bonds. As partisan politics entered the picture, dissension and factional strife ensued. However, by 1931, the totality of the financial depression was better understood and most of the differences were forgotten. The efforts of the majority of the county's citizens to improve every school situation where improvement was possible, and to make the most of bad situations which could not be helped, caused them to become more united in the face of adversity than they had been during times of prosperity. The prevailing spirit of cooperation, between the communities and the schools, between the county government and the Board of Education, as well as the good will which existed between the races, stood out brightly against the dark background of the depression years.

The teachers in Johnston County's public schools felt the impact of the Great Depression, from the start. Although their salaries were not reduced until 1931, when the state assumed support of the instructional costs, their troubles started in 1929. Many lost their positions when teacher allotments were reduced. Those who were employed taught larger classes than ever before, often under adverse circumstances, as hasty consolidation became mandatory when sharp budget reductions for the operation of the schools were made. Their living expenses rose, if they lived in the

teachers' homes maintained by the county. In addition, they found that the communities in which they lived often expected them to assume more civic responsibility than had been the case in the past. As the depression grew worse in 1931 and the county funds for school support became exhausted, the teachers welcomed the state support program, even though it lowered their salaries by ten per cent. In 1933, with state support of the public schools placed on an eight-months basis instead of six, the further reduction of thirty per cent in monthly salary schedules caused teachers to earn less pay for eight months work than they had formerly received for six months. The teachers carried on valiantly, however, and won the admiration of those whom they served. Many went far beyond the call of duty in helping their young charges and the communities in which they lived to meet the terrible stresses of the times. Appreciation on the part of school patrons was shown to the teachers in many ways, including support of the movement for higher pay. Salary increases granted by the North Carolina General Assembly during its sessions of 1935 and 1937 added a total of twenty-five per cent to the amounts they received. On the basis of scholarship, Johnston County had better teachers in 1940 than in 1927.

The impact of the Great Depression on the school children was quite evident. Many came from homes which had become poverty stricken, and the problem of obtaining clothing

to wear to school was a real one. Many were unable to purchase school books and supplies. There was a definite deterioration in the health of school children, and many suffered from physical defects brought on by malnutrition. School attendance, however, was higher than it had been during the years of prosperity. Improvement in average daily attendance and the increased number of high school graduates was believed to be due in a large measure to greater interest in education. Another reason more students attended school was that employment opportunities which had previously lured them away from the classroom did not exist during the depression years.

The changes in the school curriculum which were made during the Nineteen-thirties resulted largely from the efforts of educators to meet the needs of the times, when the impact of the Great Depression was greatest. It was felt that the school should go beyond its academic program and take a more active part in character training. While the steps taken may have paved the way for a later trend toward too little regard for subject matter, the needs of the times undeniably included training in moral values and citizenship. Juvenile crime had increased alarmingly with the impact of the Great Depression.

The introduction of the 4-H Club programs into the schools of Johnston County paid rich dividends. Greater interest in school resulted, and influence was exerted toward

diversification of farming. Activity of the 4-H Clubs was also credited with helping to increase the interest in higher education. Competition became keen for college scholarships offered by North Carolina State College and the local business community.

The schools of Johnston County were better in 1940 than they had been in 1927 because of the large scale consolidation which had taken place. Real hardship had accompanied the combining of schools during the early depression years, however. Crowded conditions prevailed for many years before there were funds available for the construction of additional classrooms to accommodate the increased numbers of students which were brought together. The elimination of schools which had too few children for the operation of an adequate education program, in favor of consolidated schools at strategic locations in the county, had long been advocated by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, and urged by the Johnston County Board of Education. The movement toward consolidation, which had made some progress during the early twenties, and was proceeding more slowly at the end of the decade, was speeded up by the impact of the Great Depression. The reduction in the number of Johnston County schools between 1927 and 1940, from seventy-nine white schools to twenty-two, and thirty-four Negro schools to nine, resulted in better, stronger schools. More effective administration was another good result of consolidation.

