

D E D I C A T I O N

This paper is dedicated to the memory of my father,  
J. M. Money - Father of Skyline Farms Colony

and

to my Seniors, past, present and future who are  
fulfilling the original goal of the colony - to  
become good substantial citizens.

by  
Joyce Money Kennamer  
1978

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF SKYLINE FARMS:  
SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

The times were the 1930's. Our nation was in the throes of the great depression. The number of unemployed in the United States rose to a record 14 million when more than 25 percent of the labor force was out of work. This was the situation that Franklin Delano Roosevelt found when he was inaugurated as President of the United States on March 4, 1933. A new era in American history began under Roosevelt. He called his program the New Deal. Roosevelt said he wanted to help the average American, whom he called the "forgotten man." He promised relief, reform and recovery in the programs that he introduced.<sup>1</sup>

Jackson County, located in the extreme northeast section of Alabama, was one area that received a large amount of financial aid from the federal government to speed recovery.

My father, J. M. Money was elected Probate Judge of Jackson County in 1928. He took office on July 1, 1929, prior to the stock market crash of October, 1929. As the depression deepened, Jackson County, primarily agricultural, suffered deeply. Much of my fathers time was spent in

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<sup>1</sup>"Unemployment," World Book Encyclopeda, Volume IXX, 1964, p. 13.

planning ways to aid the destitute people of our area. When he heard of government programs to aid the people, he would investigate and seek these programs for our residents. Two projects that he had much success in getting was a road up, across and down Cumberland Mountain and the Skyline Farms Colony. Here is the story as I have heard it from the people involved and the newspaper accounts of our county that verify the building of the road up Cumberland Mountain which made possible the creation of the Skyline Farms Colony.

Under President Herbert Hoover the Reconstruction Finance Corporation was established in 1932 enabling the federal government to aid business. Congress authorized the RFC to lend up to \$300,000,000 to the states for relief.<sup>2</sup>

This is the first account of relief programs listed in our paper.

In February of 1933 the Board of Commission of Jackson County purchased four trucks to use in transporting men to various relief programs. It is said a plan is afoot to build a road up Maynards Cove to connect with the upper end of Paint

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<sup>2</sup>"Hoover, Herbert," World Book Encyclopedia, Volume IX, 1964, p. 294.

Rock Valley and opening up that vast area known as Cumberland Mountain which heretofore had no chance of development."<sup>3</sup>

Judge J. M. Money announced plans for the construction of a road to connect parts of the valley with Cumberland Mountain. Job applications are to be taken immediately. To be eligible you must be on the county relief rolls.<sup>4</sup>

Five thousand applications have been taken for work on road construction. Three thousand five hundred have been assigned to work under 73 overseers throughout the county.<sup>5</sup>

The road at Tupelo which is at the foot of Cumberland Mountain was started in March, 1933. The work was done by hand with the men using sledge hammers, pick axes, shovels and wheelbarrows. Oxen were used for snaking trees and boulders from the site. Dynamite was used when absolutely necessary. The oxen were furnished by the county.

This was backbreaking work. Muscles and sweat of desperate men were the means of building the winding road.

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<sup>3</sup>"Observation of the Editor", The Progressive Age, 2 February, 1933, Section 1, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>"Road to be Built," The Progressive Age, 16 February 1933, Section 1, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>"Applications Taken," The Progressive Age, 23 February 1933.

So many men needed to work that the Relief Administration decided each man could work two 10 hour days per week at \$1.00 a day. My father went to Birmingham to buy shoes out of his own pocket for the men who had none. My brother, Clyde Money, took the picks and shovels out each day as the trucks left Scottsboro at six each morning. Part of the men had no lunches, so Mr. Hal Cunningham, a farmer who lived at the foot of the mountain, gave bushels of sweet potatoes that were roasted over an open fire each day. This was done out of the goodness of his heart so that the men would not be hungry.<sup>6</sup>

As the five mile road neared completion plans were being made for a big occasion to celebrate the opening of the road.

