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A century of excellence has extended the influence of a small campus far beyond its hometown.

In celebration of the 100th anniversary of its founding, the institution, known today as Pennsylvania College of Technology, has published a series of books that chronicles the history of the campus beginning in 1914.

This book (number four in the series) and a companion documentary, both titled *Working Class: 100 Years of Hands-On Education*, capture stories that embrace the dignity of a “working class” defined not only as a group of individuals contributing to the workforce, but also as a teaching and learning experience that puts general education into practice through relevant, hands-on activities in classrooms, shops, and laboratories.

The stories are told by the men and women who – by their actions as teachers, students, and campus and community leaders – helped to weave the institution’s rich, century-old tapestry. These stories originally were told in different forms, from personal memoirs to videotaped interviews. Many were published in newspapers and magazines.

Professor Emeritus and Master Teacher Veronica M. Muzic, who served as the college’s chief academic officer, said, “Past through present, [the book shares] a consistent motif and one that demonstrates sound planning and decision making over time.”

Penn College acknowledges the contributions of many individuals whose work supported the compilation of its history, including men and women who shared their memories through oral history recordings and provided generous contributions of documents, photographs, and memorabilia to the Madigan Library Archives.

Special thanks are offered to Professor Emeritus and Master Teacher Daniel J. Doyle, Patricia A. Scott, Thomas F. Speicher, and Christopher J. Leigh, for their work with the oral history project; Nicole S. Staron, Patricia A. Scott and Helen L. Yoas, for research assistance; and Veronica M. Muzic, Thomas W. Wilson, and Tina M. Miller for editing support.

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*Working Class: 100 Years of Hands-On Education*

Written by Elaine J. Lambert  
Designed by Sarah K. Patterson  
Digital publishing coordinated by Larry D. Kauffman and K. Park Williams

[www.pct.edu/centennial](http://www.pct.edu/centennial)

Centennial website designed by Phillip C. Warner and Judith A. Fink

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*Pennsylvania College of Technology*

2014  
Dr. Davie Jane Gilmour, *president*  
State Sen. Gene Yaw, *chairman of the board*  
Dr. Robert L. Dunham, *chairman emeritus*
Public Relations & Marketing

For more than five years, the Public Relations & Marketing staff (formerly College Information & Community Relations) invested time and talent in the development of the Centennial book series and documentary, as well as the promotion and publicity work surrounding Centennial events and activities.

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Joseph S. Yoder, associate vice president for public relations and marketing
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Dawn M. Cool, marketing communications coordinator for noncredit programs and public services
Judith A. Fink, website content manager and supervisor of alumni/advancement marketing
Michael S. Fischer, student photographer
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Phillip C. Warner, web designer
K. Park Williams, coordinator of digital publishing
Thomas W. Wilson, writer/editor, PCToday
Working Class: 100 Years of Hands-On Education offers a glimpse into classrooms that – for more than a century – have presented postsecondary education in a unique manner, combining general education with real work experience.

A century of success is rooted in the school’s respect for the “working class” – defined not only as a group contributing labor to the workforce, but also as a classroom engaging students both in traditional, general education, and relevant, hands-on, work-related activity.

Today – in a learning environment that combines classrooms, laboratories, and technology-enhanced workspaces – students directly apply knowledge gained from textbooks and lectures to real-world projects. Through this comprehensive educational experience, men and women – many representing the first generation in their families to attend college – increase their prospects for richer, fuller lives.

Fortified by its success in creating opportunities from challenges that ranged from depression and world war to global industrialization, the institution that began as a vocational education experiment in 1914 entered the 21st century as a nationally ranked, baccalaureate college.

The celebration of its Centennial presents an opportunity to explore the history of an institution distinguished by its unique mission in a crowded higher-education marketplace.

