

### ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY OCTOBER 4



View of Arthurdale. Harry Carlson Collection, Ms2011-12

**On October 4, 1933, the federal government purchased the Arthur farm in Preston County to establish the first subsistence homestead, Arthurdale.**

**CSO: SS.8.7, SS.8.14, SS.8.24, ELA.8.1**

**Investigate the Document: (Ms2011-012, Harry Carlson Collection)**

1. How did the people of Arthurdale make a living? How are the 2300 acres that encompass Arthurdale described?
2. Arthurdale is located twenty miles east of \_\_\_\_\_ and seventy-five miles southeast of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. What does Harry Carlson note that was in dire need of reorganization?

**Think Critically:** Arthurdale was the first of many planned New Deal communities that were established under FDR's administration. What was the reasoning behind these communities? In your own words, explain the effects of the Great Depression and the lasting impact of New Deal programs on West Virginia.

Arthurdale is the home of 250 families rescued by the New Deal from nearby coal-mining villages. It occupies an area of about 2300 acres. Most of it is rich black bottom land protected by a series of wooded hills. Here the Homesteaders eke out a fair living by tilling intensively their plots of ground ranging from two to five acres of land and earning extra money in the factory built on the project. There is a certain amount of "taking each other's washing," such as janitorial service, working in the co-op stores and barber shop.

Houses range from extensively altered "ready-built summer cottages" to two-story with basement individually-planned ones. All have their own driven wells and pumping apparatus, as well as individual sewage disposal units.

Centrally located is a Community center with project offices, Co-op store, office, workshop, post office, and recreational hall which is used for church and club meetings.

## CHAPTER I

Twenty miles east of Morgantown, the home of West Virginia's University and 75 miles southeast of Pittsburgh in the Appalachian Soft Coal region is Arthurdale; the "experimental" laboratory of the Federal Government's ambition to build communities, sometimes called subsistence homesteads. Here 250 families live, they rear their children, eke out a fair standard of existence and increasingly resist the insistence of socially minded New Dealers that they be used as guinea pigs for their experiments.

Not always have they fared so well, not always have they been the center of interests wishing to build a new order.

About 90 per cent of them come from local deserted mining villages, the rest from surrounding hamlets and hills of West Virginia.

The social attitudes they now possess were not always theirs. As a group they have passed through four great changes or phases of social relationships. The transition periods were moments of great strain. The ushering in of each new era came suddenly. Adjustment wrought havoc with existing attitudes.

The story of the changing social attitudes and indices of adjustment is a fascinating one. Tracing the living of a group of people through the maelstrom of experiences that were theirs for a generation is a stupendous job, but today's attitudes need that background for their comprehension. Today's attitudes are all consuming in interest, but they reflect a little of the ideas that social reorganizers set in motion during the worst years of the depression

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when all eyes were fixed on events that for a time seemed destined to remake our social existence.

During the years of the depression the country was searching everywhere for a "way out". The depression had moved people toward a frame of mind that anything was possible. Hungry folks stormed centers better stacked with food. Deserted cities and communities dotted the country. The morale of the nation was sinking lower and lower. Reorganization of social and economic forces was a dire necessity. Many "plans" were suggested for social reform or reorganization. Back to the farm movements were started. Decentralization of industry was suggested. There was a hope that some way of living could be found that would make it possible for working men to tide themselves over periods of depression. Manufacturers, social organizations and socially minded officials joined hands and ideas to give subsistence homesteads their initial push. Subsistence homesteads were but one phase of the reorganization undertaken by the new administration, but this endeavour has a unique significance that can be brought out by showing the evolution of people's attitudes and their institutions.