The big barbecue held on Cumberland Mountain Wednesday, November 1 was one of the best held in this county in many years. It is estimated that fully 1,000 people were in attendance. The barbecue was held to celebrate the opening of the road up Cumberland Mountain that will

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<sup>6</sup>Interview with Clyde Money, Former Store Owner at Skyline, Scottsboro, Alabama, 28 May 1978.

eventually join the two great valleys, Tennessee and Paint Rock. It has been a stupendous task and hundreds of people marveled at the progress that has been made in this short time. The grade up the mountain is splendid, not over 7 percent in any place and is regarded as a model in engineering. The free dinner was made possible by the public spirited citizens of the county who provided several beef, hogs, goats and sheep and the businessmen, together with candidates, who donated the bread.

The R. F. C. men who worked on the project are justly proud of their work. A road is being completed on top of the mountain. The gas and oil for the work is being furnished to the county by the Pierce interests on the mountain and the work is being done by the R. F. C. and the county. Drs. F. D. and R. V. Pierce of Buffalo, New York own 8,000 acres of timber and mineral land on Cumberland Mountain where they mined coal from 1907 to 1920.

The program began at 11 o'clock. An enthusiastic address was made by Judge Money who made a full and complete report of how R. F. C. and county funds had been expended. He traced the early efforts of Jackson County to secure its part of the \$300,000,000 appropriated by Congress for relief work and stated that he and the county Commission had gone to Montgomery and by really going after it, we were the 4th county in the state to get its part of the relief. He told of the self sacrificing work of the Commission in putting over these projects and that they worked day in and day out without compensation. He explained that he and the Commission had nothing to do with putting people on the R. F. C. but that this was placed in the hands of the Social Service Department of the State and County and that the Commission's job was to provide the jobs after they had been put on the roll. He attacked those who made false statements regarding

the amount spent on this Cumberland Mountain road and said that up to the present the R. F. C. had spent \$12,473.75 on this project.<sup>7</sup>

Even before the road was completed, my father and the Commission were thinking of other ways to relieve the county of relief rolls. For several years the J. F. D. Pierce Patent Medicine Company, had wanted to sell the 8,000 acres of land they owned on Cumberland Mountain. This land had previously been used for mining coal, but was not a successful operation.

The Federal Emergency Relief Administration was created by Congress in 1934. Harry Hopkins, the F. E. R. A. director, announced that new types of homesteading in rural areas were being started. In charge in our state was Thad Holt, director of the Alabama Rural Rehabilitation Program. My father got in touch with our two United States Senators John Bankhead and Hugo Black and told them of the Pierce land that was for sale on Cumberland Mountain. He was told to get in touch with Thad Holt in Montgomery.<sup>8</sup>

The following action was taken and reported.

Probate Judge J. M. Money, chairman of the Jackson County Rehabilitation Commission, and a delegation went to Montgomery November

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<sup>7</sup>"Large Crowd Attend Barbecue," The Progressive Age, 2 November 1933, Section 1, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup>Interview with Clyde Money, Former Store Owner at Skyline Farms, Scottsboro, Alabama, 28 May 1978.



30 and interviewed the Federal Rehabilitation Commission for Alabama with the view of getting one or more of the federal homesteading colonies located on Cumberland and Sand Mountain in Jackson County.

The facts were placed before the commission showing our county had some unusually desirable features for such projects and pleading the full cooperation of our officials and our people with the government in bringing successes if we are favored with such colonies. The local delegation believed the State and Federal men were favorably impressed and the matter will be constantly agitated until our county gets some of this federal allocation.

The territory being offered the government is on the rich and fertile Cumberland and Sand Mountain with Cumberland Mountain having call as first project because it is ideally situated and endowed by nature for this great social experiment. Cumberland Mountain is approximately eight miles wide and thirty miles long. The rehabilitation

plan of the government is to get away from having to sustain families with direct relief and to make them self sustaining and land owners. The government proposes to lease the land for a period of 3 years with the option of buying the same. The homesteading families are to be given financial assistance to build a home and necessary outhouses upon the land, paid for clearing up the land, his payment in part to revert to the purchase of the land which will be owned by the homesteader after a certain time. Many families from over the Tennessee Valley region will have their farms flooded within the next 3 or 4 years by the TVA. New homes must be found for these people. Jackson County could easily take care of 1,000 new families through this homestead method.

This Federal Rehabilitation Program is part of President Roosevelt's pledge to the "forgotten man" and it will mean the making of good substantial citizens of thousands

of families that were dependent upon charity.