As a national leader in applied technology education, Pennsylvania College of Technology today builds upon a rich history of success, inspiring individuals, workplaces, and communities through its ongoing commitment to the “working class.”
The evolution of this institution has been marked by its renaming – three times in its 100-year history. The story began in 1914 when a new high school opened in Williamsport, Pa. A vocational-technical program housed in the school basement opened an adult training program that gained national acclaim for efforts to fight joblessness during the Great Depression. The program grew into the world-renowned Williamsport Technical Institute, founded in 1941, and created the foundation for Williamsport Area Community College, established in 1965 as one of the state’s first community colleges and the only one dedicated to hands-on, technical education.

Challenged by rising costs and facing the loss of local sponsorship required by the community college system, the college forged a unique affiliation with The Pennsylvania State University that led to the establishment of Pennsylvania College of Technology in 1989. As a special mission affiliate of Penn State, Penn College became the state’s premier technical college. In recent years, the college has articulated a vision to be recognized as a national leader in applied technology education.

Guiding the institution throughout its 100-year history are consistent, core values that celebrate the dignity of work and the importance of connecting the classroom to “real world” experiences in business, industry, and society.

This publication celebrates the ideals that inspired Williamsport’s visionary leaders to embark upon a journey in 1914 that would lead to a 21st-century model of higher education.
BOOM. Trees falling in Penn’s Woods once made a powerful sound.

In the second half of the 19th century, Pennsylvania was the greatest lumber-producing state in the nation. Williamsport – a centrally located city that held timber for miles in the cradle of the Susquehanna Log Boom Company – became known as “The Lumber Capital of the World.”

The boom created wealth in Williamsport, which claimed more millionaires per capita than any other city. While lumber barons built magnificent homes within walking distance of the Susquehanna, thousands of working-class citizens provided manual and skilled labor that brought prosperity to the river valley.
For generations, local citizens lived off the land, working on farms, in forests, and along the river. By the early 1900s, many jobs began to disappear as the timber boom that introduced great wealth into the region also depleted once-plentiful natural resources.

The Pennsylvania Lumber Museum reported, “By 1920, the seemingly endless forests had become history, and in hundreds of lumber towns as the last, solitary log was moved up the jack ladder, the sawmill whistle was given a long, lonely, final blast, which signaled the closing of the mill and the end of an era.”

It was impossible to recreate lost natural resources, but new opportunities for prosperity emerged as a result of innovations that took place during the lumbering period. Williamsport’s strategic location and the introduction of steam-powered engines, railroad transportation and other technologies led to the development of large-scale, commercial enterprises in the city. To be successful, those businesses needed educated and skilled workers.

**The boom created wealth in Williamsport, which claimed more millionaires per capita than any other city.**

Train transporting logs

Collage of Williamsport views (Market Square, Third & Pine, Trinity Church, W. Fourth & Campbell, Lycoming Opera House)
Williamsport High School

A new Williamsport High School, built on land between the Susquehanna River and the mansions of “Millionaires’ Row,” symbolized the rising importance of education in this 20th-century city.

In November 1914, a public celebration marked the dedication of a majestic, neo-classical high school building, where an enlightened faculty would introduce new ideas about teaching and learning to meet the needs of a city on the brink of change.

“At the turn of the century, the high school offered four courses of study – the classical, the Latin-scientific, the English-scientific, and the commercial,” declared Williamsport Schools Through the Years, published in 1958. “As the century progressed, the high school kept up with the times.

The school’s instructional shops were equipped with tools and machines high school students could use to develop the skills needed for jobs in local wood products and machining industries.

“Williamsport had one of the best schools for industrial arts in the state … for what we would now call vocational education,” said George H. Parkes, who joined the high school faculty as a mechanical drawing teacher in 1920. He was named director of the high school vocational program in 1924, and became the first director of Williamsport Technical Institute in 1941.

The earliest industrial shops – situated, as Parkes described, among the basement coal bins – were wood shops, a pattern-making shop and a cabinet-making shop.

