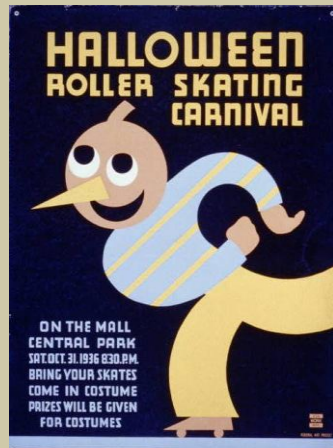
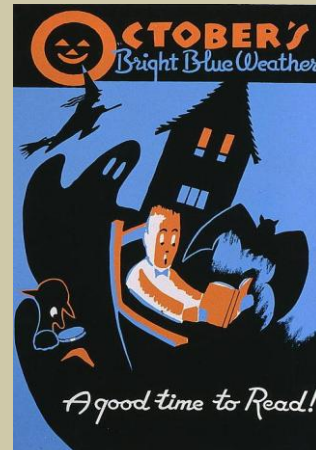


# Maryland New Deal Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 3, October 2012  
By Brent McKee & Colleen Walter



(WPA poster art)



(WPA poster art)

## Quote of the Month:

*"I have moments of real terror, when I think we may be losing this generation. We have got to bring these young people into the active life of the community and make them feel that they are necessary."*

--Eleanor Roosevelt, 1934, quote found in the book "The African-American Experience in the Civilian Conservation Corps," by Olen Cole, Jr., University Press of Florida, 1999.

\*\*\* Get email alerts when our free newsletters come out! Email us at [wpatoday@gmail.com](mailto:wpatoday@gmail.com), or go to [http://www.wpatoday.org/New\\_Deal\\_Newsletter.html](http://www.wpatoday.org/New_Deal_Newsletter.html) and use the subscribe tool. You can also download previous issues there! \*\*\*

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# “A Woman’s Dream & the WPA at Towson University”

By Brent McKee



*(Pavilion at Glen Woods. Photo by Brent McKee, 2011)*

On the campus of Towson University is a natural area called “Glen Woods.” The 12-acre glen has several stone structures that, when compared to the modern buildings surrounding it, seem out of place. There are two small buildings, a pavilion with a fireplace, a stone picnic table, a few outdoor cooking platforms, and various other works of masonry. Some areas of the glen have been restored, while other areas are in various states of disrepair.

A dilapidated sign in the glen, recently removed for renovation, read as follows:

“Stella Brown’s Dream: Stella Brown had a dream that the Glen could be developed into an arboretum that could continue to be used for all its previous uses as well as becoming a community resource. She and other faculty envisioned the construction of a few buildings for meeting as well as a set of trails from which students and the public could appreciate the planting. About that

time, the depression hit and many people lost their jobs. To help these people survive, the federal government developed the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which among other things, built roads, sidewalks, sewage systems and park buildings in many cities and towns. Realizing that the WPA might be a way to get the proposed Glen structures built, Lida (illegible letters) Tall, head of the Normal School, and Stella Brown, with general support of the institution, submitted a proposal. The \$55,000 proposal was approved in October of 1935, and by May of 1936, after obtaining an additional \$19,000 supplemental budget, the project was completed."

During the Depression, a woman's dream was connected with the noble idea of the Works Progress Administration and something beautiful was created. In more modern days, by contrast, we have let both Glen Woods and the unemployed fall apart. And this phenomenon is repeated every day, all across the nation. Crumbling historic sites, jobless Americans looking for work, and the failure of our society to connect the dots. Is it too melodramatic to say, "It's a crime"?

When it was completed, Glen Woods was a monument to what we can accomplish when we work together. Its subsequent deterioration is a symbol of what happens when we forget to work together.

But in times of cultural apathy, there are always those who go against the grain and take action. Students have come together to clean up trash, and Jim Hull, the director of Glen Woods, has been successful in restoring some of the structures. Mr. Hull has a long-term plan for restoration, but it will be an uphill struggle. Unlike Stella Brown, Mr. Hull does not have the assistance of \$74,000 in WPA and local contributing funds (about 1.2 million in today's dollars).