The Jackson County plan was worked out by Judge Money and Mr. Ross, Jackson County Work Director who have been keeping in touch with the Federal Rehabilitation movement since its beginning. The delegation accompanying Judge Money to Montgomery were W. C. Selby, H. G. Graham, A. D. Kirby, John O'Neal, J. L. Staple, J. F. Proctor, J. C. Wall and Jack Reid.<sup>9</sup>

According to Clyde Money the people of Jackson County waited with baited breath to hear if we were going to be among the chosen few. As The Progressive Age came out on December 13, 1934 large headlines proclaimed our victory.

FARM COLONY ASSURED IN JACKSON COUNTY

Cumberland Mountain will be the location of a homestead colony. Formal approval was received by letter on Friday, December 7th. This project is to be made up of approximately two hundred farm families, who have been placed on the Rural Rehabilitation Program and who are anxious to become self sustaining

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<sup>9</sup>"Quest in Montgomery," Jackson County Sentinel, 6 December 1934, Section 1, p. 1.

and will be willing to work and establish themselves. The colony is to be located on Cumberland Mountain on the Pierce Development Company's land. This company is granting a three year lease to the County Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, at the end of which time the rehabilitants may have option to buy his own tract of land at a rate per acre which is fixed at the present time. This project is to be on a cooperative basis and each person will help build the houses and clear the land for other persons. A bunkhouse will be built first to house the first group of twenty five men while they are clearing the land and constructing their homes. As soon as this twenty five move into their homes, others will be taken until about two hundred families have colonized on the project.<sup>10</sup>

Colonists are to be made up of Group I and Group II families. Group I are those on the Farm Program who were not fortunate enough to have suitable land and homes and

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<sup>10</sup>"Farm Colony Assured in Jackson County," The Progressive Age, 13 December 1934, Section 1, p. 1.

money will be advanced to them to make a ✓  
crop. The Group II people, having no land  
were to receive only subsistence.

The plan is as follows: Suitable barracks  
have been built to house and feed men who may  
come from any part of the county to work out  
a home, where they can remain through the  
week and return home over Sunday. Those  
who find it impossible to leave their  
families may travel back and forth on  
trucks that leave Scottsboro at 6:00 each  
morning. In the colony he is assigned to  
work for which he is most suited. The  
result of all this work will be a home  
and forty acres of land, which will be  
deeded to him. He is charged, together  
with his family's grocery order, with  
what it cost the government to build  
this house for him, plus the land. He  
will be credited with each days work  
he performs at the prevailing wage rate  
of the County, which is 15 cents per hour  
for everything but his land, the cost of  
which the Government plans to spread out

over a long number of years.

The houses are allotted to the men solely on their merits and the interest they show in their work. No matter what his job may be, it is rated on an equal basis with all other positions, so if a person is assigned to driving a truck or helping around the kitchen, if he shows proper interest in his work and reports regularly he will be considered for a home just as soon as the man who is directing the logging or doing carpenter work.

When developments are well under way, suitable work projects will be started to which the women will be assigned, to enable them to secure a home and work out their indebtedness to the Government.

When a subscriber moves into his home, he will be provided with means to make a crop and become self-sustaining. Crops will be potatoes, cotton, corn, soybeans and field vegetables.

Weather permitting, the first house

should be completed next week and county officials invite the public to attend. Montgomery officials have expressed their intention of being there.<sup>11</sup>

The first homestead in the Colony on Cumberland Mountain will be open for inspection. If you want to go and see this home, get in touch with your respective commissioner. Officials of the Relief Administration will be here to visit local authorities.<sup>12</sup>

The Number 1 house is located on Highway 79 at Skyline. The people of the community now refer to it as the Osborn house since the Osbornes owned it for the last 15 years or so. When I first came to Skyline to teach, <sup>number</sup> the 1 was still above the door. The Osbornes moved to Decatur in 1977 and the new owner did not know what might have happened to the original house number. As the colony grew, more homes were built. All lumber used in these homes were cut at one of the 4 sawmills operated by the colonists under direction of Ike Floyd. There were basically 3 plans, either 2, 3 or 4 bedrooms, living room and a very large kitchen. The size

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<sup>11</sup>"Relief Administration At Work on Colony," The Progressive Age, 17 January 1935, Section 1, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup>"Observation of the Edition," The Progressive Age, 31 January 1935, Section 2, p. 1.

of your home was based on how many people in your family. The looks of the homes could be varied by changing the direction it faced and by placing the porches at different angles. If homes were painted, it was a standard green. There was no electricity, water or plumbing. These homes were built so sturdy that most of them are still standing and in use today. Necessary out houses and sheds were built as well as barns to house the oxen or horse the government supplied.

An office building and a commissary were built out of sand stone. Both of these are in excellent condition after 42 years. The commissary is now called the Rock Store and the office is now a private home.

Captain Harry Ross, frequently called "Boss Ross" was the director. "Lawyer Cornelison" ran the cooperative store and his wife Lorene was the Postmistress. The government hired Dr. Zimmerman and Nurse Ola Barclay to look after the health needs of the colony. The families did pay 50¢ per month for the doctors services and \$5.00 when a baby was born.<sup>13</sup>

The first school building was hastily constructed of wood, heated with heaters made from oil drums and furnished with benches and tables that had been constructed by nailing

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<sup>13</sup>Interview with Bertha Kirby, WPA County Women Supervisor, Scottsboro, Alabama, 17 June 1978.



planks to log legs. All work was done so quickly that the bark was still on some of the logs. The teachers in this school were: Principal G. P. Helms, Orville, O'Shields, G. B. Segler, Mrs. Bill White, W. G. Johnston, Ola Vaught, Esta Reid, Virginia West, Lilah Beason and Ella Chambers.<sup>14</sup>

By 1936 the population of school age children had increased and the barrack type building was becoming obsolete. The Federal Government allocated \$25,000 for the construction of a sandstone building.

A crowd of 400 gathered at the site of the new Cumberland Farms School building Wednesday, March 11, and participated in the land breaking ceremonies preparatory to the beginning of the actual construction of the \$25,000 school and community center building. Mr. L. E. Ford, regional superintendent of construction, made a short speech and pledged the support of the Montgomery officials. He moved the first shovel of dirt for the building.

Judge Money, pioneer worker of the project, made a fine speech. He was one of the first to have a vision of the project and said he made enemies because of this

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<sup>14</sup>Interview with Lilah Beason, Former Skyline Teacher, Scottsboro, Alabama, 10 June 1978.

interest and effort to help rehabilitate men and their families who wanted to come back and take their rightful place in citizenship.

W. H. Kessler, landscape architect known over the South as one of the leading artists in his particular field, was here and lent his ideas toward the refinement of the school. Mr. Kessler was particularly interested in this phase of the work as he has done school work all over the South. He also went into several of the homes that are being built and expressed himself as being entirely satisfied with both the material and workmanship, and that the work being done blended entirely with the general thought of the work being undertaken. Other distinguished visitors who made talks were Superintendent of Education J. F. Hodges, Editor of the Progressive Age, J. S. Benson, Captain Ross and Commissioners W. C. Selby, H. G. Graham and W. Badger.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>"Land-Breaking For School Building Is Attended By Many,"  
Jackson County Sentinel, 19 March 1936, Section 1, p. 1.

This natural rock building, started in 1936, was completed and dedicated on May 7, 1938. Students were assigned to teachers in a most unusual way. The first grade teacher might have the normal 6 year old group but might also have a 10 or 14 year old who had not attended school before. This was not too successful, so shortly after this we changed to the age grouping plan. The first 9 grades were taught. At the governments insistence progressive education was incorporated into the curriculum. People from both the state and federal government taught special programs of songs, arts and crafts. Everything we asked for was given to us by the government. The school was the center of the community activities. Its 11 classrooms and auditorium was on a beautiful campus. Each spring the dogwood trees were so lovely that the community began a dogwood festival each year highlighted by a Maypole dance. This rock building was considered one of the finer school building in Alabama.<sup>16</sup>

Three hundred and fifty pupils have enrolled this fall. The age grouping plan is being used. One hundred forty of the oldest are taking a rich course in vocational work. The girls are

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<sup>16</sup>Interview with Ola Vaught, Former Skyline Teacher, Scottsboro, Alabama, 6 June 1978.

selecting patterns for new dresses. The boys have started an extensive course in agriculture. At the present time they are making a study of Winter cover crops and other soil building plants. They have made several field trips.