“It is rather remarkable, the sophistication of that program,” Parkes declared. “The high school was new. It was a very well-built building, and was quite elaborately equipped for its size and for the size of the program at that particular time.”
“At the turn of the century, the high school offered four courses of study – the classical, the Latin-scientific, the English-scientific, and the commercial. As the century progressed, the high school kept up with the times.”

Williamsport Schools Through the Years
Locker Room Auto Shop

As automobiles gained popularity across America, vocational education leaders in Williamsport saw an early opportunity to begin training automotive mechanics, introducing one of the nation’s first instructional automotive programs. But, traditional classrooms and industrial shops were not fitting for this type of program.

“We wanted to get into the automotive field and there was no facility,” George H. Parkes recalled in a 1970 interview. “So, we got them to give us the old locker room … on the ground floor of the southwest corner of the high school …. We got an old automobile and put it in there. At the start, we had only one student and he worked pretty much alone in there. This student’s name was Morrissey, Charlie Morrissey.”

The program soon outgrew the locker room and instruction moved from the locker room to an open area under the high school football stadium bleachers.

“In order to get a respectable place to have an auto shop, we persuaded the school board to let us have the dismal, deep freeze area under the bleachers …. When weather would permit it, we did a great deal of work out there. Charlie Smith was the instructor and later Harry Myers. This auto shop under the bleachers was quite a popular thing, and it gave us the background, and confronted us with the problems.

“We finally (1931 or ’32) came up with a very elaborate auto shop, a very large auto shop, and an extremely well-equipped auto shop,” Parkes concluded. “This was perhaps one of the very first auto shop buildings built for this purpose in the state of Pennsylvania or in the country …. as far as serious auto mechanics is concerned.”

High School athletic field

Automotive mechanics
Adult Education

In addition to its vocational program for high school students, Williamsport offered adult education prior to World War I, including citizenship and literacy programs for immigrants and classes for adults interested in finding jobs in commercial fields.

After the war, a veterans’ training program operated in the city from 1920-24, offering classes in automotive mechanics, pattern-making, cabinet-making, drafting, and electricity; over the summer months, when regular school was not in session, veterans trained in the high school shops. When that program closed, the high school expanded its programming for adults.

“It was started simply as a night school, as many other school districts had at that particular time ... The most significant early step we took was when we carried the adult education program into the foremanship training program.”

George H. Parkes

In 1926-29, approximately 20 industries signed on for the foremanship training program, opening their
doors to allow the high school vocational teachers to provide on-the-job training to employees who were in line for advancement. Education had spread beyond the classroom and into the workplace.

Parkes saw the foremanship training program as an opportunity to give something back to industries that earlier offered a “cooperative education” experience to Williamsport High School vocational students. Teenage “co-op” students alternated traditional learning – in academic and shop classes – with real work experience in the cooperating local businesses.

“Most of our industries, while very cooperative, were doing it chiefly as a gesture of good will for working boys who couldn’t go to college,” Parkes said.

The vocational faculty who led foremanship training became “almost partners with industry,” Parkes said. “They were in and out of the industrial plants at a great rate.”

The close relationship between Williamsport’s vocational teachers and business leaders was the spark igniting an industry-education partnership that created enthusiasm among students and employers for the next century.

“When we started this foremanship training program, the industries suddenly discovered that here was a service that would earn money for them,” Parkes stated. “This was the beginning of our success in our work with the industries.”

Great Depression

When the Great Depression threatened the stability of every American city, Williamsport’s business and vocational education leaders – already united by partnerships such as cooperative education and foremanship training – pulled together. They came up with a plan that would gain national attention for its success in creating jobs and stimulating industry.

Based on a 1930 survey of local industry needs, the Williamsport Plan recommended that the vocational education program retrain unemployed workers to fill vacant, skilled positions that would support the growth of local industries.

“This retraining program was not a hit-or-miss affair,” according to The Williamsport Schools Through the Years. “Eight coordinators blueprinted the city’s employment situation and students were trained to fit specific jobs in the community.”

National media recognized the unique approach. The Saturday Evening Post reported: “On the local level, down where the jobs and the jobless are, a movement is developing which, if it does not solve the unemployment problem, is due to make a sizeable dent in it. What they aim to do is train the jobless into jobs.”

The Post credited the retraining program for unprecedented success: “What the Depression did to Williamsport was about what it did to most similarly placed industrial communities … but what Williamsport did to the Depression is a story in the best, though of late unofficial, American tradition.”
Williamsport Defeats Unemployment Through Occupational Adjustment

FRANCES MAULE

Conquest of unemployment through an organized community effort at occupational adjustment—this is the task to which Williamsport, Pennsylvania, has addressed itself with zeal and enthusiasm.

By means of a five-point vocational program administered by the public school system, sponsored by the Williamsport Community Trade Association, and furthered by practically every up-building force in the community, Williamsport has managed to hold unemployment at a gratifyingly low point through depression and recession, has placed as many as eight hundred persons a year on private payrolls during the more prosperous of the seven years since 1931, and is now focusing the combined resources of these agencies upon an effort to obtain for its workers the full measure of job security and job satisfaction that can be had from job-training and job-adjustment.

Said a leading local newspaper editor to me on the occasion of a recent visit to Williamsport to study its vocational program: "Sooner or later everything and everybody here in Williamsport find themselves pressed into the service of vocational education and adjustment and working enthusiastically to promote its objectives—newspapers; social welfare organizations; religious and racial groups; city, county, state, federal agencies; private employers. And the cooperation is one hundred percent. Why? Because we have become convinced that this is the one and only way to lick unemployment in our town."

According to the Williamsport philosophy, the best investment a community can make in behalf of its children, from the standpoint of its own self-interest, is a chance for those children to learn how to do the particular kinds of work needed in that community; and an opportunity to equip themselves to bear their part as completely independent self-sustaining individuals in its economic and social life. An instance of the seriousness of this point of view is afforded by the fact that the greatly coveted annual prize offered by the Grit Publishing Company, in recognition of distinguished community service, was awarded in 1936 to Williamsport's vocational program.
OCCUPATIONAL ADJUSTMENT IN WILLIAMSPORT

The declared objective of this program is to open up to the people of Williamsport—young and old alike—facilities for training and re-training for jobs that are available locally, and to help them to secure those jobs. Courses of training for types of work that are not to be had in Williamsport are ruled out as a waste of the taxpayer’s money and the student’s time. Every effort is directed toward maintenance of a constant balance between the jobs open at any one time—or likely to be open in the near future—and the number of persons in training for those jobs.

In Williamsport they do not keep on endlessly training for tool and die making simply because a sufficiently large number elect this subject to make up a good class, or because tool and die making seems a good reliable sort of trade. The leaders of the vocational program ascertain approximately how many openings there are likely to be for tool and die makers in Williamsport, and through careful steering, counseling, and constructive alternative suggestions, keep these classes down to estimated needs.

WORK TOGETHER

To secure the information required to maintain this balance between labor demand and supply, the closest possible relations are kept up with the Williamsport industries, not by means of an occasional formal white-collar-and-tie academic visitation under the guidance of an official of the company, but by a continuous, shirt-sleeve, first-name intimacy with the foremen and workmen of all Williamsport’s industrial plants. Any one of the teachers or coordinators of the industrial school can walk in at the back door of any Williamsport factory at any time, hail the foreman as “Bill” or “Pete,” and not only put to him any questions they may want answered in regard to specific job-possibilities in the plant, present or future, but gossip with him socially and informally about possible future changes or developments that are likely to change the job set-up.

An equally intimate relationship is maintained by the teachers and coordinators in the business and home economics departments with the business organizations of the city, and with local organizations and individuals seeking persons equipped with commercial or home economics training.

