

New Deal Archaeology: Pennsylvanians Dig During the Depression, 1934-1940



In 1938, a New Deal excavator left a broken shovel head (inset) behind at the Martz Rockshelter in Somerset County, which was found by archaeologists working at the site in the 1990s.



New Deal archaeologists often excavated through the winter, when regular jobs were scarcest. The workers shown here at Peck 1 in Somerset County discovered many important artifacts, including clay pot fragments with burned food residues (inset) that allowed modern archaeologists to radiocarbon date the site to ca. A.D. 1375.



Boy scouts watch a New Deal worker excavate at Fort Augusta in Northumberland County. Fort Augusta was built in 1756 and used during the French and Indian War.



Few families were untouched by the ravages of the Great Depression (1929-1941). Forgotten men and women eked out a living in the shadows of society, having lost their jobs, their homes, sometimes their families... having lost all hope. After his inauguration in 1933, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt began a New Deal for the American people, creating work relief programs that helped Americans cope with the Depression, and restored their hope and sense of self worth. Archaeology projects were well suited for work relief because they were "shovel ready" and the nation's buried past was still very much a mystery to all.

Farmers, coal miners, railroad workers, and other ordinary Pennsylvanians brought their practical knowledge and skills—and in many cases their own shovels and trowels—to the grand adventure that is archaeology. They uncovered hidden clues about Pennsylvania's past and forever changed how we view the Keystone state. Pennsylvania's New Deal archaeologists excavated in Bradford, Bucks, Chester, Crawford, Delaware, Erie, Fayette, Greene, Luzerne, Lycoming, Montgomery, Northumberland, Somerset, Venango, and Warren Counties. Modern archaeologists return again and again to the lasting legacy they left behind—a legacy carefully kept in trust by our state's museums and historic places.



The background image shows the approximate location where New Deal excavations took place at Peck 1.

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Save the Past for the Future • Make a Future for the Past

www.pennsylvaniaarchaeology.com and www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/new_deal_archaeology/4671

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