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Political Shifts in the Eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan during the Great Depression

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Political Shifts in the Eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan during the Great Depression

Abstract
Regarded as one of the greatest struggles in American history, the Great Depression was a catalyst not only for economic change but also political change. The defeat of Hoover in 1932 was one of the largest margins of victory by a Democratic presidential candidate ever seen. The victory of Franklin D. Roosevelt brought change to a nation struggling with unemployment. The efforts of the Works Progress Administration, Civilian Conservation Corps, Public Works Administration, along with numerous other employment programs, helped put people back to work. More importantly, though, these public works projects ranged from the improvement of roads and preservation of forests to writing and theater projects. Most often, people associate the jobs created by the public works projects as aid to blue collar workers. However, that was not the case. The jobs created by Roosevelt's programs helped people who had lost white collar jobs and even artists. Additionally, the size of these projects could be as small as a community garden and as large as the Hoover Dam. In a time of need for almost everyone, these projects helped prevent the economy and unemployment from catastrophically increasing further. One of the hardest hit states during the Great Depression was Michigan. Michigan's eclectic mix of industries and people make it one of the most difficult states to pin down and understand as a whole during the Great Depression. Different regions voted differently and focused on different issues. Furthermore, political allegiance varied from region to region.

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POLITICAL Shifts in the Eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan
during the Great Depression

By

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Eastern Michigan University
Honors College
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References
Introduction

Regarded as one of the greatest struggles in American history, the Great Depression was a catalyst not only for economic change but also political change. The defeat of Hoover in 1932 was one of the largest margins of victory by a Democratic presidential candidate ever seen. The victory of Franklin D. Roosevelt brought change to a nation struggling with unemployment. The efforts of the Works Progress Administration, Civilian Conservation Corps, Public Works Administration, along with numerous other employment programs, helped put people back to work. More importantly, though, these public works projects ranged from the improvement of roads and preservation of forests to writing and theater projects. Most often, people associate the jobs created by the public works projects as aid to blue collar workers. However, that was not the case. The jobs created by Roosevelt's programs helped people who had lost white collar jobs and even artists. Additionally, the size of these projects could be as small as a community garden and as large as the Hoover Dam. In a time of need for almost everyone, these projects helped prevent the economy and unemployment from catastrophically increasing further. One of the hardest hit states during the Great Depression was Michigan. Michigan's eclectic mix of industries and people make it one of the most difficult states to pin down and understand as a whole during the Great Depression. Different regions voted differently and focused on different issues. Furthermore, political allegiance varied from region to region.
Since the creation of the Republican Party in Jackson, Michigan, in the summer of 1854, the state of Michigan had consistently voted for Republican candidates in elections. From 1856 to 1928, Michigan supported nearly every Republican candidate in presidential elections except in the election of 1912. In the same period of time, Republican candidates won 34 of the 38 elections for governor of the state. Particularly in the 1920s, the Republican Party enjoyed a huge majority of the votes in most elections. Typically the Republican presidential candidate won nearly three quarters of the votes in many counties around the state of Michigan. In counties in the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan, the majority could be even higher although most stayed close to the state average.

When most historians write their Depression-Era Michigan pieces, they often focus on the Detroit area because it was one of the major industrial regions in Michigan, and it also contained the highest population density in the state. However, this focus leaves huge gaps in the understanding of Michigan as a whole during the Great Depression. During the 1920s, when many of its industries relished in prosperity, Michigan as a whole was a predominantly Republican state. After the stock market crash of October 1929, unemployment began to increase. Throughout much of the nation the Republican stronghold began to crumble and by 1932 much of the industrial and urban areas of Michigan had turned to the Democrats. However, the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan, which for this study

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3 Ibid., 3.
Schwab 3

included Mackinac, Chippewa, Schoolcraft, Delta, Alger, and Luce counties, was slow to accept the Democratic Party and its values. It was not until the 1936 Presidential Elections that all of counties in the eastern Upper Peninsula would vote collectively for the Democratic Presidential candidate. The absence of a unified and organized Democratic Party in the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan, while Republicans remained persistent and strong on the ground thanks to their policies prior to 1932, created a deficit that Democrats would need to climb out of to win elections in 1932 in several counties the area. When the 1936 presidential election took place, the public works programs created by President Roosevelt were in place. Preservation of forests and improvements to roads and hospitals were underway and people were pleased with the progress made. The 1940 election in the eastern Upper Peninsula was similar to the election of 1932, but the failure of a major public works project to build a bridge at the Straits of Mackinac fell on the Democrats, and as a result people turned back to the Republican Party. Even with major events happening around the nation, the concern for local projects and improvements weighed heavily on the presidential elections from 1928-1940 in the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan and boosted the popularity of the Democrats and an area previously dominated by Republicans.
Counties StudiedOutlined in Blue: Delta, Alger, Schoolcraft, Luce, Mackinac, and Chippewa
Elections from 1928-1932

Much of the 1920s has been stereotyped by an era of prosperity. However, behind the prosperity and success of many industries, there was an economic catastrophe brewing. In the early 1920s, wages rose at an unprecedented rate because many people were able to buy the goods produced. Model-Ts and other manufactured items were selling at high rates. As the decade progressed, many companies effectively flooded the markets they had previously made millions in. People bought fewer products, but the factories and manufactures kept producing at the same unprecedented rate as before. As a result, warehouses were stocked full of products that no one wanted, and as a result prices for these goods fell. However, even before Black Tuesday, the two main industries in the eastern Upper Peninsula were suffering and had been for many years.

While the western Upper Peninsula relied primarily on mining, the eastern portion of the Upper Peninsula relied on logging and tourism to keep their economy going logging began to fall into decline in the early 20th Century. In the eastern Upper Peninsula, the lumber industry was already in a rapid decline from years of overcutting and unethical business practices. Moreover, many mill workers were paid very little for the long hours they spent in the forests: “Even before the depression the mill worker was not getting by very well. Since the World War his wants has increased out of proportion to his income.” Long before the economic crisis of the 1930s, people could see warning signs of the problems to come.

However, a majority of America prospered, and thus with Republicans in charge of government and with business seemingly fine, they continued to sweep elections both nationally and at the state level.

In 1928, nearly a year before the stock market crash, the United States had held a presidential election. Running on behalf of the Democratic Party was Al Smith and the Republicans nominated Herbert Hoover. Although Smith fought fiercely to win the presidency, Hoover along with constituents around the nation affiliated with the Republican Party in local and state elections emerged victorious. Michigan, home of the Republican Party, would prove to be an easy win Hoover and other Republican constituents. Smith received nearly 400,000 votes while Hoover captured over 985,000 (Figure 1). Every county in the eastern Upper Peninsula was won by Hoover with over a 60 percent majority except Delta County (Figure 2). Alger, Schoolcraft, Chippewa, and Mackinac counties all received about sixty percent returns for Hoover. Luce County reported eighty percent returns for Hoover. Of the six counties Delta County was moving more quickly to favor Democrats, and the presidential election of 1928 was won by the Republican Party by a single vote.

Figure 1: Election Results of Michigan in 1928


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Figure 2:


With Hoover and the Republicans leading the nation, the 1928 election "...left Republicans in control of government on the eve of the Depression, and it put Hoover, who opposed public relief even in crisis and who believed in the power of
phrases to shape the world, in charge of the federal response to economic calamity.” Hoover also believed that local and state governments had the finances and an ability to provide public works projects. When the Depression came, Hoover strongly insisted that the federal government should refrain from interfering with the economy, and that the economy would essentially fix itself if given enough time. In addition, Hoover refused to use federal monies to deal with unemployment out of fear of increasing the federal deficit or “dole.”

