

CHAPTER 21 THE DRAINING YEARS

- A. Introduction. At the end of World War I, the cotton market collapsed and with it, the only brief period of relative prosperity that the state had known since before the Civil War. A majority of the state's population lived on farms where modern conveniences were unknown. The economic problems in rural areas led to farm foreclosures and bank failures. The downturn in the agricultural sector was matched by one in textiles. The Stock Market Crash of '29 and the Great Depression only made a bad situation worse. South Carolina was in such sad shape, that one observer wrote: "in almost every aspect of human progress, South Carolina has sunk as far as a state can sink."
- B. The Countryside
1. In 1933, less than 2% of the farms in South Carolina had electricity.
 2. Although a few farmers began using tractors in the 1920s, mules and hand labor were more typical on the state's farms until after World War II.
 3. The boll weevil combined with falling cotton prices to drive thousands from their farms.
- C. The Towns
1. Both Columbia and Greenville developed suburban areas linked to the central city by trolley car lines.
 2. Municipal services such as sanitation, paved streets, and water were installed or improved, but outdoor privies were still a common sight.
 3. With the exception of the mill towns in the Piedmont, most towns continued to be tied to adjacent rural areas.
 - a. They served as market and shopping centers.
 - b. They served as social centers: "Going to town on Saturday afternoon" was a common practice.
 - c. When hard times hit the farmers, it also hit the storekeepers and merchants in the towns that served them.

D. Outmigration

1. Between 1920 and 1935, some 80% of South Carolina's male high school graduates left the state.
2. There was a significant exodus of literally hundreds of thousands of rural blacks from every section of the state except the PeeDee.

E. The Roaring Twenties

- *1. Although South Carolina had been legally dry since 1915, many chose to ignore the law.**
 - a. The coast, with its numerous isolated inlets and rivers, became a haven for "rumrunners" smuggling foreign liquor into the country.
 - b. In all sections of the state, "moonshiners" made "white lightning" which found a ready market.
 - c. When national prohibition ended in 1933, South Carolina legalized the sale of beer and wine and two years later authorized package stores for the sale of liquor.
2. The state's Blue Laws prohibited many activities on Sunday, but often were ignored.
 - a. Governor John G. Richards' attempts to strictly enforce the laws were ignored by local authorities and ridiculed in the press.
 - b. The automobile and tourism, both of which needed servicing seven days a week, brought about the gradual relaxation or modification of some of the laws.
- *3. One reaction to the "new morality" of the 1920s was an unsuccessful attempt to outlaw the teaching of evolution in the public schools.**
4. The first radio stations went on the air during the 1920s and within a decade radios brought news of the outside world to South Carolina homes.
5. As elsewhere, there was a revival of the KKK during the 1920s and its influence was powerful enough in the General Assembly to defeat the reelection of Jewish businessman August Kohn to the University of South Carolina's Board of Trustees.

F. Education

1. In 1924, the “6-0-1” law was a major step forward in public education.
2. Illiteracy still haunted the state, but adult education programs, such as the Opportunity School, began to chip away at this disgrace.
3. The schools were rigidly segregated and more funds were spent on white schools than on black schools.

G. On Vacation

1. The increase in the number of automobiles led to family vacations at South Carolina’s beaches.
2. Folly Beach near Charleston and the beaches of the Grand Strand attracted a growing number of South Carolinians.
3. Atlantic Beach, also on the Grand Strand, was a beach developed by black Carolinians as a black resort.

***H. The South Carolina Literary Renaissance**

- *1. During the 1920s and 1930s, a group of South Carolina writers flourished as part of the Southern Literary Renaissance – one of the most important periods in American literature.**
- *2. The South Carolina Poetry Society encouraged young writers.**
- *3. Julia Peterkin and DuBose Heyward both achieved national acclaim for their writings and Peterkin won a Pulitzer Prize.**

***I. The Impact of the Great Depression**

- *1. The State of South Carolina was on the verge of financial collapse in 1933.**
 - *a. State employees were laid off.**
 - *b. Those employees who were retained were paid with “state I.O.U.’s” and not real money.**
- *2. In desperation, South Carolinians sold off portions of their cultural heritage to put food on the table.**
 - *a. Historical documents and papers were purchased by out of state libraries.**
 - *b. Northern museums bought South Carolina made furniture, silver, and even the paneling out of houses all at distress sale prices.**

- *3. The loss of the state's priceless cultural heritage gave rise to organizations which were determined to keep it intact.**
 - a. The Preservation Society in Charleston was established to preserve and restore buildings in the port city.
 - b. The South Caroliniana Society, a statewide organization based in Columbia, was founded to purchase and preserve historic documents.

***J. The New Deal in South Carolina**

- *1. President Roosevelt declared that the South was the nation's number one economic problem – and he could have added that South Carolina was among the bottom 3 or 4 states in the region.**
- *2. The Rural Electrification Act (REA) assisted in the formation of electric cooperatives that brought power to 25% of the state's farms by 1940.**
- *3. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) established some 30 camps throughout the state.**
 - *a. The CCC put young men to work on reforestation and soil conservation projects.**
 - *b. A number of our present state parks were begun as CCC projects.**
- *4. The Public Works Administration built the Wade Hampton State Office Building, the old Carolina Stadium, and dozens of libraries, court houses, and other community structures.**
- *5. The most important New Deal Project in the state was Santee Cooper which, when completed, provided electricity for thousands of rural South Carolinians.**
- *6. The Federal Writers' Project employed hundreds of people across the state.**
 - *a. The agency produced South Carolina: A Guide to the Palmetto State and other useful publications.**
 - *b. It also employed individuals who painstakingly transcribed hundreds historical documents – the originals of which have since been lost or destroyed.**

- *7. **Several South Carolinians played major roles in the New Deal.**
 - *a. **Senator James F. Byrnes was one of President Roosevelt's most trusted advisors.**
 - *b. **Camden native, financier Bernard Barush, advised Roosevelt as he had Woodrow Wilson.**
 - *c. **Burnet R. Maybank, as Mayor of Charleston and Governor of South Carolina, was one of the most outspoken supporters of Santee Cooper.**
- *8. **During the New Deal, South Carolina sent approximately \$10 million in taxes to Washington and received in return more than \$240 million for various projects.**

K. Summary. Economically, South Carolina and her people during the 1920s and 1930s were in a bad way – even worse than during Reconstruction. The New Deal helped South Carolina and South Carolinians get back on their feet. The New Deal was not a panacea for all of the state's ills, but it surely was a powerful and much needed tonic.

L. Readings

1. Edgar, South Carolina: A History, Chapter 21
1. Blum, Catton, The National Experience, pp. 638-642, 660-666, 679-692
2. Byrnes, All in One Lifetime, pp. 59-134
3. Edgar, Santee Cooper
4. Edgar, South Carolina: The WPA Guide
5. Hayes, South Carolina and the New Deal
5. Horne, South Carolina, 393-426
6. Johnson & Dunn, A True Likeness
7. Jones, South Carolina, pp. 625-631, 634-654
8. Kovacik & Winberry, South Carolina, pp. 118-129
9. Lander, A History of South Carolina, pp. 66-81, 102-105, 117-121, 129, 135-138

10. Robertson, Red Hills and Cotton
11. Tindall, America, pp. 985-1005, 1016-1020, 1042-1046, 1061-1096