Turning Coal to Diamond: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Arthurdale Subsistence Housing Project

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Abstract

In 1933, Eleanor Roosevelt (ER), the First Lady of the United States, initiated a subsistence housing project, Arthurdale, funded by the federal government to help a poor coal mining town in West Virginia rise above poverty. ER spotlighted subsistence housing as a promising venture for poor American workers to develop economic stability and community unification. She encountered harsh pushback from the federal government, the American public, and private industries. Deemed communistic and excessively expensive, Arthurdale pushed the boundaries of federal government involvement in community organization. Bureaucratic and financial issues impacted the community’s employment rates, income, and community cooperation. ER persisted, perhaps too blindly, until the federal government declared the project a failure and pulled out to avoid further financial loses. ER’s involvement in Arthurdale’s administration and bureaucracy radically shifted the role of the First Lady, a position with no named responsibilities or regulations. Before ER, First Ladies never exercised authority in federally regulated projects and rarely publicly presented their opinions. Did ER’s involvement in Arthurdale hinder or promote the project’s success? Should a First Lady involve herself in federal policy? If so, how much authority should she possess?
What did Eleanor Roosevelt devote her time to that went well beyond the traditional sphere of what first ladies were expected to do? She wrote newspaper columns, delivered hundreds of speeches, and served as an advocate for various causes. Eleanor Roosevelt made contact with thousands of people: out-of-work coal miners, impoverished sharecroppers, and wounded soldiers. What accomplishments were fundamental to Eleanor Roosevelt's sense of self-esteem? The first lady often visited Arthurdale during the 1930s, taking part in village square dances and attending high school commencement. Who was Marian Anderson? A great soprano. Arthurdale housed displaced and jobless coal mining families. What began as a grand scheme to ease Great Depression suffering by providing homes, gardens, a community school, and jobs for those in want, became a much criticized, costly project which Congress forced the federal government to sell. Describes the first most controversial New Deal subsistence homestead project sited in Northern West Virginia mining area in 1933. Arthurdale housed displaced and jobless coal mining families. What began as a grand scheme to ease Great Depression suffering by providing homes, gardens, a community school, and jobs for those in want, became a much criticized, costly project which Congress forced the federal government to sell. Date uploaded. Nov 09, 2009. Mrs. Roosevelt continued to advocate for the town even as the years went on and the New Deal looked elsewhere for national solutions. She helped hold the town together through locating federal grants and other assistance wherever it could be found. The town increasingly looked to her as the ongoing solution for all its challenges. And she was steadfast, always exerting herself to find some answer from the government's resources. But finally, in 1940, in a world darkened by war, Mrs. Roosevelt came to the end of her hope in the Arthurdale project. An incident with the town's school bus may have What can be learned from Chapter Introductions The New Deal May 27, 1938: Eleanor Roosevelt visits Arthurdale, West Virginia First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and her square dance partner promenaded down the aisle of clapping onlookers in the Arthurdale High School Auditorium. Five years had passed since Mrs. Roosevelt helped to establish the resettlement community of Arthurdale, West Virginia, and she wanted to be on hand to celebrate the graduation of its first high school senior class. To encourage people to make the move to Arthurdale, the federal government promised that each family would have a house with plumbing and electricity, a plot of land, and a job in a near-by factory.