Let us hope that Mr. Hull, Towson University students, and others are successful in rehabilitating one of the best areas of New Deal history in Maryland. While our Congress bickers one day, and twiddles its thumbs the next, the people who are working to restore and maintain our history will need all the help & hope they can get.

\*\*\*Note: The development of Glen Woods seems to have started prior to the WPA's involvement. Before the WPA was created, there was a Maryland

Emergency Relief Administration (MERA, circa 1933-35). The University of Maryland College Park Archives has photos of work being performed at Glen Woods in both their MERA collection and their WPA collection.

### Sources of Information

- (1) Photograph collections at the University of Maryland College Park Archives.
- (2) Information plaques at Glen Woods.
- (3) Correspondence & conversation with Jim Hull, director of Glen Woods.

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## Personalities from the 1930s: Francis Townsend (1867-1960): A Catalyst for Social Security

By Bill Barry



*(Francis Townsend, right. Image provided courtesy of the Social Security Administration)*



“Dear Mr. President.” “I’m 72 years old and have no one to take care of me.”—letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1934)

There is myth and there is history and there are moments when it is difficult to distinguish when the myth ends and history begins. In 1933, a 66-year-old doctor who had been laid off as a public health officer for the city of Long Beach, CA, supposedly looked out his window and saw three elderly women searching through his trash for food. The doctor cursed the situation that drove the women to such desperation and said to his wife that “he wanted to yell until God and the whole country heard him.”

“A torrent of invectives tore out of me, the big blast of all the bitterness that had been building in me for years,” he later wrote. “I swore and I ranted, and I let my voice bellow with a wild hatred I had for things as they were.”

The man was Dr. Francis Earl Townsend and his plan was simple: it was unfair that people who had built this country should, in their old age, be forced to live in destitution. Townsend proposed that each citizen over the age of 60 receive a monthly stipend of \$150.00 (at a time when the average tradesman earned \$ .61/per hour, slightly more than \$100.00 for a full month’s work, if such was even available at the bottom of the Depression). The pension would end the dependency of the elderly on their children and would be considered a right, earned by decades of hard work, and not charity.

Under the Townsend Plan, the recipients would be required to spend all of this income within a month. Pension money would expand the economy, leading to increased tax revenues to further fund the plan so that it would be self-supporting. Money for initial payments would be gained from a sales tax of 2% on all business transactions.

While much of the legislation proposed by the New Deal represented *noblesse oblige*—wealthy people looking out for, and often down on, other citizens—the Townsend movement rose from the bottom up and involved millions of Americans in a social movement that resulted in the now hotly-debated Social Security program.

In *New Horizons: An Autobiography*, Dr. Townsend said his plan “first saw the light of day in cold print back on September 30, 1933, in the vox pop columns of the *Long Beach Press-Telegram*.” It is easy to understand why a proposal like this would appeal to many *Press Telegram* readers because California doubled its 65-and-older population between 1920-1930 and in Long Beach, a third of the population was elderly.

More important than simply proposing this radical plan, Dr. Townsend and his main supporter, a real estate entrepreneur named Robert Earl Clements, created a movement, although Dr. Townsend called it “advertising.” As Townsend described it in his autobiography, “First, I drew up a Townsend petition, comprising only a few lines, directed to our local congressman. Then I inserted a one-inch advertisement in our evening paper asking elderly men and women who had nothing better to do to call at my office the following morning. The advertisement told them they could help me circulate a petition that might, possibly, result in alleviating the distress of the thousands who had become victims of the depression. . . . The nation-wide Townsend organization was born the following morning, in November of 1933, in a little eight-by-ten room in the rear of a real estate office. Its personnel at that time consisted of one member—the author.”

Volunteers got petitions signed and pamphlets distributed, convincing printers and building owners to support the cause. The Old Age Revolving Pension (OARP), Ltd., was founded in January, 1934, “to promote and secure by means of education and ever other means, the adoption of The US Government . . . of plans and laws providing for the pensioning of its citizens.” In February, 1934, they hired their first canvasser and within several months, the movement had grown by the thousands, even if the financial structure—with commissions and subcontracting—looked like a pyramid scheme. In June, 1934, Chester J. McDonald began to publish a 16-page newsletter, *The Modern Crusader*.

