

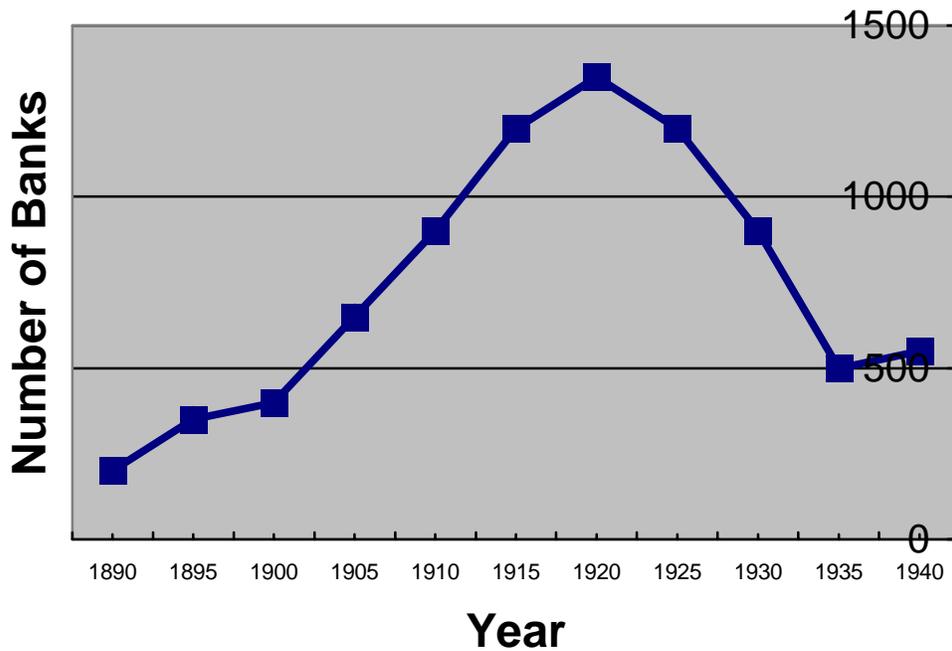
UNIT III: THE DEPRESSION (1919-1940)

Topics: Industry and Agriculture

INTRODUCTION TO TEACHERS

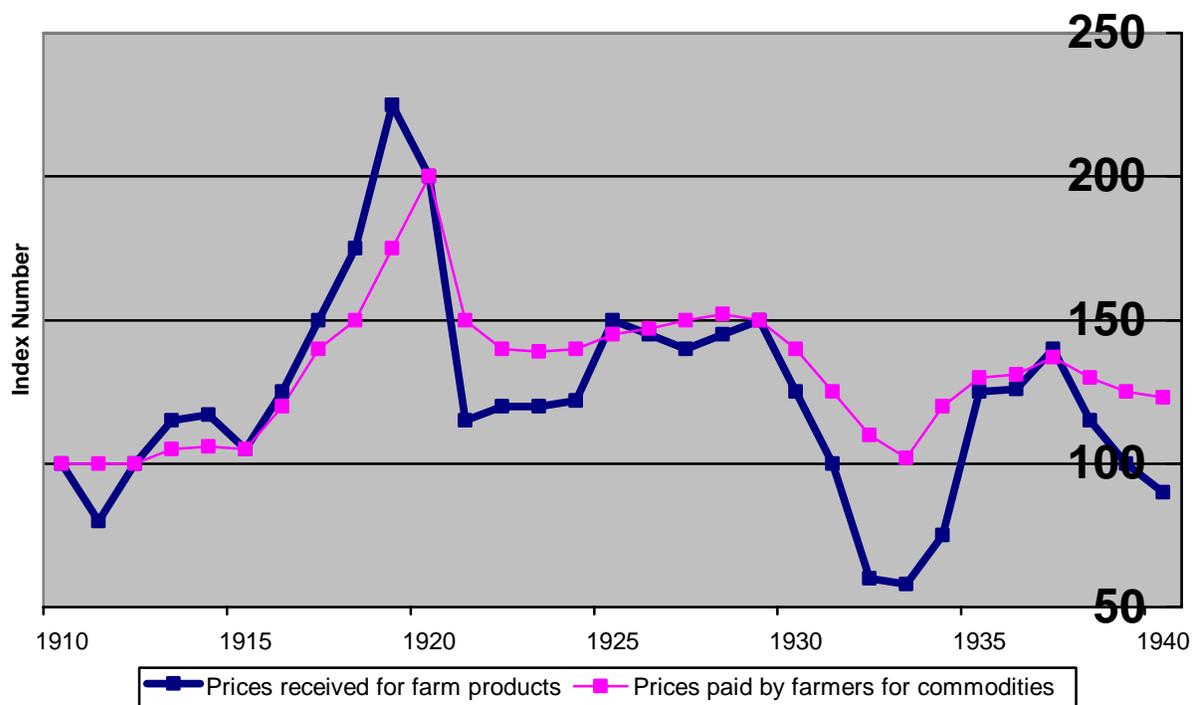
The Great Depression in Iowa did not begin with the stock market failure of 1929. Following the economically productive years of World War 1, there was a sharp decline in economic activity in Iowa. One index of this decline was the large number of banks which closed during the twenties. By 1932 there were less than half the number of Iowa banks that there were at the close of World War 1.

Banks in Iowa, 1891-1939



Another index of economic decline was the sharp downturn in farm prices starting in 1919. The graph below shows the prices received by farmers compared to the prices paid by farmers for commodities.

Prices Paid and Prices Received by Iowa Farmers, 1910-1939



As both graphs illustrate, the depression was the most severe between 1932 and 1933 with farm prices failing to depths not known since the early 1900s. These statistics are important to an understanding of the depression in Iowa since Iowa was predominantly a rural state. During the 1920s and 1930s, Iowa remained between 60 and 70% rural. Of the 30 - 40% of the population who lived in urban areas, many worked in agri-related industries. The documents in this section provide insight into the lives of both factory workers and farmers during the depression.

The following materials support the study of the Great Depression in Iowa:

1. *Five Families in Dubuque: The Urban Depression*

Included in this collection are interviews of working people in Dubuque conducted by the WPA in 1937 and 1938. These interviews provide valuable information about the urban laborer's experiences with unemployment, local relief, and the New Deal.

2. *The Diary of Elmer Powers* (1932-1933)

Elmer Powers, an Iowa farmer, lived in Boone County during the darkest days of the depression. His diary provides valuable insight into the attitudes and experiences of Iowa's rural population.

3. *The Diary of Clara Ackerman* (1932-1933)

Clara Ackerman, an Iowa farm wife, lived in southern Iowa during the days of the depression. She skillfully expresses her opinions about farm life, politics and economics in this segment of her diary.

Explorations in Iowa History Project, Malcolm Price Laboratory School, University Of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa
©COPYRIGHT 2003 University of Northern Iowa Lynn.Nielsen@uni.edu Duplication for Instructional purposes only. Credits: Logo and site design by ITS CET Documents courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa