Though the dire economic conditions of the Depression affected all of Colorado, drought and dust storms hit Baca County especially hard. Over half of county residents were on relief during the 1930s, and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided a desperately needed source of employment. As a work relief program, the primary goal of the WPA was to employ as many as possible, so most of a project budget was spent on labor and as little as possible on materials or plans. As a result, projects emphasized the use of local materials and were usually designed by the local sponsor or a regional WPA engineer. In Baca County, the WPA used locally quarried sandstone for most projects. These WPA projects represent the last time major construction work was done mainly by hand without any large equipment. The quality of much of the stonework is exceptional. Even many functional structures like culverts feature decorative stonework. (As you drive around the county, look for the numerous stone bridges and culverts constructed by the WPA). Most of the stone buildings are an adaptation of the Rustic Style, which originated with the National Park Service in the 1920s and emphasized the use of native materials and adaptation of indigenous or frontier methods of construction.

★★ BACA COUNTY COURTHOUSE
A fire destroyed the first Baca County Courthouse in 1910. The current courthouse replaced it in 1916. A courthouse annex, designed by the Denver firm of Mountjoy and Frewen, was constructed in 1930. In 1935, WPA workers began construction of a third addition. This two-story, stone annex served as a jail and sheriff’s quarters. The plans were prepared by E.C. Measel, a contractor who was also the project foreman, overseeing a WPA crew of 25 to 40 men. Total costs were about $35,000 (with the federal government covering roughly 80 percent), including landscaping and construction of a stone wall around the grounds. The WPA annex served as the jail until 1972 when a new jail was built. The Baca County Museum then moved into the annex.

★★ CAMPO SCHOOL
In 1935, the Campo School District applied for a WPA project to construct an addition to its frame school building. Andrew Collier, the school superintendent, prepared plans for the addition, a single-story structure of adobe blocks covered with stucco. Many WPA projects in eastern Colorado utilized adobe blocks. Inexpensive but labor-intensive, adobe construction fit well with the WPA’s efforts to direct most project costs to labor. The addition was completed in 1936; high school classes were held in the new addition while elementary classes were held in the original building. The frame building burned in 1950, leaving only the WPA addition.

★★ VILAS SCHOOL
Records indicate that the Vilas community had a school as early as 1898. The Vilas School District constructed a new school, costing $45,000, in 1929. It included classrooms as well as an indoor gymnasium. In 1930, the Big Flat District voted to consolidate with the Vilas District. Additional classroom space was needed and the Vilas District applied for a WPA project for a school addition in 1935. Construction of the stone addition began in August 1936 with a crew of 36. Several state WPA officials came for the dedication of the addition on May 19, 1937; the community held a basket dinner in their honor.

★★ PRITCHETT SCHOOL
BUS BARN
The WPA awarded the Pritchett School District a project for the construction of a five-stall, stone bus garage in April 1938. Many of Pritchett’s students came from surrounding farms, and it was essential to keep buses in good working order to drive the rural farm roads. The district had no garage facilities, and the new garage provided “a greatly needed improvement conducive to cheaper and better operation of buses.” The project included laying water lines into the building for the washing and servicing of buses.

★★ SPRINGFIELD/BACA COUNTY SHOP BUILDING
Built by the WPA in 1936, this building was designed as a garage and shop for city and county road equipment. The building is now part of the Springfield Light Plant.

★★ TWO BUTTES GYMNASIUM
In 1935, the Two Buttes School District applied for a WPA project to construct a new school building with a gymnasium and additional classrooms. According to the application: “The town of Two Buttes has no place for Public meetings or recreation. School is not large enough to take care of students nor have they any recreational center for school purposes.” Construction began in early 1936 with a crew of 36. The building was constructed of local stone “taken from eight different quarries to assure high quality.” A community supper and dance celebrated its completion in May 1937. The total cost was around $30,000. A letter appeared in the WPA Worker in August 1936, praising the WPA as the “most wonderful thing that ever happened in hard times.” The letter invited people to come see the remarkable Two Buttes Gymnasium, erected through the hard labor of amateurs without any construction machinery.

Welcome to Baca County.
These sites represent a few of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) projects in the area. There is no special order to the tour. Take your time and enjoy this tour back through time and notice the beauty and craftsmanship of these buildings. When you are finished stop for a bite to eat or something to drink.
**SPRINGFIELD CITY PARK**
In 1939, the Springfield City Council applied for a WPA project to improve Springfield’s City Park. The total project cost was around $10,000. The city provided the stone and the WPA provided the project labor. The project included the construction of stone walls, stone benches and tables, stone ovens, a stone wading pool, flower beds, and toilets.

**EDLER SCHOOL AND BUS GARAGE**
The WPA constructed the Edler School in 1937 and the Bus Garage in 1939. The area around Edler was homesteaded around 1912-1913. Settlers organized several small schools, scattered across the prairies. Around 1928, students were consolidated at Edler. A 24’ x 24’ frame building was moved from Horseshoe and placed over a one-room basement. Elementary classes were held in the basement and high school classes upstairs. The new sandstone, two-room WPA building replaced this frame school. It cost $8943; the WPA employed twenty-five men on the project. The three-stall bus garage cost $4532. The WPA covered around 90 percent of the costs.

**KONANTZ SCHOOL**
In 1935, the Konantz School District applied for a WPA project to construct a new stone school building with a full basement and stage. According to the project application: "The present school house is very much in need of repair, for it was badly damaged during the dust storms last spring. It does not provide enough room for classes, especially those of the lower grades. If the school were larger, it could be used as a community center." A WPA crew of 45 men began construction in late 1935. Workers dug rock from a quarry about 200 yards from the school. When completed in 1938, about 40 students from the surrounding farm community attended the Konantz School. The building was used until 1960 when Konantz was consolidated with Walsh Schools.

**FUNDING FOR THIS PROJECT**
Provided by: