



**State of Tennessee
Department of State
Tennessee State Library and Archives**

**Tennessee Emergency Relief Administration Records,
1933-1935**

RG 410

COLLECTION SUMMARY

Creator:

Tennessee. Emergency Relief Administration

Inclusive Dates:

1933-1935

Scope & Content:

Consists of disbursement forms related to Memphis residents seeking relief and administrative bulletins issued to all Tennessee county emergency relief administrators in 1933-1935.

The forms contain a shopper or county emergency relief official's itemized disbursements of groceries costing up to around five dollars. Articles typically included foodstuffs. On a December 4, 1933, disbursement form Ida Cross (identified as "colored"), ordered flour, meal, lard, sugar, syrup, milk, eggs, butter, peanut butter, fresh vegetables, soap, salt, (baking) soda, cocoa, coffee, and tea at a cost of \$2.25. A retailer then filled the order. In the blank captioned "Beneficiary," Ida signed with her mark of a cross. Citizens also requested standard items like cheese, cereal, potatoes, cooking oil, canned tomatoes, baking powder, beans, rice, spaghetti, and coal oil. All disbursement forms are dated between November and December 1933, with the exception of a few that are undated.

The bulletins, which are numbered 4-348, illuminate the New Deal's attempt to afford work relief rather than dole relief and to "allow opportunities for participants to perform activities related to their ordinary occupations" (H. Bruce Throckmorton, *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* website). The

state's chief emergency relief administrator addressed the bulletins to all county administrators.

Physical Description/Extent:

2 cubic feet

Accession/Record Group Number:

RG 410

Language:

English

Permanent Location:

RG 410

Repository:

Tennessee State Library and Archives, 403 Seventh Avenue North, Nashville, Tennessee, 37243-0312

Administrative/Biographical History

On May 12, 1933, Congress passed the Federal Emergency Relief Act. Less than two weeks later, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Harry Hopkins as director of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). The agency distributed grants-in-aid to states whose legislatures met certain conditions and provided matching funds, which Tennessee did. Tennessee Emergency Relief Administration (TERA) projects were spread across the state. In Memphis, it distributed food, clothing, and coal to the needy and hired men to dig ditches and clean streets. According to Throckmorton (previously cited), in Putnam County on the Cumberland Plateau, it built a school at Gentry. Kingsport sought a \$12,500 grant to create relief projects.

The bulletins provide a substantive glimpse into the mechanics of TERA's short life. According to Throckmorton, President Roosevelt and Hopkins realized that "the winter of 1933-1934 would be economically severe if something were not done quickly." By 1935, it became obvious the federal program was not working effectively, so the federal government discontinued it. This development led to the creation of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which assumed TERA's work relief program.

Lt. Colonel Walter L. Simpson served as TERA's first administrator, and it was he who signed most of the mimeographed bulletins. Early on, Simpson recognized that "inter-relations between the relief work, rehabilitation, and social

service (case work) will necessarily demand that close cooperation be established between the various divisions of the [Civil Works Administration] for the different phases of the relief program” (Bulletin 4). The 300+ bulletins address a wide-ranging variety of matters and offer guidance in dealing with family subsistence and community gardens, women’s projects and wages, displaced farm families, urban and rural projects, white collar workers, seed distribution, canning, politics and religion in the workplace, drought relief, food distribution, nursery school lunches, clothing requisition, crop and chattel mortgages, and the chronic poor.

Organization/Arrangement of Materials

The records are arranged alphabetically by document type.

Conditions of Access and Use

Restrictions on Access:

No restrictions.

Restrictions on Use and Reproduction:

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Index Terms

Personal/Family Names:

Brown, Barton B.
Hite, Elizabeth M.
Hopkins, Harry L. (Harry Lloyd), 1890-1946
Roosevelt, Franklin D. (Franklin Delano), 1882-1945
Simpson, Walter L.

Corporate Names/Organizations/Government Bodies:

Tennessee. Emergency Relief Administration
United States. Federal Civil Works Administration
United States. Federal Emergency Relief Administration
United States. Works Progress Administration

Subjects:

Depressions -- 1929 -- United States
Food relief -- United States
Public welfare -- United States

Geographic Names:

Memphis (Tenn.) -- History -- 20th century -- Sources
Tennessee -- Politics and government -- 20th century -- Sources

Document Types:

Bulletins
Forms (documents)

Provenance and Acquisition:

Specific provenance is unknown, though each bulletin is stamped
“Vanderbilt University Library” and carries the Library of Congress call
number T361.6 T29b.

Processing and Administrative Information**Preferred Citation:**

Tennessee Emergency Relief Administration Records, 1933-1935, RG
410, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee

Processing Information:

Records were processed by Susan Gordon, September 2019.

DETAILED COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

CONTAINER LIST

Contents/Item Title	Date	Box	Folder
Bulletins 4-31	Mar. 24- Apr. 10, 1934	1	1
Bulletins F32-79	Apr. 10-May 1, 1934	1	2
Bulletins 80-129	May 3-Jun. 26, 1934	1	3
Bulletins 130-169	Jun. 19-Aug. 4, 1934	1	4
Bulletins 170-229	Aug. 4-Nov. 13, 1934	1	5
Bulletins 230-279	Nov. 13, 1934- Feb. 2, 1935	1	6
Bulletins 280-319	Feb. 4-Apr. 3, 1935	1	7
Bulletins 320-348	Apr. 5-Jun. 6, 1935	1	8
Disbursement forms	Nov. 1933	2	1
Disbursement forms	Dec. 1-3, 1933	2	2
Disbursement forms	Dec. 4, 1933	2	3
Disbursement forms	Dec. 5, 1933	2	4
Disbursement forms	Dec. 6, 1933	2	5
Disbursement forms	Dec. 7, 1933	2	6
Disbursement forms	Dec. 8, 1933	2	7
Disbursement forms	Dec. 9, 1933	2	8
Disbursement forms	Dec. 11-15, 1933	2	9
Disbursement forms	undated	2	10