This is the only school in the state of Alabama that teaches Home Economics and Agricultural courses to Junior High School students.<sup>17</sup>

Ten thousand acres were added to the colony in 1936. These acres surround the present colony project of 8 thousand acres.

This project has proven so successful that the federal officials rate this colony as a number one success in every way and believe the expansion will prove of great benefit. Cumberland Farms Rehabilitation Project will be the largest in the entire South.<sup>18</sup>

There has been some confusion of this Cumberland Mountain Farms Colony with its

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<sup>17</sup>Cumberland Farms, Jackson County Sentinel, 8 October 1936, Section 1, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup>"Ten Thousand Acres Added to Colony," Jackson County Sentinel, 30 July 1936, Section 1, p. 1.

sister project Cumberland Homestead in Crossville, Tennessee. The Resettlement Administration has requested a name change.

Many names have been suggested: Alabama Mountain Farms, Alabama Skyline Farms, Alto, Roosevelt, Happy Farms, Jackson County Farms, Evergreen Farms and Rossville.

School children were given the opportunity to suggest names. A prize was offered for the pupil who suggested the name that is to be selected by the officials.<sup>19</sup>

Because of confusion over names, the new name for Cumberland Mountain Farms will be changed to Skyline Farms. The name was suggested by Mr. Robert W. Hudgens, Regional Director, Region V, Resettlement Administration, Montgomery, Alabama. The community, school and existing organizations will automatically take the new name. The letter was sent by Walter Packard, Director of Rural Resettlement Division, Washington, D. C. on February 5, 1937.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>"Cumberland Farms to Get New Name," Jackson County Sentinel, 4 February 1937, Section 1, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup>"Colony Name Is Now Skyline Farms," The Jackson County Sentinel, 18 February 1937, Section 1, p. 1.

The Colony was now well on its way to establishing the 200 farm homes that had been called for. Improvements in almost every aspect of the colonists lives were noticed. A newsletter called Skyline Farms Note was published in one of the two county papers each month. The people had started writing this in 1935 and its former name was Cumberland Farms Notes.

In these Notes all activities of the community were announced such as the May Day Festival, the Community Fair, baby contests, food and canning exhibits, ball games, PTA meetings, Boy Scout and Girl Scout meetings, the annual June singing or just any little tidbit that the colonists should be aware of.

Both the Birmingham News and the Chattanooga Times did write-ups about the Skyline Farms Colony. Excerpts of these articles, as well as pictures have been located in our county papers of 1936 and 1937.

The colonists operated a co-operative store which was built by the men themselves. Mr. Virgil Brewer, one of the original colonists and the only one of the original colonists now living on Cumberland Mountain told his story.

"I was one of the lucky ones. I was chosen to go to work on February 8, 1934. I worked two years on construction. Then in 1936 I was head cook for the ones who lived in the bunkhouses. I cooked as high as 200 biscuits a meal. In

1937 I got to move into my house. We were making nothing at first and drawing around \$7.50 a month grocery order from the co-op. Later I made \$1.00 a day. If there was any store profits, a certain per centage was set aside for community improvements with the rest of the profits to be divided among the colonists. There was no way a man and his family could eat on that \$7.50 grocery allotment so the co-op didn't show any profit so the government had to do all the improvements. It was hard and I never have understood why the government took everything back when we thought we were buying our land. I've heard some say it was like Communism, drawing supplies and working for little or no money."<sup>21</sup>

On April 29, 1937 Skyline Farms elected themselves officials, even though though they have never been an incorporated area. Five hundred attended local election and nearly 400 votes were cast. Voting stopped at 7:30 for a big community meeting, a health play on malaria and a free picture show. Votes were counted and winners were announced. District I - Bill Holman and Monroe Cox, District II - Jess Carter and Pierce Reed, District III - M. L. Lands

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<sup>21</sup>Interview with Virgil Brewer, Original Colonist, Skyline, Alabama, 2 June 1978.

and Chester Byar, District IV - Talmadge Hopper and M. B. Shrader.<sup>22</sup>

The council announced at a public meeting that Skyline Farms was such a successful project that it would go down in history the same as the Pilgrim fathers.<sup>23</sup>

Life was more pleasant for the colonists during 1937. A recreation hall was built and square dances were held once a week. One group of dancers, pickers and singers became so good they were invited to participate in several areas.