The 1928 presidential election emphasized the lack of a Democratic presence in the entire state of Michigan during most of the 1920s. For example, in the 1926 gubernatorial election, the Republican candidate Fred Green swept all of the 83 counties in Michigan and received nearly 70 percent of the total number of ballots cast in the election. Additionally, like in the 1920 and 1924 presidential elections, the Democratic presidential candidate Al Smith was unsuccessful at carrying any counties in the state in the 1928 presidential election. The longstanding relationship with the Republican Party in Michigan would be a challenge to break and prove to be a challenge to the Democratic Party even into the 1930s. But if the Democrats hoped to win back voters and begin winning elections, they would have to gather support from fellow party members, which proved to be a challenge in several elections in the early 1930s.

In particular a lack of organization prevented the Democrats from heavily participating in elections. In the 1930 midterm elections, the Michigan Democratic

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5 Ortquist, "Depression Politics," 4.
Party scrounged for politicians to run in the local and state elections and "seriously considered not putting up candidates for county offices in 1930." Consequently, three of the thirteen congressional districts in Michigan had no Democratic candidate running against the Republican candidate. Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of the election of 1930 was the struggle for Democrats to put forth a candidate for the highest state government position—governor of the state. When any party finds it difficult to nominate a candidate to represent them in an election, especially to run in the election for governor of a state, people are sent a clear message, and it is certainly not a positive one. Not many people will vote for a party that cannot even get organized enough to nominate a candidate for governor. Reluctantly, William Comstock, who was previously defeated two times in the race for governorship, agreed to run in the gubernatorial race: "Comstock agreed to run in the 1930 election only because he did not wish to see his party suffer the embarrassment of not having a candidate in the race for the state's highest elective office." With the lack of effort put forth by the Democrats in the election of 1930, the results of it are not the least bit surprising (Figures 3-6).

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7 Ortquist, "Depression Politics," 4-5.
8 Ortquist, "Depression Politics," 5.
9 Ortquist, "Depression Politics," 5.
Figure 3

Alger County 1930 Election Results

Source: "The Votes Given at General Election Held Tuesday November 4, 1930,"
Munising News, November 22, 1930.

Figure 4

Delta County 1930 Election Results

Schoolcraft County 1930 Election Results
While the Democrats were gaining ground in some heavily Republican states, like Ohio or Illinois, they were completely devastated in Michigan's 1930 midterm election. Brucker defeated Comstock by over 125,000 votes state wide, all 13
congressional districts went to the Republicans, and of the 132 seat state legislator only two seats in that election were won by Democrats.\textsuperscript{10} Despite slight gains in Democratic votes, Republicans again swept midterm election, and it was yet another blow to the Michigan Democratic Party.

Newly elected Republican Governor of Michigan Wilber M. Brucker shared several of the same views as Hoover, particularly his opposition of public relief in challenging times. In August of 1931, Governor Brucker wrote to President Hoover and said, "the people of Michigan will take care of their own problem."\textsuperscript{11} Brucker meant that local organizations and governments would have to handle the relief efforts in their communities with no help from the federal or state government. By 1933, nearly one third of the population in the Upper Peninsula were receiving some kind of relief and made it difficult for private and public organizations to keep up with.\textsuperscript{12}

While allowing businesses and local governments to iron out their own problems was Hoover and Brucker's initial reaction to the growing problem of unemployment early in the Depression, the issue became too large to simply ignore. By the middle of 1930, unemployment and how to deal with the unprecedented unemployment rates was the main issue for Brucker and Hoover going into the 1932 election season--especially if they wanted to remain serving in office. In response, Hoover decided to take a slightly more activist approach to solving the

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{11} Susan Stein-Roggenbuck, \textit{Negotiating Relief: The Development of Social Welfare Programs in Depression-Era Michigan, 1930-1940} (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), 71.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 12.
problem although he was still slightly resistant to the idea. Among several different programs Hoover created, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and infancy of public works programs through the Emergency Relief and Construction Act would make small appearances in the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

One of the most progressive programs started by Hoover to combat the issue of unemployment and to encourage economic growth was the Reconstruction Finance Corporation in January of 1932. With the passage of the program, the RFC was given the amount of nearly 500 million dollars and an additional 1.5 to two billion dollars more if needed. The money was generally given to railroad companies, buildings and loan establishments, large banks, and insurance companies. In Hoover's opinion, invigorating the top end of companies would result in prosperity down the line, more popularly known as "trickle down" economics. This program extended the involvement of government into the business sector as never before in history. Just two weeks after the program began, the RFC was granting on average over one hundred loans daily. Soon after the RFC began loaning money, Hoover added the Emergency Relief and Construction Act to the RFC programs. The function of the Emergency Relief and Construction Act was to "relieve destitution, to broaden the lending powers of the RFC, and to create employment by providing for and expediting a public works program."

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13 Rauchway, *The Great Depression & the New Deal*, 34.
In October of 1932 nearly one month before the elections, Governor Brucker issued a statement supporting the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. He noted that if the state chose to borrow money from the RFC, the state legislator would divvy the funds equally throughout Michigan and not favor one particular area over another. This proposal would prove to be positive news for the people in the eastern Upper Peninsula. This notion assured people in the eastern Upper Peninsula that there would be no favoritism of RFC money to more populated regions of Michigan. With Governor Brucker promising not to favor one region over another the sight of Reconstruction Finance Corporation money for possible building or updating projects seemed promising.

Some of the money available from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation made it to the eastern Upper Peninsula. In Alger County, which was also dependent on farming, the RFC made seed loans available to those farmers who could not afford to buy seeds for the planting season. While the RFC put up some money for this venture, local organizations also contributed to the seed loan fund. Although this would help some of the farmers in Alger County, there were not enough funds to give loans to all the farmers in need. In addition to helping farmers, people looked to the woods for additional help. In 1932, H. Phil Brandner, head ranger at the Marquette National Forest, proposed the idea to aid unemployment with the newly available federal funds by recycling the unused cut wood and giving it to needy families. In an agreement with the county unemployment services, the facilities and tools would be provided by the forest stations. Permits for the projected were

granted to several communities throughout Chippewa County in Raco, Strongs, Trout Lake, and Brimley to start the project.\textsuperscript{18}

While the Reconstruction Finance Corporation did give some relief to people in the eastern Upper Peninsula, most of the relief projects were funded and managed at the county level. Cities from around the area sent representatives to Lansing to propose projects that would take pressure off organizations providing relief to the unemployed. One community to do so was Munising, and in August of 1931 representatives traveled to Lansing to propose the M-94 highway project. In the same month the state government approved the project and began taking bids. The M-94 highway project was estimated to would employ 80-100 men.\textsuperscript{19} In Sault Ste. Marie, similar road building and updating projects occurred. In Brimley and Bay Mills, several winter road construction projects were approved that would employ nearly 170 men.\textsuperscript{20} Aside from road and highway projects, cities also chose to beautify themselves by updating parks. Escanaba spent several hundred thousand dollars adding playgrounds, picnic areas, and vegetation to their city park and felt that it was the “most important project in city history.”\textsuperscript{21}

Improving cities and roads were some of the most important issues to Governor Brucker. In a speech in January of 1932 in Sault Ste. Marie, Brucker felt that improving highways and cities would draw tourists to the area. To entice people to come to Michigan for their vacations, Brucker signed a bill to allocate

\textsuperscript{19} “Prompt Start on M-94 Job Okehed,” \textit{The Munising News}, August 21, 1931.
\textsuperscript{20} “Road Building Making Relief Burden Light,” \textit{The Evening News}, February 17, 1932.
$100,000 toward creating an advertising campaign highlighting the outdoor activities in Michigan. Brucker said, "I know that this appropriation will come back to Michigan ten times over in tourist cash." Additionally, he advocated road projects all over Michigan, especially in the Upper Peninsula, during the winter because the construction projects provided employment during the hardest season to find employment.

Not only did the Republican policies come into play but also the conservative voices in the public media stepped in and spoke on behalf of President Hoover and the Republican Party. Henry Ford, one of the most prominent business people in the state, endorsed President Hoover for the 1932 election. The words of Henry Ford reached all the way up to Sault Ste. Marie in *The Evening News* editorial pages. Henry Ford was viewed as a respected industrialist and was thought to know what was best for the growth of industry, not just in the automotive sector but others as well. Ford said that "President Hoover must be elected 'to prevent times from getting worse and to help them get better.'" The same notion of influencing his employees in the automotive factories around Detroit was hopefully going to have the same effect in the eastern Upper Peninsula. The editorial itself added, "Whether the Democrats like it or not the Ford Motor Company is not the only large employer of labor whose head believe that Hoover and his sound methods will bring better conditions much faster than any Democratic administration." Additionally, Republican politicians would also add their opinions in campaign visits to Michigan.

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24 Ibid.
Before the election of 1932, several prominent Republican politicians visited the state of Michigan, including President Hoover himself. On October 22 of 1932 President Hoover made a last minute stop in the city of Detroit to rally Republicans.

25 The Evening News of Sault Ste. Marie and The Escanaba Daily Press kept close tabs on the event, and featured it several times on the front cover of their newspapers as the main headline for that day’s issue.26 A few weeks earlier on October 2, 1932, Roosevelt made a similar campaign trip to Michigan to rally Democrats in the area.27 However, Roosevelt received less coverage in the newspapers around the eastern Upper Peninsula than President Hoover. While the president was probably the most predominant figure in American politics, in an election year the person the president runs against also becomes inducted into the lime light and closely followed by other newspapers. Also periodically, The Escanaba Daily Press featured a column called “Hoover Highlights” on the front page just prior to the November election of 1932.28 The column featured quotes from Hoover and events that he had taken part in throughout the nation. The bias of the newspapers in the Eastern Upper Peninsula clearly favored the Republicans and also influenced the voters at the polls.

Previously in August of 1932, Governor Brucker made an appearance at the Temple Theater in Sault Ste. Marie to discuss the progress made in combating

25 “President to Visit Detroit,” Escanaba Daily Pres, October 22, 1932.
26 “Republicans of Michigan Preparing Reception for President Saturday Night,” The Evening News, October 18, 1932.
economic problems specifically in the eastern Upper Peninsula.\textsuperscript{29} One of the points Brucker made in the speech was that he had created and given more relief to the people of Michigan than any other governor at the time. He noted that under his administration, he created winter road work projects as well as state construction projects to provide relief. Additionally, Brucker noted that he reduced the state deficit and lowered taxes and would continue to lower taxes. He specifically cited that he cut down property taxes by 20 percent, sent money back to the counties to help with local taxes, cut needless spending, built roads to bring tourist money to the areas, and improved state buildings to encourage employment.\textsuperscript{30} During the speech he said, “I have the interest of the north country very deeply at heart.”\textsuperscript{31} His speech in Sault Ste. Marie was extremely popular and drew a positive reaction from the crowds that gathered to see him.

Additionally, \textit{The Evening News}, \textit{The Newberry News}, and \textit{The Munising News} featured many editorials and advertisements favoring Republican candidates and policies over Democratic candidates and policies leading up to the election of 1932. While some of the articles barely filled up a quarter of the column, others could be the length of two full columns. What is interesting to note are the use of words and phrases—a popular tactic in Hoover’s campaign to swing voters and win elections.

A popular approach used by editorial writers was to draw on past historical failures of the Democratic Party. In one article, the writer likened Hoover to Lincoln and noted that the Democrats of Hoover’s time were being just as obstructive of


\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
progress as Democrats of Lincoln’s time: “This Democratic Party which now seeks the confidence of the voters of America is not only the part that obstructed President Lincoln’s great work, but it is the party that advanced the destructive policy of free silver in 1896 and continues to preach the doctrine of cheap money.”

Furthermore, the article mentioned that President Wilson ran on the platform of keeping the United States out of World War I, but the United States ended up in the war anyways. In a similar vein, another editorial discussed the presidential election between McKinley and Bryan. The editorial writer noted that most people claimed that Roosevelt would win all but one state and that the Democrats in the election of 1932 were claiming victory before the votes were counted: “Hark back to the Bryan campaign when there was much more noise and many more extravagant claims. A month before the election the Democrats had won. When the votes were counted in November, McKinley had 271 electoral votes and Bryan 176.”

Michigan Republicans felt optimistic that the steps that Hoover and Brucker took in combating unemployment were huge accomplishments and would benefit the public if continued.

Because much of the country felt the Republicans in power failed in the handling of unemployment, Democrats felt optimistic into the 1932 elections—especially Michigan Democrats. Many of the urban industrial areas like Detroit and Flint had sided with the Democrats in mayoral and state and local elections. The reasons why the Democrats won in urban areas were due to the “overwhelming popularity of the Democratic Party in Michigan’s urban counties... and the

abominable condition of the Michigan economy.\textsuperscript{34} While this may have been true in southeastern Lower Michigan, other factors were at play that kept the Republicans in high favor among voters in the eastern Upper Peninsula.

Republicans enjoyed a huge majority for much of the 1920s, but Democrats were slowly gaining ground. Even with the lack of a Democratic presence in the eastern Upper Peninsula, the Democratic Party managed to gain some local and state offices particularly in Delta county in the 1932 election year. Democrats also gained votes in Mackinac and Alger county in the presidential race. However, Republican’s still held on strongly to Schoolcraft and Chippewa County and barely won Alger County. One of Hoover’s strategies for winning elections was words, and while it may not have won him the election nationally, it did preserve his image and integrity in the eastern Upper Peninsula (Figure 7).

\textbf{Figure 7: Presidential Election Results of the Eastern Upper Peninsula in 1932}

![Pie charts showing election results in Luce County and Delta County](image_url)

\textsuperscript{34} Grant, “Presidential Election,” 91.
It is interesting to note that counties won by Democrats generally also carried other Democratic candidates at state and local levels and the same was true for Republicans. For example, in both Luce and Chippewa County the Republican Party swept the county in each office up for election. Luce County reported a total of 1,259 votes for President Hoover and only 928 for Roosevelt. For the gubernatorial election, Brucker received 1,317 votes while Comstock fared less than Roosevelt and only received 836 votes. Moreover, Republicans also carried the election for Senator, Congressional and State Representative, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General, State Treasurer, and Auditor General.35

35"Luce County in G.O.P. Column," Newberry News, November 11, 1932.
In contrast, Delta and Mackinac County forged the largest victories for the Democrats in the eastern Upper Peninsula. Both counties had returns of over sixty percent of voters casting ballots for Roosevelt. Additionally, Alger County returns reported that fifty-seven percent of voters voted for Roosevelt. In the eastern Upper Peninsula, a split in favor of political parties occurred. However, Luce and Chippewa Counties showed returns favoring Republicans. Nearly fifty-five percent of voters in both counties cast ballots for Hoover, while Schoolcraft County reported about forty-nine percent of ballots cast were for Hoover.