The most important step forward in public education, during the period studied, was, of course, the assumption of public school support by the state. While consideration had been previously given to the provision of greater state aid than that afforded by the Equalization Fund, it was the impact of the Great Depression, with the resultant inability of the counties to properly provide for their schools, which brought it about. Under the law of 1933, the schools of Johnston County, like those elsewhere accredited by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, were all operated according to the same standards. Besides the many other advantages of standardization, the matter of uniformity in the length of school terms meant a great deal. Under the old system, whereby support of the six-months constitutional term was provided for through general county funds, and longer terms were financed on a district basis, the school term had varied widely from district to district. This caused a great deal of confusion for both pupils and teachers when children changed schools. Since many of the families of Johnston County school children were a part of the large tenant population which moved to new locations frequently, great difficulties were experienced when those accustomed to six-months schools moved into eight-months districts, or vice-versa. An eight-months school for all was a distinct advantage.

The impact of the Great Depression on public education

in Johnston County cannot be fully appreciated without giving attention to the broad aspects of economic, social, and cultural change which took place in the county at large during the period 1927-1940. So strong were the ties which bound the affairs of the farming community to every phase of life in the county, that discussion of the impact of the Great Depression on agriculture takes a prominent place. The economic decline in agriculture began in Johnston County in 1926, and by the time the Great Depression became fully developed in the early thirties, many Johnston County farmers were in desperate straits. As prices of farm commodities dropped lower and lower, real poverty existed for a people who had just a short while before enjoyed financial well being. This poverty was reflected in their inability to pay the taxes upon which depended the support of the public schools.

As the New Deal went into operation, many of the first relief programs were designed to effect a revival of agriculture. Later developments under the second AAA restored the farmer to his pre-depression financial status. Reduced production of cotton and tobacco, diversification of crops, and a more scientific approach to the business of agriculture had long been advocated by state and national groups that longed to see Johnston County farmers break the shackles which bound them to the two great money crops. Their efforts met with little success, but the impact of the

Great Depression brought the agricultural community into a more receptive frame of mind, and the demands of decreased production in order to get federal aid were promptly met. One result was voluntary endorsement of reduced acreage devoted to cotton and tobacco; another was a willingness to try other crops, and a greater interest in raising livestock. In regard to the latter, it seems clear that credit is due the county schools, and their cooperation with the 4-H Club program. Improved techniques, diversified crops and livestock raising were stressed by 4-H Club leaders.

Bolstered by federal price supports, the prices for farm products began to rise. With the national consumption of farm products increasing as the nation began to emerge from the depression, and with the world market improving due to the war in Europe, Johnston County farmers were again engaged in a profitable business. Once more they could pay their debts, including their county taxes. Since they composed the bulk of the taxpayers in Johnston County, the county treasury began to resume its former healthy condition. As rapidly as local funds for the use of public education could be accumulated, they were used to match federal grants, available under the WPA, to construct much needed new classrooms, and to improve the facilities for the county schools. Full advantage was taken of the opportunities, which also required matching funds, to get WPA grants to provide

vocational education and occupational rehabilitation for the Negro community. Other funds were provided to pay the county's part of the costs for maintaining the NYA and adult education programs, and to support the movement which encouraged improvement of school and local libraries.

The impact of the Great Depression on Johnston County government had been very great, yet at the end of the depression decade the financial condition of the county was materially improved over what it had been at the end of the twenties. There was a balanced budget and appropriations could again be made to improve the schools, and to restore county services which had been curtailed or eliminated during the hard depression years. Funds were available to steadily reduce the county's bonded indebtedness. What is even more noteworthy, the county commissioners were able to make several reductions in the property tax rate.

District taxpayers, by 1939, showed their willingness to pay the costs of improvements for their schools in the same spirit that had prevailed during the twenties, before the Great Depression. As soon as legislative action allowed them to do so, district citizens petitioned the county commissioners for elections to impose additional district taxes, in order that funds might accumulate to be used for new building construction.

While arguments still go on across the nation as to whether the New Deal or the war in Europe brought an end to

the Great Depression, the facts seem to show conclusively that the economy of Johnston County was vastly improved before the war began. It also seems clear that public education in Johnston County, because of the determination of the people to seek improvement, even in difficult times, was better in 1940 than it had ever been before.

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