Twenty-nine musicians and traditional square dancers from Skyline Farms Colony arrived in Ashville, North Carolina for a 3 day festival. They performed at 8 p.m. each night and played on the radio Saturday morning.<sup>24</sup>

According to Mr. Chester Allen, one of the colonists and a musician, the greatest honor to come to Skyline was an invitation by Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt for the musicians and the dancers to perform in Washington, D.C. Mrs. Roosevelt took a special interest in this type of social experiment. A check was sent by her to cover their expenses.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>"Skyline Farms Elect Officials," Jackson County Sentinel, 6 May 1937, Section 1, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup>"Skyline Farms News," Jackson County Sentinel, 1 August 1937, Section 1, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup>"Skyline Farm Colony News," Jackson County Sentinel, 17 August 1937, Section 1, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup>Interview with Chester Allen, Colonist, Skyline, Alabama, 4 June 1978.



The Skyline Farms group is to sing and dance on the White House Lawn. They were invited by Mrs. Roosevelt for May 12. They are to leave for Washington on May 10th. Their expenses while in the city will be paid by Mrs. Roosevelt.<sup>26</sup>

The White House grounds rang with mountain music, hound dog wails and the shuffle of dancing feet Thursday.

Twenty-two Alabama boys and girls who helped homestead a hilltop to escape the depression, sang, danced and fiddled for 2,323 garden party guests.

The gingham clad girls and coatless boys who "threaded the needle" and "Rang up Four" were young folks from Skyline Farms, a government aided community near Scottsboro, Alabama. Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was entertaining women executives of government departments announced her entertainment had come 750 miles by car to "play" just as they do in their own community house on Cumberland Mountain.

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<sup>26</sup>"Skyline Farms Group To Sing In Washington" Jackson County Sentinel, 3 May 1938, Section 1, p. 1.

Ike Floyd, smiling homesteader in charge of timber cutting in the community was master of ceremony..

Not the least self conscious, a six piece orchestra began with "Alabama Jubilee." When they played "Fox Chase," Chester Allen who doubled on the fiddle and guitar wailed like a dog. Then the tune "Cacklin Hen" and Allen's voice still did tricks.

Eight couples danced the figures kept alive in the South despite the new modern dances.<sup>27</sup>

The group consisted of the following: Mr. and Mrs. W. I. Floyd, Willie Rodgers, Opal Holsonback, Mrs. A. Walker, Prince Whorton, Mrs. E. E. Wilson, John Lindsey, J. W. Holmand, Edith Green, Mr. and Mrs. Elton Kennamer, Mr. and Mrs. N. E. Waldrop, Walter Freeman, Juanita Jarnagin, Jane Floyd, M. L. Lands, Mr. and Mrs. Otis Sharpe, Mr. and Mrs. W. N. Ross, H. L. Green, Joe Sharpe, Clifford Anderson, Thomas Holt, Reuben Rousseau, and Chester Allen, (Old Rattler).

Mr. Floyd and the group wrote a thank you note to Mrs. Roosevelt and returned \$15.00 that was left of the expense money. Mrs. Roosevelt wrote a letter on June 10, 1938 to Mr. Floyd in which she spoke of her appreciation to the group. She returned the \$15.00 and asked that it be spent to buy something for the community. She added that she

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<sup>27</sup>"Skyline Farms Group Make Hit In Washington," Jackson County Sentinel, 17 May 1938, Section 1, p. 1.

hoped to visit Skyline Farms in the future but she was never able to.<sup>28</sup>

The government continued to send in advisors to teach skills to the people of the community. The girls were taught to make tennis and volley balls and fishnets for sale or exchange for other similar products. Men were taught to make all types of furniture for their own use and for sale. Crops were sold by the co-op. Easter Lily bulbs were also grown for sale. A canning shelter was built and the ladies were taught how to use a pressure cooker. The Federal Government furnished tin cans and a machine to seal them with. Auburn University gave books showing the women how to use water bath canning.<sup>29</sup>

Additional work was needed to employ the women of Skyline Farms.