And what the teachers and coordinators find out from their industrial and business visits, they act upon. If, for example, a coordinator discovers that a plant is about to install a new machine, he reports his discovery to the industrial school, and the school proceeds to turn itself inside out to beg, borrow, or acquire by purchase a duplicate of that machine in order that it may begin at once to train workers for the jobs the machine is likely to create. For example, when it was learned that a hosiery mill employing women operatives was moving to Williamsport, facilities were straightway set up for training, or re-training, girls and women for the jobs that would soon be forthcoming. Today some of those who received the training or re-training are earning as high as $35 a week at steady work under particularly favorable conditions. It is not uncommon for the re-training school to have among its students an unemployed man or woman preparing for a job that is expected to come into existence several months hence.

HOW IT STARTED

The Williamsport program in its present supremely practical, highly concentrated form was developed under pressure of necessity to meet a community crisis.
An industrial city set in a long valley between rows of low-lying hills along the Susquehanna River northwest of Harrisburg, Williamsport spreads out like a panorama before the eyes of those of its more prosperous citizens who, some years ago, started moving out of the valley up into the pleasantly wooded heights. They saw a prosperous city, humming with activity, laid out in tidy, tree-shaded streets lined with comfortable, and in certain districts, handsome and spacious houses. Dominating the central part of the city stood the great plant of the rubber company that for years had given employment to a large part of Williamsport’s industrial population in the making of rubber footwear. Plants of other industries dotted the valley—the automobile motor works, the airplane motor works, the Diesel engine works, the wire rope factory, the textile mills, the hosiery mill, the wood-working factories, the machine shops. Smoke rose from their chimneys. A smiling, up-standing procession of workers, mostly of old American stock, filed in and out of their gates with well-filled dinner pails.

Along in the early nineteen-thirties, however, leading citizens realized that all was not well with Williamsport’s working people. In 1932 the great catastrophe occurred. The rubber footwear factory, so long the main support of so large a part of the city’s industrial population, moved away in order to seek more economical transportation facilities for its raw materials and finished products.

Williamsport was confronted with a crisis. It was not merely that so many persons had been thrown out of work—although that was bad enough. The most serious aspect of the tragedy was that many of them had literally grown up in the rubber footwear plant. They understood the making of rubber footwear. They possessed no other skills. Before they could hope to secure other employment, therefore, it was necessary for them to acquire other skills.

How? Where? It was the rare good fortune of the working people of Williamsport that the answer was ready and waiting. It came from the city’s public schools.

Two years before, as a result of an unemployment survey made by the Williamsport Community Trade Association, a re-training program had been set up by the vocational department of the public school system. This department, for years, had been performing yeoman service to Williamsport’s workers and employers alike by giving courses in the particular skills needed by local business and industry. Now it was proposed that facilities for re-training be added specifically for the benefit of those who had lost their jobs because of the depression. Thus came into existence the first of the re-training schools to be established in the United States. In 1932 when the dislocated rubber footwear workers came into the picture, the vocational education department of the public school system was ready for them with a re-training program. Most of the unemployed rubber workers were successfully re-trained for specific types of work normally in demand by the local industries; and, despite the depression, many were placed.

Meanwhile the depression pursued its relentless course. Job-finding for the jobless became the first order of business of the social welfare agencies of the community. Their common experiences growing out of this effort made them quite ready to assent to the proposition, put to them by the leaders of the vocational adjustment program, that unemployment is not due simply and solely to bad business conditions but to what the
vocational adjusters designate as “failure characteristics” within the individual. Among these they listed lack of proper training or experience, unsatisfactory records on previous jobs, physical disabilities or handicaps, poor attitudes toward work, inadequate or incompetent counseling and guidance in school.

