

Looking Back at 2023: A Banner Year for the Living New Deal

LND ANNUAL ACTIVITIES REPORT FOR 2023

New LND Website Unveiled

Our website is the heart of the Living New Deal. It features our national map of New Deal public works and artworks and the extensive research that has gone into it over the years. It includes a wealth of other resources on the New Deal, past and present, including newsletters, webinars, videos, historical summaries, and more. These public educational resources are free to everyone and attract well over a million visitors a year, according to Google analytics.

The website underwent a total overhaul that was introduced to the world in September 2023. The renovated website brings a more aesthetically pleasing look and a new layout that makes for greater ease of use by visitors. The organization of our immense mass of information on the New Deal became clearer, making our content more accessible to users. Behind the scenes, the rebuild improved the internal workings of the website to increase speed and reduce storage costs, and it also made the submission of new documented sites and photographs easier.

The redesign and reconstruction of the website over the last three years was the work of Webmaster Lisa Thompson, with design and content input from Executive Director Richard Walker and invaluable programming input from Todd Abbott at Full Orbit Web.

National Map Passes 18,000 New Deal Sites

This year, our online [archive of New Deal sites](#) grew to more than 18,300 projects. Some 500 were documented and submitted by National Associates and other volunteers. Research Director Elena Ion vets the new additions for our searchable online the map and database.

Richard Walker traveled to Idaho in search of New Deal sites and Researcher-at-Large Evan Kalish generated scores of new sites in Nebraska and Connecticut for our database and map. Brent McKee is also adding sites and has produced several entries on racially integrated CCC camps, the CCC's work at Gettysburg National Military Park, and the amazing locomotives financed by the Public Works Administration (PWA).

Lisa Thompson also made important improvements to our online map platform by MapBox expert Victor Temprano of Mapster.

New Deal Art Initiative Launched

In 2023, we undertook a major new initiative, "Advocating for New Deal Art" (ANDA) and hired Dr. Mary Okin to lead it. Okin recently completed graduate training in American art and digital humanities at UC Santa Barbara. Okin is also serving as LND's Assistant Director to learn the ropes for when Walker eventually steps down as LND's Executive Director.

Okin has been reaching out to New Deal art experts to seek advice. She created an Advisory Board of senior scholars who will help build community, plan events, fundraise, and promote New Deal art appreciation and preservation. Among ANDA's priorities in 2024 are documenting New Deal art archives and collections nationally in order to develop a comprehensive guide for navigating widely dispersed resources about New Deal art programs, their administration, and surviving legacies. The ANDA initiative will also organize webinars.

Okin attended several New Deal art events beginning with the College Art Association Annual Conference in New York, where she met leaders of the CETA Arts Legacy Project. She networked with scholars at the American Literature Conference in Boston, where she met the great-granddaughter of Harry Hopkins. She viewed *Art for the People: WPA-era Paintings from the Dijkstra Collection* at three venues in California (Crocker Art Museum, Oceanside Museum of Art, Huntington Library), *Art for the Millions: American Culture and Politics in the 1930s* at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and the *Healing Wall* exhibit at Roosevelt House in New York (see below). She was also invited to meet regularly with leading collectors of New Deal art.

Finally, Okin collaborated with other LND staff on applications for grant funding to the Terra Foundation for American Art and California Humanities, and on a preliminary proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities for expanding LND's work in digital humanities.

The Second Annual New Deal Book Award Presented

Our second annual New Deal Book Award went to Victoria Wolcott for *Living in the Future: Utopianism and the Long Civil Rights Movement*, published by University of Chicago Press. The award was presented at the Roosevelt Reading Festival at the FDR Presidential Library and Museum in Hyde Park, NY, on June 24. Founder Gray Brechin and Kimberley Johnson, chair of the Book Award Review Committee introduced the awardee. Professor Wolcott later did an LND webinar about her book in conversation with Professor Kimberly Johnson in October.

Kurt Feichtmeir oversaw the entire award process, from placing calls for nominations in professional journals to collecting nominations, organizing the review committee, and arranging the award presentation at Hyde Park. The award committee of New Deal scholars, in addition to Prof. Johnson of NYU, included professors Mason Williams of Williams College, Sharon Musher of Stockton University (NJ), Chloe Thurston of Northwestern, and our 2021 New Deal Book Award Winner Scott Borchert.

Celebrating the 90th Anniversary of the New Deal, 1933-2023

The opening year of New Deal's 90th anniversary gave us good reason to celebrate. We raised our glasses—and our visibility—at a number of events held in honor of the occasion. Communications Director Susan Ives led the way on these efforts.

Remembering the Dust Bowl

Dalhart, Texas, a city in the bullseye of the Dust Bowl, recalled the New Deal's restoration and relief programs in June. Presenters included Living New Deal National Research Associate Annie Rothstein Segan, who showcased iconic images of the Dust Bowl that her dad, Arthur Rothstein, took for the Farm Security Administration. In addition, an exhibition of Rothstein's work, "[New Deal America](#)," at the Gage Gallery at Roosevelt University in Chicago through May 2024.

Honoring the Federal Writers' Project

The Living New Deal was well represented at the July [Library of Congress symposium, "Rewriting America: Politics, Vision, Purpose."](#) Living New Deal National Research Associate Susan Rubenstein DeMasi, author of the book *Henry Alsberg, The Driving Force Behind the Federal Writers' Project*, was among the leading scholars to speak at the conference.

Rewarding the New Deal Spirit

Greenbelt, Maryland, founded by the New Deal, celebrated at its annual Utopian Film Festival in October by presenting the New Deal Spirit Award. The winning film, *Town Destroyer*, is a thought-provoking documentary about the controversial New Deal-era murals at San Francisco's George Washington High School. Producers Alan Snitow and Deborah Kauffman previously hosted a screening at a benefit for the Living New Deal in 2022.

A Walk in the Woods

In October, "A Walk in Muir Woods," in partnership with the National Park Service, highlighted the history of the CCC in the surrounding parklands. Our group hiked among the ancient redwoods with Living New Deal founder, Gray Brechin and historian Ranger Matt Cerkel, with NPS's Mia Monroe and Ranger Jace Ritchey as guides. The NPS's restoration team just completed long-planned habitat recovery efforts at Redwood Creek. Spawning Coho salmon, a struggling species long absent from the park, were observed swimming up the creek that same day!

Grand Finale of 2023

In November, in partnership with the SF MOMA, National Park Service and the San Francisco National Maritime Park Association, we held a gala gathering at the San Francisco Maritime Museum, an architectural landmark built by the WPA. The event, "[Happy Days Are Here Again](#)," began with federal Judge Charles Breyer raising a toast to the New Deal and Aaron Peskin, President of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, presenting a Proclamation from the City honoring the work of the Living New Deal. The evening's featured speakers, historians Heather Cox Richardson, Gary Kamiya, and Gray Brechin, reflected on the New Deal and America today. Photos and videos can be found on [the event webpage](#) and our [YouTube channel](#).

Social Media Outreach Strengthened

This year we turned our Social Media effort up a notch in hopes of reaching new and younger audiences. The first step was hiring Sophia Gimenez of Santa Monica, CA, to lead the way and bring a youthful vision to the job. Gimenez posts regularly about Living New Deal events; milestones of the 90th anniversary of the New Deal; stories about New Deal art; resources on the LND website; and New Deal sites added to our online national map. As a result, she has steadily expanded the number of followers on Instagram (up by a third) and Facebook (up by half) over the past years. She also is developing new liaisons with organizations interested in New Deal history and art.

Brent McKee continues to contribute research and content about New Deal history to livingnewdeal.com and posts to LND's Twitter/X account. He has doubled the number of followers over the year with his timely posts linking modern-day issues to New Deal programs addressing the same problems in American life. Some of his tweets have received tens of thousands of views, e.g.,

WPA and toys: 34,000 views

<https://twitter.com/LivingNewDeal/status/1733523347668107390>

Rexford Tugwell & New Deal freedom from regimentation: 57,000 views

<https://twitter.com/LivingNewDeal/status/1665104097286995970>

WPA response to loneliness: 25,000 views

<https://twitter.com/LivingNewDeal/status/1653520477879500802>

National Associate for the Northwest Judith Kenny produced a brilliant video on Eagle Creek Recreation Area in Oregon, where the Civilian Conservation Corps made extensive improvements. [The CCC's Legacy at Eagle Creek Recreation Area - YouTube](#). She sought and received a grant from the Kinsman Foundation that allowed her to hire a professional videographer to help with the project.

New Deal History Resources Expanded

Project Historian Brent McKee has been busy, as always, amplifying the history resources on the Living New Deal website. He has written new entries on New Deal public health programs, the Farm Security Administration, and New Dealer leaders such as Frank Murphy and Grace Langdon. The history section, with its program summaries and New Dealer bios, is the most visited part of the website after the national map and is heavily used by teachers and students. We're doing valuable work bringing to life the people and programs that have been lost to time.

McKee also developed guides to research sources on the CCC and the Civil Works Administration (CWA) to support independent New Deal researchers around the country. McKee has scanned over 8,000 WPA photographs in the National Archives for a new section of the website, which will make these important photographic records available to online researchers. These new resources will be forthcoming in 2024.

New York City Chapter Going Strong

The NYC Chapter produced several excellent webinars on policy topics tying the New Deal to present-day concerns:

- *Transforming the Nation's Food System: Lessons from the New Deal and Strategies for Today* (with Roosevelt House) on March 2
- *Social Security: Demographics, Economics, Politics & Its Future* on June 29
- *Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Eleanor Roosevelt and Frances Perkins Embrace Politics and Power for Women* (with Roosevelt House) on November 20
- *Unions from the Wagner Act to the New Labor Movement* on December 18.

These webinars often featured New York Chapter members, including Arlene Geiger, Kevin Baker, Jeff Gold, Blanche Wiesen Cook, and Deborah Gardner. All LND webinars are recorded and can be found on the [webinar page of our website](#) and the [LND YouTube Channel](#).

Chapter members joined in the dedication on October 11 of a monument to those who died in the horrific Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911. Witnessing the tragedy was a formative influence on Frances Perkins, the pathbreaking Secretary of Labor during the New Deal. Advisor Kevin Bacon, active with the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition that raised funds to build the memorial, attended the commemoration ceremonies with several other New York Chapter members, all holding signs promoting the New Deal.

In May, the Chapter organized a walking tour of the many New Deal contributions to Central Park. LND-NYC member, Deborah Gardner historian and curator at Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College, organized an exhibit on New Deal art in New York concerning public health and medicine:

<http://www.roosevelthouse.hunter.cuny.edu/exhibits/healing-walls-health-art-new-deal-new-york/>

We hired Arlene Geiger, a retired economics professor at John Jay College, to direct the NYC chapter for the year. She stepped down at the end of 2023 and will be replaced by author and historian Kevin Baker in 2024. We thank Arlene for her service to the LND.

New Mexico Chapter Joins the LND

The Living New Deal is adding a New Mexico Chapter as of January 1, 2024. The New Mexico group has been a leading force in New Deal art and preservation as part of the National New Deal Preservation Association (NNDPA). NNDPA, whose President is LND advisor Harvey Smith, has voted to dissolve in 2024. But the New Mexico group wants to continue under the umbrella of the LND and promises to be a fine addition to our organization and work.

Chapter leaders Kathy Flynn, Alana McGrattan, Michael Ettema, and Brad Wieneke are now part of the LND core team. Former members of the NNDPA in New Mexico have been invited to

sign on with the Living New Deal and to continue supporting the New Mexico Chapter through earmarked donations to the LND. For the time being, our website links to theirs, but Webmaster Lisa Thompson and Brad Wieneke will be working to integrate key portions of the Chapter's website with ours in 2024. Their finances will be integrated into the LND later.

Mapping New Deal Los Angeles Advances

We made significant progress toward our goal to map the enormous legacy of the New Deal in Southern California, as project we call "Making the New Deal Visible in Los Angeles." Natalie McDonald, a graduate history student at Cal State Northridge, was hired in late 2022 to lead our effort to research and document sites around greater L.A. She has uncovered scores of school renovation projects, among other sites. She conducted research at the L.A. Unified School District Art & Artifact Collection/Archive and Museum to document the massive rebuilding of schools by the New Deal following the 1933 Long Beach earthquake.

McDonald also served as an intern at the Huntington Library & Museum and was chosen by the American Historical Association to write a column for *AHA Perspectives*. As a result, she was interviewed for the American Public Media radio program, *Marketplace*, about the New Deal in Los Angeles.

We also hired Ms. Diem Duong of Garden Grove, CA to help with research on LA New Deal sites. Diem (pronounced "Zim") is a parks and outdoor recreation enthusiast who spent the summer leading hikes in Yosemite. She was trained in New Deal site research and entry by Dick Walker and will be working with McDonald.

Meanwhile, we are focused on the city of Long Beach as a model for the transformative effect of the New Deal in greater Los Angeles. Local expert, John Thomas, is working with us to create a New Deal tour of Long Beach, and has joined the LND Advisory Board. We hope to involve educators, students, and minority communities in the rediscovery of the New Deal's legacy in that city. The decision on a grant to help fund the New Deal Long Beach project is still pending.

Continuing to Get the Word Out

Communications Director Susan Ives produced an elegant printed brochure version of the LND 2022 Annual Report, which was sent to all LND supporters in March.

Gray Brechin was in high demand for talks, interviews, and tours on the New Deal and Living New Deal, as always:

- February: at the Rotary Club, Novato CA
- March: at Villa Marin, Corte Madera CA
- April: at the Rotary Club, San Rafael CA
- April: tour of Rincon Annex Post Office for UC Berkeley Retirees, San Francisco CA

- May: Interview for Adel Aali podcast
- June: at Shaping San Francisco, San Francisco CA
- August: tour of Rincon Annex Post Office for Villa Marin members, San Francisco CA
- October: "Great Minds" podcast interview

Richard Walker gave in-person and online talks on the New Deal and Living New Deal:

March: "The New Deal in California's Parks" to the California Park Rangers Training Conference at Yosemite

March: "The New Deal in Washington DC" to Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at American University

June: "Ninety Years of New Deal Art in Washington, DC" for the DC Preservation Society

In June, LND Research Advisor John Thomas gave a virtual tour of Long Beach architecture, including New Deal sites,

Financial Outlook Remains Good

Development Director Kurt Feichtmeir oversaw the continuing growth of our donor base and did his usual excellent job of cultivating donors. As a result, we enjoyed an expanding intake of small- and medium-sized donations, as well as key large donations that included a substantial bequest from the estate of former Berkeley Professor Paul Groth.

The 2023 operating budget came in around \$300,000. We finished the year with our bank account in good shape. Our budget for 2024 will be roughly the same.

We pursued grants from California Humanities, the Terra Foundation, and the Kinsman Foundation, and although none came through this year, prospects are promising for resubmissions in 2024. We also made our first foray to the National Endowment for the Humanities and will be pursuing a grant from the NEH in the coming year.

Elena Ion did her usual work managing operations for the LND and Dick Walker kept the books, dealt with the accountants, and put out the annual financial report.