

KANSAS HISTORY

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WPA Recreational Activity, Kansas City, Kansas, ca. 1941.

The Work Projects Administration, which provided employment to millions of Americans during the Great Depression, adapted its program to the needs of a nation at war during the early 1940s. The WPA's "service division" launched numerous war-related projects, one of which concentrated on providing recreational activities for servicemen and women stationed in Kansas. When Congress terminated the WPA in 1943, many communities continued the programs the New Deal agency had started.

Before the war the WPA operated about fifty recreation programs across the Sunflower State; by January 1943 their agenda had changed. Consolidation occurred and large-scale recreation programs and centers for "soldiers, sailors, and defense workers" were opened at Junction City, Leavenworth, Manhattan, Kansas City, Olathe, Lawrence, Salina, Marysville, Wichita, Parsons, and Columbus. They were staffed by WPA and community volunteers.

Team sports were popular among servicemen stationed at Kansas bases. Many participated in intramural competition while others competed in contests between rival service installations, defense plants, area colleges, and local semipro teams. Although the specifics about the game depicted in the above photograph are unknown, it is likely that this baseball or softball game, sponsored by the Kansas City WPA, featured naval aviators from Fairfax

Field's naval reserve air base in Kansas City, Kansas. By 1941 this facility had become inadequate, and in 1942 it was replaced by the U.S. Naval Reserve Aviation Base (later Naval Air Station), Olathe, Kansas.

The Johnson County station was officially commissioned on October 1, 1942. Two months later the USNRAB Clippers opened their basketball season with a 32 to 19 loss to the Oklahoma Aggies. On December 12 the Clippers took to the hardwoods against the Phog Allen-coached Kansas University team at the Municipal Auditorium in Kansas City and defeated the Jayhawks by a score of 40 to 29. The following spring an outstanding "hardball" team was organized. The Flying Jayhawk, the base's weekly, announced the Fliers' schedule on June 26, 1943, and on July 10 reported the team's season opening victory over North American Aviation (Kansas City, Kansas) defense workers; the Fliers suffered their first defeat a week later at the hands of the Pratt-Whitney Eagles at Ruppert Stadium, Kansas City, Missouri.

The inside front covers of the 1994 issues of Kansas History will feature projects sponsored by the WPA in Kansas in the 1930s and 1940s. The WPA is also the subject of one of the Kansas Museum of History's new special exhibits, "Steeped in Service: The WPA in Kansas," on display through September 7, 1994.

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Cover: Women's defense work in WWII was featured on this 1942 Collier's cover. Women's contribution to Wichita aircraft production is the subject of this issue's "Uncle Sam Wanted Them Too!" Back cover: WWII poster promoting Victory Gardens, a major home-front project during the war.

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Be sure!

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