The strength of the Republican Party was at an all time high to get Hoover and other Republicans re-elected in the eastern Upper Peninsula. Even though much of the country felt Hoover did too little too late, many voters in the eastern Upper Peninsula probably voted for Hoover because they wanted to see a continuation of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and Emergency Relief and Construction Act. Furthermore, lingering memories of failures by the Democrats in state and federal election in the 1920s created resistance to the Democratic Party and their ability to lead in a crisis. However, Democrats were beginning to sway voters, and the percent of votes cast for Republicans began to drop. Now with the Democrats controlling many aspects of state and local government, they now had the chance to prove themselves and their policies in the eastern Upper Peninsula and possibly break the reign of the Republicans in the area. More importantly, the next four years would either allow Democrats to implement programs to build a solid base of voters or fail to contain unemployment and lose the voters they just gained.
Elections from 1933-1936

Just as with many other regions in the United States, the eastern Upper Peninsula faced dramatic problems as a result of the October 1929 stock market crash. The Department of Conservation reported in *The Newberry News* that people vacated their houses in the city and moved to abandoned cabins in the woods on the fringe of town. Many people, including large families, sought out abandoned farm houses or small shacks because they could no longer afford the rent for their apartments or to keep their homes—some even resorting to frail tents in the woods.¹ Unlike squatter settlements that were established in warmer regions, these “shackers” faced life threatening cold weather and snow storms once the winter season arrived. In a series of letters from William Bonifas, a wealthy businessman from Escanaba, he wrote back and forth to Peter Ries, a fellow businessman from Illinois. Ries’s letters describe the hardships unemployed Americans faced: “The people don’t make enough to make a living... some weeks der working 3 days... some weeks only 2... women with der children with them, nothing to eat, no clothes to put on.”² Ries adds that some people even resorted to staying in prisons over night because some men could not pay their rent. In a letter back to Ries, Bonifas wrote, “There are lots of people around here to that are not working, not much to do, I hope it will pick as there are so many people out of work.”³

² Ries to Bonifas, February 15, 1931, Bonifas Family Papers.
³ Bonifas to Ries, February 1931, Bonifas Family Papers.
As mentioned earlier, during the 1920s, when many industries relished in prosperity, Michigan as a whole was a predominantly Republican state. However, over nearly three years into the depression under Republican control, economic conditions and unemployment were at an all time low around the United States. Voters around the nation showed their discontent with the way Hoover handled the epidemic of unemployment. The Republican stronghold began to crumble around the nation, and by 1932 Democrats under the leadership of Roosevelt were now in control of the country. A similar shift happened in Michigan turned to the Democrats. However, the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan was slow to warm up to the Democratic Party until the 1936 Presidential Election. What could have possibly caused this deviation from previous elections and what factors pushed the Democrats ahead? The successes and immediate execution of the First New Deal projects throughout the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan swayed just enough voters to move the victory to the Democratic side in the 1936 presidential election.

Prior to the Roosevelt Administration, local governments and private agencies tried to manage relief on their own terms with public funds, and during the early 1930s Michigan vowed to “take care of its own.” However, Michigan’s poor relief laws posed several problems. Potential relief recipients went through a rigorous series of applications to prove their need for relief. One statute noted that “relief recipients in general were to own no property or other means of securing a living. Individuals who had no income or means of support but who owned

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4 Susan Stein-Roggenbuck, Negotiating Relief: The Development of Social Welfare Programs in Depression-Era Michigan, 1930-1940 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), 40-41.
property had to sign their property rights over to the county before receiving aid."\(^5\)

Furthermore, non urban areas could not raise as much funds to support local relief efforts even with national organizations, like the Red Cross or Salvation Army, stepping in to help.\(^6\) This obstacle left limited options for people who became unemployed. As the depression worsened, these agencies could not keep up with relief demands and many people felt that more needed to be done. In the 1932 presidential election, much of Michigan turned to the Democrats and their ideas to try and control a downward spiral of unemployment.

The main goal in Roosevelt's first term focused on implementing policies set forth by the First New Deal to provide relief and manage the unemployment epidemic. Under the program there are several categories. Firstly, there was direct relief which simply allocated money and basic supplies to unemployed workers and families, which was controlled under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). The second element included indirect relief, which focused on establishing local work projects that would provide jobs and distribute wages to workers. Under the indirect relief category, two sub-categories played an instrumental role in the eastern Upper Peninsula during the early years of the Roosevelt administration. Firstly, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) main goal was to revamp and preserve forests around the country. Secondly, the Civil Works Administration (CWA) allocated funds for infrastructure projects like renovating hospitals and remodeling city areas and was created by the FERA. Through the early part of Roosevelt's first term as president, these organizations, the CCC, CWA, and FERA,

\(^5\) Ibid., 22.

\(^6\) Ibid., 42.
played a significant role in revitalizing the eastern Upper Peninsula. More importantly, many of the projects implemented by these groups specifically targeted issues and concerns of many citizens.

Since the 1800s, the eastern Upper Peninsula has been ruled by the timber industry. For many years, lumbering provided a steady income for many people living in this region. Even before the depression, increases in national and global competition slowly encroached on the profitability of timber in the eastern Upper Peninsula. However, as the Great Depression progressed, timber severely lost its profitability. Devastated by years of wasteful and impractical business practices, the once booming industry left vast acres of dead, cut-over forests. Businessmen felt the decimated land was a burden to their bottom line and the citizens living in surrounding cities wanted the forests restored and preserved; many in former lumbering communities thought that preserving the forests could possibly draw an income from tourism.\(^7\) In addition, one of the most serious consequences of the failure of the timber industry resulted in an estimated 2,000 families isolated throughout the Upper Peninsula and, with no income, unable to provide for themselves.\(^8\)

In 1933, President Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps precisely to address the conservation and restoration of destroyed forest areas. The CCC generated a popular following around the nation, but the eastern Upper Peninsula admired the program and drew many young, unemployed men for work.

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\(^8\) Ibid.
The center of CCC operations in the Upper Peninsula was established at Fort Brady in Sault Ste. Marie. Fort Brady trained workers and distributed goods to camps all over the northern region of Michigan.9

Within the first year and a half, the CCC made huge strides in renovating forests throughout the eastern Upper Peninsula. Each organized camp employed almost 200 men, and the eastern Upper Peninsula had about 11 locations for camps by June of 1933, which would provide work for almost 2,200 men.10 During the first 15 months nearly 30,000,000 trees were planted and 13,000 acres of forest were cleared to encourage new growth, as well as establishing techniques to control erosion.11 Furthermore, the CCC took action to reduce fire hazards and removed infected trees from over 160,000 acres of woodland areas.12 Aside from revitalizing the forest themselves, the CCC also added critical elements to develop future conservation of woodland areas. Some of these projects included 2,500 miles of trails which were laid to aid in the movement of forest workers to combat potential fires, 550 miles of telephone lines, 13 lookout houses, 14 watch towers, and a small airport.13

While some of the public hoped that the lumber industry would return to its pre-depression prosperity, many in the eastern Upper Peninsula realized that the lumber industry might not recover.14 As a result people would turn to the second major industry in Michigan—tourism—for financial support. For years, Michigan

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9 "400 Foresters Go Into Camp," Newberry News, June 23, 1933.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Newson, "Building Men, Women..."
and particularly the Upper Peninsula drew travelers from all over to soak in the lush forests and scenic shores of the Great Lakes or participate in an array of outdoors activities: fishing, hunting, camping, and hiking. The CCC contributed to encouraging tourism to the eastern Upper Peninsula by creating additional public campgrounds with playgrounds, water pumps, and other amenities. In November of 1935, the Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce reported that the city "had an unusually large number of tourists...." George R. Hogarth, the state director of conservation, regarded the work accomplished in less than a year by the CCC as invaluable to the tourism business in Michigan. The goal of increasing tourism clearly became a reality because of the projects implemented by the CCC. The work done as a whole by the CCC received accolades from both the public and political figures. As far as alleviating unemployment, Governor Comstock reported that over 10,000 men statewide received stable work from the inception of the CCC in 1933 to October of 1934. More importantly, the CCC set the foundation for future conservation projects in the eastern Upper Peninsula.