A \$94,000 Knitting Mill is to be built at Skyline Farms. It is to be part of the rehabilitation project. The mill will be operated by a private company from Pennsylvania. They will own 51% of it and the government 49%. The mill will employ colonists as far as practicable.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Walter Hammer, A Pictorial Walk Thru Ol' High Jackson, (Collegedale, Tennessee: College Press, 1967.) p. 104.

<sup>29</sup>Interview with Bertha Kirby, WPA Supervisor of Womens Work, Scottsboro, Alabama, 17 June 1978.

<sup>30</sup>"Work Starts On New Knitting Mill at Skyline Farms," Jackson County Sentinel, 29 November 1938, Section 1, p. 1.

According to Clyde Money, the mill was not a success since the Pennsylvania Company could not make a profit after furnishing the machinery and leasing the building from the Rehabilitation project. This mill was closed after a few years but approximately 20 years ago reopened as a latex mill and does employ many women today.<sup>31</sup>

In March of 1939, the Alabama Power Company contracted to serve Skyline Farms. The Knitting Mill needed electricity and 50 of the farmers signed up to receive power.<sup>32</sup>

A great tragedy happened in the community when the school burned in 1941.

The Skyline School building burned last Saturday. The loss is estimated at \$70,000. There was no water system to use in putting out the fire. The school, completed in 1938, had 11 classrooms and an auditorium. The school had closed on December 20 and opening had been postponed due to an epidemic of Scarlet Fever.<sup>33</sup>

When school reopened after the Scarlet Fever scare,

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<sup>31</sup>Interview with Clyde Money, Former Store Owner at Skyline, Scottsboro, Alabama, 28 May 1978.

<sup>32</sup>"Contracts With Alabama," The Progressive Age, 9 March 1939, Section 1, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup>"Skyline School Building Burned," Jackson County Sentinel, 7 January 1941, Section 1, p. 1.

classes were held in potato sheds in the community.<sup>34</sup>

A tragedy to all who had made the trip to Washington and a great loss to the community was the large autographed picture of Mrs. Roosevelt in a flowing formal gown. This picture, along with an enlarged group picture of the dance team on the capitol steps, was hanging in the office when the building was burned.

Contracts were let for a new school in July, 1941. The present stone building was built on the same foundation and is still in use today as a elementary school.<sup>35</sup>

In 1943, hearings were held before a select committee of the House of Representatives to investigate the activities of the Farm Security Administration. This is a portion of the report on Skyline Farms Colony.

As of June 30, 1942, the Government had expended \$1,260,031 in development of the project. Eight hundred sixty three thousand five hundred and ninety-seven dollars had been spent in development of the individual units. The remainder was spent in public improvement, such as roads, reserve land, school, etc. The high cost results from many causes. Relief labor in the amount

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<sup>34</sup>Interview with Ola Vaught, Former Teacher, Scottsboro, Alabama, 6 June 1978.

<sup>35</sup>Interview with Lura Duke, Former Teacher, Skyline, Alabama, 4 June 1978.

of at least \$178,700 was used in construction and clearing. Transportation of materials was costly because of the lack of roads in the earlier development.

As of June 30, 1942, the Government had collected \$26,817 of income which was available for use in operating the project. Maintenance and payments in lieu of taxes to county and public bodies amounted to \$56,095. Management costs were \$83,250.

From sales indications, it would appear that the government would recover on the average unit \$2500 less than the investment in that unit. Part of this loss results from the use of relief labor. Local, public, bodies prior to the project, were providing approximately \$30 a month in subsidies to keep each family going.

As of February 28, 1943, rehabilitation loans had been made to individual families on this project in the amount of \$425,980. The matured principal was \$104,097 and repayments on the principal amounted to \$88,893.

Interest had been collected totaling \$12,404.<sup>36</sup>

Contrary to what I have heard, I cannot find any evidence from the available documents and accounts that the Skyline Farms Colony was declared unconstitutional. According to Mr. Brewer, Mr. Allen, and Clyde Money, the farms were liquidated or recalled from the original homesteaders in 1945 if the colonists were behind in payment. Possibly this is where the idea that the colony was declared unconstitutional originated.