**ENTIRE COMMUNITY INVOLVED**

With the leaders of the vocational adjustment program, the welfare organizations began to see their task as fundamentally one of education—and re-education. Readily they agreed to the advantages lying in a coordination of their separate and diverse efforts into one consistent, organized program. Among the organizations or agencies participating are the Williamsport Community Trade Association, the Pennsylvania State Department of Public Instruction, the Williamsport School District, the State Department of Labor and Industry, the Federal Civil Service Commission, the State Civil Service Commission, the State Employment Service, the teacher training department of the Pennsylvania State College, the Social Service Bureau, the YWCA, the YMCA, various WPA agencies, the NYA, the CCC re-training program, the Catholic School System of Parochial Schools, the Lycoming County Crippled Children Society, the Lycoming County Children’s Aid Society, the Rehabilitation Bureau, the Williamsport Ministerial Association, and the Williamsport Public Library.

As a community, Williamsport is ideally qualified for the task it set itself. First, it is situated in a state favorable to the furtherance of vocational education and adjustment. When, in its 1935 session, Pennsylvania’s Legislature passed Act 426 appropriating $50,000 to be spent over a period of two years in the re-training of unemployed persons, Pennsylvania became the first state in the Union to provide support for a program of this character. The Act provided that this sum be administered directly by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and that teachers be appointed by him on the nomination of District Superintendents, and their salaries paid by the Department of Public Instruction. The 1937 session of the Legislature re-enacted this legislation with added measures providing for cooperation with vocational guidance and employment services.

Secondly, the population of Williamsport is not too large (47,000) for thoroughly integrated community effort, and yet large enough to provide adequate facilities and a sufficiently large body of trained and suitable persons to take care of the work involved in a thoroughly professional manner.

Thirdly, the population of Williamsport is exceptionally homogeneous in character. It has the lowest foreign-born population of any city of its size and industrial character in the state. Chiefly its people are native-born of native-born parents or else second-generation stock sprung from foreign-born parents who have become completely Americanized. The entire population, practically, is English-speaking. There are no unassimilable elements whatever. The city contains about one thousand Negroes of an exceptionally high character, owning their own homes and holding a high standing in the community as workers and citizens. The school population is practically stationary—varying only slightly around nine thousand from year to year. The roster of the adult school averages about three thousand, twelve hundred of whom are in the re-training school. Four out of five of the school population are school placement problems.
Fourthly, most of Williamsport's well-to-do citizens have a strong hereditary interest in the well-being of the city. Descendants of the original English, Irish, Scotch, and German settlers who came into the Susquehanna Valley in the early days and proceeded to make fortunes for themselves in the lumber industry, they can be counted upon almost one hundred percent to support with money and influence any constructive effort in the interests of the city or its people. Among them are Williamsport's bankers, city officials, captains of industry, business and professional leaders. Of the employers of the city, some 350 actively cooperate with the vocational program. These men, with their wives and daughters, sit on the boards of Williamsport's welfare organizations, and act as volunteer workers in every good cause. Generally their children study and play throughout their elementary and high school years with the children of the industrial workers in the valley. Every educational effort made in behalf of the children of the workers is, therefore, of deep personal interest to the children of more prosperous citizens.

THE MEN BEHIND THE PROGRAM

Finally Williamsport is particularly fortunate in the administrators of its vocational program. Constantly in talking with representatives of groups cooperating in the program and with members of the staff, the writer was reminded of Emerson's saying that every great achievement is but the lengthened shadow of a man. One and all put the achievement in Williamsport chiefly up to its administrator of vocational and adult education, George H. Parkes. They told of his vision, his single-mindedness, his realistic perception of actual needs, his unflagging zeal, his kindliness and good humor, his extraordinary efficiency, and, above all, his truly amazing gift for enlisting support from all kinds and conditions of people and for infusing into them the same whole-hearted devotion and enthusiasm that inspires his own efforts. Behind him, to be sure, Mr. Parkes has a man of unusual breadth of vision, sympathy, understanding, and practical idealism in the person of the superintendent of schools, A. M. Weaver, who not only supports but actively promotes Mr. Parkes' dream of coordinating all the vocational work done in the community under the leadership of the schools.