According to historian Kevin Starr, “By January 1935 a half million Americans had joined Townsend Clubs and were sending nearly \$1 million in dues and other donations into the movement’s headquarters.” That same year, a newly elected Congressman from Los Angeles arrived in Washington DC and promptly introduced legislation to implement The Townsend Plan and Dr. Townsend made the cover of *Newsweek*. By 1936, membership in Townsend

Clubs surpassed 2.1 million people, and *The Townsend National Weekly* was earning roughly a quarter-million dollars a year in advertising fees for support stockings, constipation remedies, and other geriatric products. "In terms of yearly coverage in the *New York Times*," Edwin Amenta wrote in his history of the movement, the Townsend Plans rank "as the eighth-most publicized U.S. social movement organization of the twentieth century."

In May, 1936, *The New Republic* attacked the movement, claiming that the Townsendites were "economic illiterates held together chiefly by the burning conviction that our civilization could do far more for the aged — and for everybody — than it does. Mussolini in Italy, Hitler in Germany, began their rise to power by making promises strikingly similar to the fundamental concepts of the Townsend Plan; and their first followers, though their average age was doubtless lower, were much like the adherents of that plan today. That is one reason why the movement, for all the revelations regarding it in Washington, still needs watching, and will for a long time to come."

A variant of the Townsend Plan, colorfully called The Ham and Eggs Movement, was started in California to advocate for a state pension plan in which any unemployed resident over the age of 50 would get "warrants" for \$30 every Thursday and—to stimulate the state economy—the money would be taxed weekly until spent. A movement to enact this plan was narrowly defeated in an initiative election 1938 but Upton Sinclair had included a state pension proposal in his EPIC platform when he ran for governor in 1934.

In 1935, Dr. Townsend handed in to President Roosevelt a petition supporting OARP that had been signed by more than 20 million people. As often happened with the radical social movements of the 1930s, FDR—prodded especially by Secretary of Labor Francis Perkins—introduced a much more limited "old age" protection in The Social Security Act in 1935. FDR's plan initially provided only lump sums and did not begin monthly payments until 1942. Dr. Townsend claimed that Roosevelt's social security legislation was completely inadequate and in 1936 joined with Father Charles Coughlin, Gerald L. K. Smith and followers of the late Huey Long, to form the National Union of Social Justice.

In 1936, Dr. Townsend was prosecuted by the U.S. Department of Justice for contempt of Congress for storming out of a Congressional hearing but FDR



commuted Dr. Townsend's 30 day prison sentence. Townsend died in Los Angeles in 1960.

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For further background on the Townsend movement, *New Horizons: An Autobiography* (1943) is the place to start. *When Movements Matter: The Townsend Plan and the Rise of Social Security* by Edwin Amenta (2006) is a thorough history while Kevin Starr's *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (1996) also covers the Townsend movement. An article, "Dr. Francis Everett Townsend, Citizen Wonk," by Conor Friedersdorf <http://theamericanscene.com/2010/09/14/dr-francis-everett-townsend-citizen-wonk> includes comparisons to contemporary politics. The Social Security Administration has a wonderful history of pensions generally, and of Social Security in particular, at <http://www.ssa.gov/history/briefhistory3.html>.

Bill Barry is the retired Director of Labor Studies at The Community College of Baltimore County and developed a course, The History of the 1930s, which will be offered again at CCBC-Essex in the Spring, 2013, semester <http://faculty.ccbcmd.edu/~wbarry/History%20of%201930s.html>

## Our New Deal Benefit Today!



(*Left:* Workers pouring concrete for the Johnson's Pond Dam, 1936. Photo by the WPA, provided courtesy of the University of Maryland College Park Archives. *Right:* Johnson's Pond today. Part of the top of the dam can be seen at the far end of the pond. Photo taken by Brent McKee, 2011)