Mr. Chester Allen, an early colonist came out to work for the colony in early 1935. It is his opinion that the property had to be sold because the people did not keep up their payments to the government according to their agreement. They began to buy radio - phonographs with their money since they now had electricity. He feels that the people began to squabble among themselves. This led to the transferring of Harry Ross, the project manager to Cahaba around 1940 and the bringing in of Tommy David. Mr. David, the new project manager was not as effective as Harry Ross. He said the community lost a great leader in Harry Ross. Mr. Allen told of meeting him several years later and Mr. Ross told him, "No matter where I go, my heart belongs to Skyline." Clay Paradise, Mr. Allen's father-in-law

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<sup>36</sup>U.S. Congress, House, A Resolution Creating A Select Committee to Investigate The Activities of the Farm Security Administration, H. R. 119, 78th Congress, 1st session, 1943, p. 1037.

was the only one of the original colonists who was able to pay for his land. Many of the earlier settlers of the colony do own property and live at Skyline, but not on their original homestead. Those people who came in after 1939 have in most cases, kept their homesteads. Deed records of 1945 verify that Mr. Paradise did buy his own homestead.<sup>37</sup>

There is only one of the original homesteaders still living at Skyline, Virgil Brewer (this is verified by many people.) He understood that the settlers were to get everything free until they got their farms started. This included the land, house, furnishings, stock and seed. Later he was billed for it all. He kept going farther and farther into debt. He received a letter from the government in 1945 giving him 90 days to get out. He moved to Tennessee for a while but later moved back to Skyline and bought a plot of land. He retired as janitor of Skyline School in 1971. His interest in the community has never waned.<sup>38</sup>

It has been said by some that Skyline Farms Colony was a failure. Was it? You be the judge.

It did take people off relief rolls. It did furnish jobs for desperate souls. They did live in substantial

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<sup>37</sup>Interview with Chester Allen, Early Settler, Skyline, Alabama, 4 June 1978.

<sup>38</sup>Interview with Virgil Brewer, Original Colonist, Skyline, Alabama, 2 June 1978.



homes and grow sufficient crops for thier needs. They did learn new methods of farming and preserving. They were furnished recreational activities. They were provided an excellent school for their childrens' education. They were furnished medical care. All of these programs were sponsored by the Government. Perhaps the rehabilitation of the heads of the families was a failure according to the standards by which they were judged, but their children had to benefit as their children today are benefitting from the creation of the Skyline Farms Colony.

There is a little known song, written by a colony school boy, Stonewall Fairbanks, who was the son of an early homesteader. It was written to be sung to the tune "Wabash Cannonball."

Listen to my story, I do not mean  
no harm.  
It's about a little station they call  
Skyline Farms.  
It's a beautiful place away out on  
a mountain top,  
Where there's lots of beer and whiskey  
and the law ain't so hot.

The government was very liberal,  
they granted us a store.  
The members all traded there, but  
some of them got sore.  
Some wanted it wholesale, but  
Law (store manager) said it couldn't  
be done;  
But if you will come and visit  
us we will show you how its run.  
The people get discouraged, their  
minds get a fright.  
Pop Ross calls a meeting,  
he always sets them right.

It's a government project and  
we have lots to eat.  
Its potatoes, its tomatoes, but  
seldom it's meat.  
The government is backing us.  
I know we cannot fall.  
You heard this story from a 39  
boy they call Stonewall.

Stonewall is still living at Skyline. He was not just trying to rhyme a poem when he said "we cannot fall." As for those who feel that the Skyline Farms Colony was a failure because most of the original colonists lost their land, I cannot agree.

Looking at only the improvements that have come about as a result of the establishment, this is what I see - A new highway up the mountain completed in 1961, a High School built in 1975, a new gymnasium, a new lunchroom, increased campus acreage, 750 pupils, 34 teachers, 2 Holiness churches, 2 Church of God, a Church of Christ, and 5 Baptists churches, a P.T.A., a Boosters Club, miles and miles of paved roads, a water system, a volunteer fire department, a latex mill, beautiful homes as well as remodeled colony homes, 10 general stores, 8 service stations, a cafe, and about 3,500 people. These are just a few of the things that have come about as a result of a social experiment that was carved out of a wilderness atop Cumberland Mountain during the dark years of the depression.

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Interview with Stonewall Fairbanks, Colonist, Skyline,  
Alabama, 2 June 1978.