A second key element of the public works projects implemented by the First New Deal promoted improvement of local infrastructure, which included a variety of projects: updating roads, bridges, sewer systems, schools, and hospital facilities. Unlike the metropolitan regions in southern Michigan, many of the towns in the Upper Peninsula were significantly behind in efficient road systems and facilities. Along with forest preservation, updating infrastructure, specifically hospitals and

15 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
bridges, would prove to be another concern on the minds of many living in the eastern Upper Peninsula.

In Luce, Mackinac, Chippewa, Schoolcraft, and Alger County numerous people contracted and died of tuberculosis. A study reproduced in *The Newberry News* reported the number of deaths per 100,000 for each county. Luce County deaths totaled about 30, while Delta, Mackinac, and Chippewa Counties deaths were more than double that of Luce County. The Alger County tuberculosis death rate was 96 deaths per 100,000. Schoolcraft County reported the most deaths--118 deaths per 100,000.19 Even though these figures were slightly lower than past years, physicians wanted more money and better facilities to treat the patients and to turn their focus to educating and preventing people from contracting tuberculosis.20

By the early 1930s, the Newberry State Sanitarium struggled to meet the needs of patients and staff and this issue needed to be addressed quickly in the eyes of the public. In the forefront of hospital improvement was R.G. Ferguson, the chairman of the State Hospital Board. Of the 12.5 million dollars allocated from the state to update hospitals around Michigan, the Newberry State Sanatorium received approximately one million dollars.21 Ferguson personally felt "that this is one of the wisest and most needful projects that has yet come before federal and state authorities for construction under federal construction programs."22 The money allocated to the hospital paid for updating and constructing new buildings, with

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19 "Luce Death Rate Shows Decline," *Newberry News*, November 10, 1933.
20 Ibid.
21 "Million Dollars for State Hospital," *Newberry News*, September 1, 1933.
22 Ibid.
much of the work completed by the CWA. In addition, the funds also allowed the hospital to purchase new state of the art technology and equipment. The updating of the Newberry State Sanatorium began shortly after September of 1933 and ended by April 1934, making it one of the best hospitals in the region.

Aside from revamping hospitals, the CWA and FERA participated in several major road and bridge projects throughout the eastern Upper Peninsula. A prime example of one of the major bridge projects that passed the legislator was the construction of the Ashmun Street Bridge linking the southern portion of Sault Ste. Marie to the northern portion by the Locks and Portage Street. The bridge project was approved quickly by the Lansing Legislator and the United States Congress by June of 1934. By November of the following year, the Ashmun Street Bridge was completed. The people of Sault Ste. Marie regarded the bridge as one of the most important accomplishments of that year. Along with the construction of the bridge, much of Ashmun Street received revamping, a critical improvement since Ashmun was considered to be the main street of the city leading up to the tourist area near the SooLocks. The Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce praised the work done by the people who built the bridge and the cooperation of local businesses and governments to make it a reality.

In concert with bridge building, widening, grading, and repaving roads throughout the eastern Upper Peninsula took place during the early years of the

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24 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
Because of the constant freezing and melting of water and the harsh winter conditions, many highways around the region needed to be updated and fixed. Furthermore, many of these two-lane highways provide the most direct or, in some cases, only route connecting other cities in the Upper Peninsula to one another. Hundreds of thousands of federally funded dollars went into improving main highways across the area, including the main M-28 and M-41.

While most of the CCC and CWA projects employed men, FERA projects attempted to involve entire communities. In 1934, the FERA mandated the addition of “relief gardens” in several communities. Led by FERA Garden Supervisor Francis Pelliter, Luce County’s citizens planted over 200 gardens and required that “All employees of FERA, on welfare rolls, are obligated to have vegetable gardens at their homes or on the county garden plots.” These gardens provided several benefits. Firstly, by teaching the public how to maintain gardens made them less reliant on purchasing produce from stores, especially if they could not afford to. Secondly, the gardens brought the citizens of the towns together. As a part of Luce’s garden program, the local 4-H club sponsored competitions to see who grew the best crops. Aside from providing food, the gardens also provided a moral boost and gathering place for many towns.

While the programs and projects did not completely resolve the problem of unemployment or the Great Depression as a whole, one cannot deny that the psychological effects left a lasting impression on many people. A report published in

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29 Ibid.
1935 by the Michigan State Emergency Welfare Relief Commission stressed the importance of continuing the public works programs until the percentage of unemployment decreased: "Any comparison of direct relief and work relief will show that, in most cases, the later is more adequate...of preventing deterioration of the client, more conducive to self respect, and more adaptable to diverse needs of different individuals."31 Basically, after someone who has worked for a majority of their life loses their job, not only will that person face financial stress but possible mental instability. Yes, public works programs provided a wage and updated infrastructure, but more importantly the projects gave unemployed people some sense of a normal life similar to the one they had before they lost their job.

The quick work done by President Roosevelt to implemented and expand upon Hoover's smaller public works programs benefited the Democratic Party by the 1934 elections both nationally and in the state of Michigan. Nationally, the 1934 midterm elections yielded an additional 23 seats in the House and 19 seats in the Senate. Furthermore, Democrats won 25 out of the 35 gubernatorial races.32 By the 1934 midterms, Republicans governors led only 12 states. Nationally, Democrats seemed strong and in control; however, Michigan was a far more complicated situation. With the Republicans winning the governorship, attorney general, Secretary of State, and lieutenant governorship, Michigan as looked like it was leaning back to its old Republican ways in 1934.33 However, by the 1936

33 Ibid., 22.
presidential election, the policies executed by President Roosevelt from 1933-1936 turned all of the counties in the eastern Upper Peninsula to a Democratic majority—something that had not happened in many years (Figure 8). Alger and Delta County election returns boasted over sixty-five percent election returns favoring the Democrats, and Schoolcraft’s returns reported that sixty percent of voters cast ballots for Democrats. Luce and Mackinac County returns showed that Democrats received about fifty-three percent of the votes cast. Of the six counties, Chippewa showed the lowest percentage in votes for Democrats, which was fifty percent of votes cast for Democrats and only three percent more votes than Republicans. Still, the presidential election of 1936 marked one of the few times when all the six counties in this study were won by a Democratic representative running for president of the United States.

Figure 8: 1936 Presidential Election Results
While Hoover may have won many of the eastern Upper Peninsula counties in 1932, the tables turned within four years to favor the Democrats. Many of the projects proposed in the first New Deal specifically addressed several of the issues many of the people in the Upper Peninsula wanted resolved. Huge strides were made in the conservation of forest areas and improvement of infrastructure, as well as public health. Even if public works jobs were temporary, they provided a sense of normalcy to peoples’ lives. Instead of sitting around waiting for a relief check, people went to work for several hours a day and then received a paycheck at the end of the week just like they had before they lost their job. As a result of the plans implemented by President Roosevelt and the speedy execution of those projects at the local level, the eastern Upper Peninsula shifted to a Democratic majority.

Although the efforts made by the federal government to control unemployment did not completely alleviate the unemployment problem escalated by the Great Depression, the work done by the Civilian Conservation Corps, Civil Works Administration, and Federal Emergency Relief Administration left a positive lasting impression leading into the election of 1936.
Elections from 1937-1940

The 1936 presidential election had marked a significant break in the trend of Republicans winning presidential elections in the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan. From the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, he had four years to implement programs to aid in unemployment relief and to try to stabilize the economy. More importantly these four years gave Democrats a chance to prove themselves in office and try to gain a solid base like the Republicans did in the previous decade. The Democrats tried to establish themselves by putting people back to work through government programs. The projects completed by the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Public Works Administration, and the Works Progress Administration created projects that employed many people and left positive results for people to see in and around their communities. The proud effect of these projects ultimately led to all of the counties in this study to shift to the Democratic Party in 1936. However, between the 1936 and 1940 elections, a shift back to the Republican Party was underway. Even though the Republicans were making a comeback, the Democrats still held their ground in state and national elections in the Eastern Upper Peninsula through the continuation of New Deal programs and organization of their part in the area.

While the 1936 election turned to favor Democrats, just as quickly the turn back to Republicans occurred. By 1938, Democrats lost seats in Congress, as well as
popularity around the nation. Additionally by 1938, the world had begun to focus more on the turmoil in Europe. As Hitler's reach in Europe grew larger, Americans realized a threat was on the horizon. The public began to turn away from domestic issues and turned their attention to an impending war. Despite this threat New Deal programs continued. While most people in the nation turned their focus to abroad, people in the eastern Upper Peninsula were still largely focused on local issues and improvements in the communities around them via New Deal Projects.

One of the significant areas of improvement for Democrats in the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan was in organizing and making their party relevant in the area. As discussed earlier, the Democrats of the late 1920s and early 1930s lacked organization and presence in most of Michigan. Democrats struggled to find candidates for local and state elections. Republicans dominated not only because of a tradition of people voting for them, but by continuing to put pressure on the Democrats with well-known candidates, lots of money, and lots of campaign hours poured into elections. Taking a page from the Republican book, the Democrats finally were able to organize themselves and to begin to move votes to their side. Prior to the 1938 and 1940 elections, Democrats were rarely noted for making campaign stops in the eastern Upper Peninsula; however, by those elections, Democrats frequently visited cities and towns across the area. Additionally, one of the most important moves the Democrats made was creating a regional headquarters in the Upper Peninsula.

Just before the 1938 gubernatorial election, Democrats established their
headquarters for the 15 counties of the Upper Peninsula in the city of Escanaba. All
speakers, fliers, ads, and other campaign related issues centered were centered
there. Not only was the location in Escanaba central to the entire Upper Peninsula,
but Delta County also emerged as the third highest relief dependent county in the
Upper Peninsula. Creating the Democratic headquarters in the area showed the
awareness of the party to the still urgent situation of relief for the unemployed.
Although Escanaba was still far from other large cities in the Upper Peninsula, it was
better than having nothing at all. Additionally, having the Democrats present in the
Upper Peninsula established that the party recognized the area and its significance.
Every voter, from a large city to a small town wants to feel that their lives matter.
Political parties can express their concern by making appearances and their
presence known, and they know this concern will give them an advantage on
Election Day. In general, people liked interacting with potential politicians or
elected state officers. By contacting and talking directly with candidates, people can
introduce issues directly to someone who might be able to fix them if elected, thus
giving people more of an inclination to get their candidate elected.

Additionally, Democrats tried to find candidates from the Upper Peninsula to
run for offices in the U.S. and Michigan State Congress. Most of the politicians
running in state and federal elections came from the Lower Peninsula cities like
Detroit or Grand Rapids. With nearly 300 miles between Detroit and St. Ignace,
people of the Upper Peninsula felt that their needs were not being met, much less

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understood, politicians from the Lower Peninsula. For example, Democrats seized onto Prentiss M. Brown, who was born and raised in St. Ignace, Michigan. He began his political career in the early 1930s as a representative in the United States Congress for Michigan. By 1938, Representative Brown traded in his seat in the House for one in the Senate. Senator Brown helped bring the issues of the Upper Peninsula to the federal government. His name would later be synonymous with advocating one of the largest construction projects ever taken on in Michigan. In 1934, Brown began urging federal and state governments to build a bridge over the Straits of Mackinac. Being from St. Ignace, Brown saw firsthand the need for a bridge to connect the Lower and Upper Peninsulas of Michigan, and he also saw how a bridge could benefit the eastern Upper Peninsula and the Lower Northern Peninsula. Using candidates from the area paralleled the idea of creating a party headquarters in a town. People feel like if the candidate is from their particular area, they would have a better idea or more consideration for local issues than an outsider because the candidate has had direct contact or involvement in the area.

Another important factor to keep Democrats in favor was the continuation of public works projects throughout the eastern Upper Peninsula. By the 1938 and 1940 elections, newspapers began to report the amount of relief spent in each county in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. In 1938, the Evening News of Sault Ste. Marie reported that Chippewa County received over 2.5 million dollars since relief efforts began in 1933. In September of 1940, The Escanaba Daily Press released the amount of state aid given to each of the 15 counties in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Michigan since the early 1930s. Delta County ranked third for the most amount of relief poured into it, out of the fifteen counties of the Upper Peninsula. Additionally, Delta County ranked number one on the list of the six counties studied in this report. The total amount of aid given to Delta County was nearly $931,000. Chippewa County came in second on the list with over $661,000 spent. Schoolcraft and Alger Counties both came in at around $350,000 spent in aid, and Luce and Mackinac Counties spent about $320,000 in state aid. The two Upper Peninsula counties that were given the most state aid were Houghton County, which was given nearly $1.2 million, and Marquette County, which edged out Delta County with over $953,000. The money given to these counties via state and federal aid went to improve education, health services, welfare, highways, and other smaller miscellaneous projects. None of the money provided went to direct relief. This money not only helped people earn wages, but added to the money provided by the federal government to help with infrastructure projects across the eastern Upper Peninsula.

Improvement of public health continued in the area. A few years earlier, a major hospital in Luce County received WPA money for structure improvements. Later in 1938, President Roosevelt approved a large project to make the birth, death, and immunization records at local hospitals more efficient and user friendly. In earlier years, the primary focus of public works projects focused on the repairing the hospital structures themselves. Now the focus of the projects seemed to take a more internal approach by working on the records in the facilities, illustrating that

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structures were not the only things that needed to be fixed in many health care systems. Improving access of records displays a deeper concern for the health and safety of the public by the federal government. Furthermore, these more information based jobs targeted more "white collar" workers who were also unemployed. Often this group may have been overlooked because most of the time people think of factory workers as the ones in the unemployment lines. However, not only were former factory workers in those lines. Unemployment struck almost all levels of jobs. The PWA recognized this and began turning their efforts to help those in information based jobs.