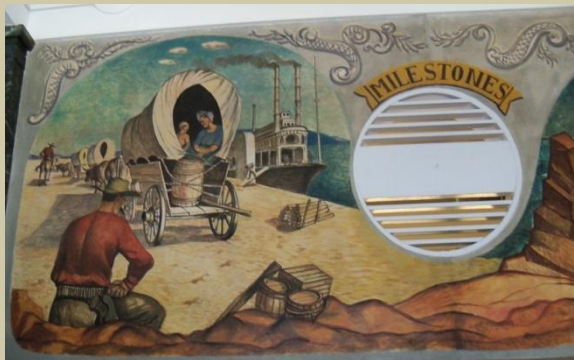
Johnson's Pond is located in Salisbury, Maryland. The dam creating the pond was built by the WPA in 1936 and is still in operation today. The pond is

used for fishing and boating. Fish species in the pond include bass, bluegill, “black crappie, pumpkinseed sunfish, yellow perch, white perch, chain pickerel, brown bullhead catfish and common carp”

(<http://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/recreational/fwhatjohnsonspnd.html>).

Johnson’s Pond—and Johnson’s Pond Dam—is yet another example of how government investment in infrastructure, and the labor of the unemployed, is being utilized & enjoyed by present-day Marylanders.

## New Deal Art



*(Photos by Brent McKee, 2012. Four sections of same mural.)*

The above mural is in the Towson Post Office at 101 West Chesapeake Avenue. According to the *New Deal Art Registry*, it was commissioned by the U.S. Treasury, and painted by Nicolai Cikovsky in 1939

(<http://www.newdealartregistry.org/artist/Cikovskynicolai/>).

## Neat Links

**New Deal Archaeology:** This web project was created “to promote the study of archaeology conducted under the auspices of federal work relief funding during the Great Depression, and to promote research using field records and archaeological collections generated as part of these New Deal-funded archaeological investigations.”

<http://newdealarchaeology.com/about/>

**College course at the Community College of Baltimore County:** “History of the 1930s”:

<http://faculty.ccbcmd.edu/~wbarry/History%20of%201930s.html>

(A section of this course is being planned for Spring Semester 2013)

## Correction for the August 2012 Newsletter

(For the article: “The Civilian Conservation Corps at Fort Frederick”)

The Williams farmhouse no longer remains on the property. It was torn down by the CCC and they constructed the park superintendent’s residence near the farmhouse site. This building remains on site today as a souvenir shop. The Williams family actually sold the property in 1912 to a man named Cavanaugh, who ultimately sold the property to the state ten years later, in 1922. However, historic structures do remain on the property today. Aside from the CCC constructed buildings, there is a structure near the maintenance shop of off Route 56 that the Williams constructed at the turn of the twentieth century and served as one of Washington County’s first Colored Free Schools. These various uses similarly reflect the changes wrought within the fort and its surrounding property over time, from defensive structure, to pasture, to a place of opportunity for many.

\*\*\*This information was received via email from Ross Kimmel, retired MD State Parks Historian, on August 5, 2012.

## Bios

**Brent McKee** is a board member of the National New Deal Preservation Association, a volunteer for the Living New Deal mapping project, and creator of "WPA Today," a web project designed to help preserve the history of the Works Progress Administration, particularly in Maryland ([www.wpatoday.org](http://www.wpatoday.org)). He holds a Master of Public Policy degree from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. He can be reached at [wpatoday@gmail.com](mailto:wpatoday@gmail.com).

**Colleen Walter** is active in the history field through a variety of organizations. She works as both staff archivist and gallery assistant at the Benjamin Banneker Historical Park and Museum. She also does on site living history interpretation at the National Colonial Farm, Accokeek Foundation. Her interest in the New Deal and the work of the CCC in particular came from her work with the MD Department of Natural Resources Committee for Maryland Conservation History. She continues to serve them as an active member and secretary of the Foundation, which recently earned non-profit 501C-3 status. Her master's thesis for the University of Maryland, Baltimore County focused on the three pronged impact of the Corps upon the nation- at environmental, economic, and social levels for both the enrollees and local populations.

## Can You Help?

Through our newsletter (and other activities) we're trying to raise awareness and interest in Maryland's New Deal history. We are also hoping to start a non-profit organization to preserve, present, and promote this history (possibly including the entire Mid-Atlantic area). If you can help in any way, e.g., information leads, article submissions, technical suggestions, we would appreciate it!