

Great Depression and the New Deal



A 1926 hurricane left boats on the streets of Miami.

Although there was an economic boom in Florida during the early 1920s, the economy went downhill as the decade came to an end. Two severe hurricanes damaged a large portion of South Florida. The first one hit the Miami and Fort Lauderdale areas in the middle of the night, which came as a surprise to many people including tourists. Severe flooding and wind damage crippled the community. The second one hit the Palm Beach area, which caused Lake Okeechobee to flood and drown over 2,000 people in nearby communities.

The next disaster occurred when there was an outbreak of the Mediterranean fruit fly in a grapefruit grove near Orlando. These insects quickly spread across the state and killed off most of the citrus crop. Because of a quarantine imposed on all remaining citrus, this was another blow to Florida's economy. These two hurricanes, the crop destruction, and an attempt to recover from the previous wars put a financial burden on Florida.

The Great Depression

All across the United States, people were facing economic difficulties. By 1929, our country was facing a depression, which is a situation when there isn't any money and there are very few jobs open to the public. "The Great Depression" began when the stock market fell. This was called the Great Stock Market Crash of 1929. People who invested their money in stocks began to lose all of their money. They couldn't pay their bank loans or personal bills.

In 1931, the Florida State Legislature created a State Racing Commission which legalized betting at both horse and dog racing tracks and at all Jai Alai frontons. When people won money from betting, a tax was taken out of the money. This partially aided the state, but not as much as the legislature planned. After all, people did not have enough money to bet! This idea, that the Legislature hoped would pull Florida out of the depression, did not work.

The depression affected the nation's banks as well. By 1932, many banks had closed their doors. This meant that people lost their savings. Without money, families could not afford a place to live or adequate food to eat. They also couldn't buy goods and services, which meant most businesses had to close as well. Over 12 million people across the U.S. were unemployed at the peak of the depression. In Florida, there were over 90,000 families affected by the depression.

During the first years of the Great Depression, Florida's government did little to help people. But the federal government gave help by providing Floridians with financial aid called relief. One fourth of the people who lived in Florida were on relief.

Tourism supported Florida's economy a little during the winter months. Many people drove to Florida to enjoy the warm climate. Because Floridians were facing economic difficulties, however, Florida State Police were stationed at Florida's border; if people did not have enough money or a job to support them, they were not allowed to enter the state. Florida was having a hard enough time supporting residents without increasing the extra number of people who wanted to live in a year-round warm state but who didn't have the means to take care of themselves or their family.

The New Deal

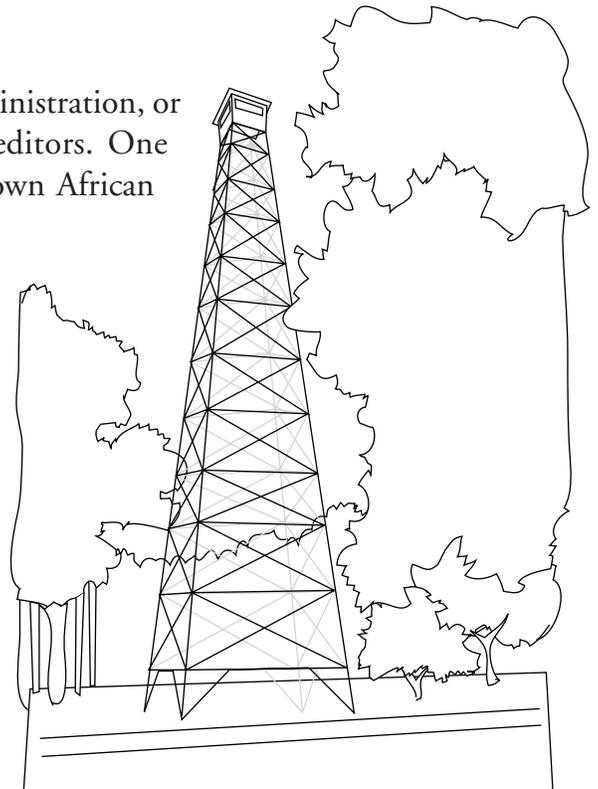
In 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt became President of the United States. His presidency became known as the "New Deal" because of the promises that he made to Americans. This deal consisted of ideas to get the country and people back on their feet. Soon, millions of Americans were working again. One of the programs was called the Civilian Conservation Corps, or CCC. Young men from all over the country lived in work camps. About 40,000 Floridians participated in the CCC. They received food and clothing and their paychecks were sent home to their families. Some of the work in Florida consisted of cutting down millions of trees to build fire lines. The CCC also planted 13 million trees in Florida and created many of the state parks and wildlife preserves. Other New Deal workers built federal buildings and schools.

The CCC also rebuilt the Overseas Railroad connecting Miami to Key West, originally built by Henry Flagler, but destroyed in 1935 by a hurricane. The reconstruction finished in 1938 and the railroad was opened once again. It helped bring tourism to Key West. It is 100 miles long and has more than 40 bridges. Florida owns many of its conservation projects, parks, and preserves thanks to President Roosevelt's CCC.

Another New Deal program was called the Works Progress Administration, or WPA. This program gave jobs to researchers, writers, and editors. One Floridian writer, Zora Neale Hurston, became a very well known African American author who wrote about growing up in Florida.

Through the New Deal era, many Florida businesses began to redevelop. Industries grew and Florida's banking business was becoming stronger. Alfred Du Pont, a wealthy businessman, took control of a few Florida banks and reestablished them. He bought forestland and used it to start the paper industry in Florida. Paper mills sprang up all around the state.

The citrus industry began to ship fruit to other parts of the country, and by 1939, three airlines scheduled flights into Florida. Because of new roads, businesses, and air flights, tourism started to flourish. The United States was coming out of the depression by the end of the 1930s. Once again, people were able to find jobs and take care of their families.



The CCC built this fire tower near the Olustee Battlefield.