Additionally, projects continued to keep the Civilian Conservation Corps busy. By October of 1938, forty-two CCC camps were remaining open for work during the winter, which was only three or fewer than the number of camps open during warmer months. Because the cold weather and snow season remained around for a longer period of time in the Upper Peninsula than the parts of the Lower Peninsula, most construction projects could not be worked on during the winter season. This problem lead to higher unemployment rates in the winter than summer and thus more indirect relief was needed during the winter. While direct relief was helpful, it did not produce any projects and simply paid people to sit at home. Director Robert Fechner also announced that in the summer of 1939, new camps would open all over the Upper Peninsula, which included a few in Schoolcraft County continuing the hope for increased summer employment. The work

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7 Ibid.
continued by the CCC proved to be invaluable for future forest conservation and tourism.

With the work accomplished by the Civilian Conservation Corps improved and preserved forests and created park and camping areas, many people turned to tourism as one way to infuse money into the economy. However, what most people recognized was the inadequate road conditions throughout the Upper Peninsula. While projects on hospitals and parks continued, the main focus of Works Progress Administration funds was spent on roads. Most of the total amount of state aid given to the counties of the eastern Upper Peninsula went to road and highway work. Alger County received nearly $122,000 for highways, while Delta and Chippewa Counties received about $190,000 each for road work. Mackinac County received about $110,000. Schoolcraft County gained about $90,000. Mackinac County received $75,000 to improve highways.\(^8\) In the 1930s, many major highways in the Upper Peninsula were gravel or unpaved surfaces. Many people argued that by paving roads and creating more highway systems that these new and safer roadways would entice more people to travel to the Upper Peninsula because the roads would be safer and easier to travel on.

One of the largest highway projects in the eastern Upper Peninsula was the improvement of Trunkline M-28, which ran from Sault Ste. Marie all the way west to Ironwood and was a total of about 305 miles long. Between 1933 and 1938, nearly half of the road was already revamped with concrete. Additionally, 12 other structures and surfaces were improved in that span, which included five grade

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separations and seven bridges. With the harsh winters and short summers to build in the Upper Peninsula Highway Commissioner Murray D. Van Wagoner was pleased with the progress made by workers. In addition to the M-28 improvements, M-35 also received federal money for improvements. The idea was to reroute the road through J.W. Wells Park to make it a more attractive and scenic drive for tourists.\footnote{"The M-35 Relocation," \textit{Escanaba Daily Press}, Oct. 1, 1938.} However, the people of northern Lower Michigan and the eastern Upper Peninsula sought after a much larger project—a bridge roughly five miles stretching over the Straits of Mackinac.

Despite the five mile gap between the Upper and lower Peninsulas of Michigan, this relatively short distance proved to be a huge physical challenge. During the 1930s the only ways to reach the Upper Peninsula were by taking a long trip via the highway around Lake Michigan and through Wisconsin or by the ferry service located at the Straits of Mackinac. The problem with both ways was that the amount of time to travel to the Upper Peninsula often deterred people from going there. Once news circulated of the new updated parks in the late 1930s, a large increase of tourists that traveled to the Upper Peninsula. However, the slow ferry service often turned people away and kept them in the Lower Northern Peninsula. Backups in St. Ignace and Mackinaw City could be miles long and people would wait hours for a ferry.

Additionally, the Straits of Mackinac was a significant gap for citizens of the Upper Peninsula. In a literal sense the Upper and Lower Peninsula of Michigan was geographically divided by the Straits of Mackinac, but the gap between these
peninsulas held a deeper meaning. People of the Upper Peninsula felt disconnected from the people of Lower Michigan and politically divided. Some of the people in the Upper Peninsula felt that even though political candidates visited the Upper Peninsula, politicians paid more attention to their constituents in the Lower Peninsula. Generally, people in the Upper Peninsula felt underappreciated and underrepresented in state and federal government. An article in the Sault Ste. Marie 
*Evening News* stated, "A bridge at the Straits of Mackinac is the only thing that will give justice to the Upper Peninsula." 

One way to bring the two peninsulas of Michigan together was to literally bridge the gap between them. With the emergence of federal funds promoting huge projects such as the Hoover Dam and numerous other hydroelectric facilities throughout Tennessee, the idea of a bridge over the Straits of Mackinac seemed feasible via federal monies. The idea of a bridge connecting the Lower and Upper portions of Michigan began circulating in state and government forums in 1934. In June of the same year, a bill presented by two Democratic Congressmen of Michigan, Representative Prentiss M. Brown (who was born and raised in the city of St. Ignace) and Senator Arthur A. Vandenberg, reached the United States Congress. After reviewing and passing the bill, Congress granted the State of Michigan the ability to assemble the Mackinac Bridge Commission and begin surveys for constructing a bridge over the Straits of Mackinac. This was a huge step forward for beginning the construction of the bridge. If successful, the project would employ hundreds of men and bring much needed money to the Straits area.

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Within days Republicans stepped up and stopped the project from progressing further. Estimations for the bridge reached nearly $35 million dollars, and the Mackinac Bridge Commission hoped that the project could be helped through federal aid. Once the estimate reached the United States House, Representative Mapes, a Republican from Michigan, remarked that the project was a "wild fantasy of the imagination."12 Justifying his remark, Representative Mapes added that further surveys and consideration for the economic conditions should be taken into account before any further progress is made.13 From the surveys at that time, a bridge directly across the Straits at its narrowest part seemed like an engineering impossibility because of water depths and water currents, as well as traffic from freighters. The second plan proposed by the bill to reach across the Straits was to start a causeway from Cheboygan to Bois Blank Island to Round Island to the western tip of Mackinac Island then finally reaching the Upper Peninsula. The total mileage of this venture was nearly eleven miles and would also cost over $35 million to construct versus the five miles using the direct path across the Straits.14 With no concise determination of where the money for the bridge would come from, the project was put on hold. A few years later in 1938, the Straits of Mackinac Bridge project reemerged. News reached Chase Osborn, the Chairman of the Straits of Mackinac Bridge Committee, from Senator Brown that President

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
Roosevelt assured a bridge would be built at the Straits, and surveys of the area picked up again.\textsuperscript{15}

This time around in 1938 the both Democrats and Republicans took the Straits Bridge project more seriously, and building a bridge over the Straits became a key issue, particularly in the state elections of 1938. Republicans in Michigan were finally on board and endorsed a bridge at the Straits of Mackinac connecting Michigan’s Upper and Lower Peninsulas. While traveling around the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Republican incumbent Governor Frank Fitzgerald rallied behind the idea of constructing a bridge or tunnel system across the Straits of Mackinac. Fred Bradley, a Republican running for a seat in the U.S. House, backed up Governor Fitzgerald by assuring potential voters that if elected he would assure the bridge would be built while he was in office. Attempting to show voters that the bridge was also a major issue in the Lower Peninsula, Bradley added, “...the Straits of Mackinac is only a physical barrier between the two peninsulas, that there are not thoughts and aims of the people in the two areas; and that when he is elected he wants to eliminate that barrier.”\textsuperscript{16} As people began to see tourism as a way to invigorate the economy in the eastern Upper Peninsula, more pressure was put on politicians to get federal funding for the Straits of Mackinac project. Republicans saw the bridge project as an opportunity to regain votes they may have lost in previous elections.


The construction of a bridge over the Straits of Mackinac enticed many people. Transporting goods via the highway would take less time. Additionally, a bridge would allow for a continuous flow of traffic across the Strait of Mackinac that would not have to wait for ferries. A trip across the Straits that could take hours, or even days, would be shortened to just a few minutes. Most importantly, the first part of the Upper Peninsula to reap the benefits of a bridge would be the eastern Upper Peninsula. The significance and urgency of this project soon took precedence over many other issues. When Republicans joined the Democrats on this issue probably brought back some voters to their side and helped reinvigorate their base.

Ultimately the projected was stopped by President Roosevelt late in 1938 because it would cost too much money to build the bridge over the Straits of Mackinac. The President added that the while the bridge project would be too large for the WPA funds, he would still like to see a bridge constructed. This action probably lead to discontent with the Democratic Party seeing as one of the projects people in the eastern Upper Peninsula wanted was rejected by the highest ranking Democratic official in the United States government. Going into the 1940 elections, the primaries showed that Republicans had a strong base that could possible topple the Democratic. In Schoolcraft County, primary results noted that Republicans received nearly a 5 to 3 advantage over Democratic candidates. Even in Delta County, the first in the eastern Upper Peninsula favor to Democrats over Republicans, show voters leaning toward the Republican ticket.

18 "GOP Margin is about 5 to 3," Escanaba Daily Press, Sept. 12, 1940.
Although they are just primary results and cannot truly predict the winner of an election, they showed a stronger Republican base was emerging than in previous years and the Republican Party was on the verge of a comeback. Despite the large turnout of Republicans in the primary, a strong base of Democrats voted in the presidential election. This election shows that even despite the failure of the bridge project, the Democrats were able to keep the strong base they gained in the 1936 presidential election. Republicans were able to recapture Chippewa, Luce, and Mackinac counties in the presidential election of 1940, which were won by them in 1932. These counties of the six tended to have stronger base of Republicans in past elections. However, despite the reemergence of the Republicans in Chippewa, Luce, and Mackinac counties, their margin of victory was rather small. In Chippewa County, Republicans edged out the Democrats by receiving fifty-one percent of the total votes cast. The percentage of victory for Republicans in Luce and Mackinac Counties was just above fifty-five percent. Meanwhile, Democrats won by a small margin in Schoolcraft and Delta Counties with about fifty-five percent of the total votes. Alger County, however, received the highest percentage of votes for Democrats, which was sixty-three percent of the total votes cast. Figure 9 show the results of the 1938 gubernatorial election between Democrat Frank Murphy and Republican Governor Fitzgerald. Figure 10 show the results of the presidential election of 1940.
Figure 9

Figure 10

The presidential election of 1940 was won by President Roosevelt. The looming fears of war in Europe and the continuation of public works programs helped Roosevelt retain the presidency for another four years. Michigan as a whole was a highly contentious state in the election of 1940. When all the votes were in, Republican Presidential candidate Wendell Willkie won all 19 electoral votes of Michigan. Much like the Democrats from the 1928 to 1932 elections broke down the Republican Party, the Republicans began breaking down the Democratic majority. Unlike the previous elections of 1936 and 1934, Democrats began to lose some of the ground that they gained. Roosevelt’s broken promise of the Straits of Mackinac Bridge project combined with local Democrats not pushing harder for the work to continue probably lost them some votes and gave reinvigorated Michigan Republicans. Although the Democrats lost some voters in the 1940 election, the previous decade dominated by public works programs created by President Roosevelt allowed Democrats to show what they could do in a time of crisis. As a result of the Great Depression and the policies of the Democratic Party, the Democrats were able to create and keep a large base of Democrat favoring voters—giving them more power than ever before in the eastern Upper Peninsula.
Conclusion

Prior to the election of President Roosevelt, Michigan traditionally voted for Republican candidates in local, state, and national elections. On very few occasions did a Democrat win any election in the state of Michigan prior to 1928. However, as unemployment increased and the funds for relief decreased, something needed to be done and it was not happening while Republicans were in office. By the time Governor Brucker and President Hoover took action, the damage to the reputation of the Republicans was done, and the Democrats seized the opportunity to implement a greater expansion of President Hoover’s public works programs to an unprecedented level.

While the Great Depression is often seen as some of the darkest days in American history, it gave the Democratic Party the opportunity to show the nation what they could accomplish during a crisis. Their actions during the depression to combat unemployment and helped put people back to work. The projects completed by the Public Works Administration, the Works Progress Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the numerous other organization started by the Roosevelt Administration provided much needed improvements to national infrastructure and improved even the smallest communities. Even in the darkest of times and the hardest economic tragedy, these projects brought some hope into people’s lives. However, it is important to remember that the foundation of the public works programs was established by Hoover just before he left office. Roosevelt built upon Hoover’s programs and expanded them throughout the nation.
The presidential election of 1940 was won by President Roosevelt. The looming fears of war in Europe and the continuation of public works programs helped Roosevelt retain the presidency for another four years. Michigan as a whole was a highly contentious state in the election of 1940. When all the votes were in, Republican Presidential candidate Wendell Willkie won all 19 electoral votes of Michigan. Much like the Democrats from the 1928 to 1932 elections broke down the Republican Party, the Republicans began breaking down the Democratic majority. Unlike the previous elections of 1936 and 1934, Democrats began to lose some of the ground that they gained. Roosevelt's broken promise of the Straits of Mackinac Bridge project combined with local Democrats not pushing harder for the work to continue probably lost them some votes and gave reinvigorated Michigan Republicans. Although the Democrats lost some voters in the 1940 election, the previous decade dominated by public works programs created by President Roosevelt allowed Democrats to show what they could do in a time of crisis. As a result of the Great Depression and the policies of the Democratic Party, the Democrats were able to create and keep a large base of Democrat favoring voters—giving them more power than ever before in the eastern Upper Peninsula.
From large cities to forests in the far north, the reach of Roosevelt’s program was unprecedented.

The range in variety of the projects implemented by President Roosevelt was also important. Most of the Works Progress Administration and Public Works Administration helped improve infrastructure to roads and bridges, as well as streamlining and improving the quality of health care and hospitals around the nation—even in the small Upper Peninsula town of Newberry. One of Roosevelt’s favorite programs and one of the most popular programs provided in the New Deal established the Civilian Conservation Corps. The work done by the CCC turned thousands of acres of cut over forest into welcoming parks and campgrounds.

Michigan today boasts the largest number of national parks in the nation and the work to preserve them was done by the CCC. The CCC also helped to improve state park facilities as well. Other programs that were not mentioned here helped benefit the preservation of buildings and the arts. Additionally, the jobs created by these programs helped people both blue collar and white collar backgrounds.

The projects and work of the workers on these projects remains invaluable, even to this day. Michigan still depends on the parks and forests improved by the workers of the Civilian Conservation Corps to draw tourists to the Upper Peninsula. Improvements on the roads and bridges made traveling safer and easier than before. Now routes like M-28, U.S. 2, and M-35, and numerous other highways improved by public works projects during the Depression continues to serve as main highways across the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.
The improvements made throughout the eastern Upper Peninsula were made possible by the success of the New Deal implemented by the Democratic Party and President Roosevelt. From Roosevelt's victory in the 1932 election, the Democrats were able to gain a solid base of voters that they never had before and retain it for a significant amount of time. In less than eight years, the eastern Upper Peninsula shifted from favoring all Republican candidates to favoring Democratic candidates for local, state, and federal government positions. The confidence instilled by Roosevelt that the Democrats were capable of managing a huge crisis helped overturn the previous notion that the Democratic Party was weak and unorganized, particularly in Michigan. The Democratic base established during this time created a solid base of Democratic voters, and eventually Michigan would become a Democratic favoring state. Despite losing some popularity in the 1940 presidential election, the Democrats policies from the Great Depression created a solid base of voters that lasted for years.
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**Secondary**