Inspired by such a superintendent and such a director, the members of the staff, down to the youngest clerk and typist, give enthusiastically and freely of their time and energies, not according to hours or pay, but according to the need of the moment. And as the need is always pressing, they are usually working at high pressure and totally without regard to time schedules. Officially the hours in the adult school are from 6 P. M. to 10 P. M. Actually its teachers and administrators are hard at it most of the day as well as the entire evening. In the equipment of the teachers, the practical nature of the program is again evident. No teacher is ever engaged merely for a purely academic proficiency in the subject to be taught. Each one must actually have worked at it on a regular job. The staff numbers normally about fifty-eight persons.

THE FIVE-POINT PROGRAM

The formal set-up of Williamsport's five-fold program consists of: (1) occupational training, guidance, and placement for the full-time students of the senior high school; (2) an evening vocational school for adults offering training in some six or seven basic trades, in commercial subjects, and in home economics;
OCCUPATIONAL ADJUSTMENT IN WILLIAMSPORT

(3) an evening high school for adults designed to provide those who have had to leave school to go to work with facilities for finishing their high school educations; (4) a re-training school for adults designed to study the handicaps and "failure characteristics" of those who are unemployed and unable to find employment, to provide a re-training and rehabilitation service to remove those handicaps and "failure characteristics," a placement service to secure private employment for the re-trained and rehabilitated, and a follow-up service to promote the greatest possible measure of success and permanency on the new job; (5) a program of cultural and recreational activities for adults designed to widen mental horizons, build up morale, and provide constructive interests and influences.*

As might be inferred from so practical a program, great emphasis is laid on placement. The declared aim is two placements a day. The actual record reaches eight hundred placements a year for the more prosperous of the past seven years. Only permanent jobs paying a minimum of $10 a week are counted as placements. When called for, arrangements are made with employers to take students as apprentices, in which case the apprentice is followed up and supervised from the school. Many placements are made through the Public Employment Service, which cooperates actively with the vocational program.

The "offices" of a number of the administrators of the program and the representatives of the cooperating agencies consist of desks ranged at intervals along the walls of an abandoned gymnasium in the senior high school building. Here you will find Kenneth L. Cornwell, coordinator for men in the adult education school, who serves likewise as vocational counselor and placement director and as a dollar-a-year administrator of the NYA in Williamsport. Mr. Cornwell's leading function is to act as liaison officer between local employers and the vocational services of the school. He explains to employers the advantages of sending their employees to the adult and re-training schools in order that they may acquire new skills and upgrade the skills they already possess; employers explain to him what they require in the way of special skills. Certain of the training courses have been set up by direct request of employers.

Directly across the hall stands the desk of Helen Trafford who performs for girls and women the same service that Mr. Cornwell performs for men. Here also in the converted gymnasium is the desk of Arthur Lee Davies, who in addition to performing all his regular tasks as supervisor of the Lycoming County WPA education-recreation program, has instituted and conducts a class in public speaking, a clinic for the discussion of psychological problems, an art class, a music class, and a discussion group called the Sociology Club. Next is the desk of W. Lewis Shetler, a statistician detailed by the federal government to make the statistical studies necessary for an accurate check on the work of the various departments, and for the formulation of future plans.

SURVEY FOR A.V.A.

In an adjoining room the writer found O. R. LeBeau, special research agent for the American Vocational Association, who is making an important study of what becomes of Williamsport high school graduates after they have been vocationally

*These activities of Williamsport's Adult School were described in more detail by Miss Maule in her article, "Adjustment for Back-to-School Youth" in Occupations, xvi, June, 1938, pp. 835-843, and reprinted in condensed form in The Education Digest for September, 1938, pp. 44-45.
OCCUPATIONS

trained, counseled, and placed on their first jobs by the vocational department. His study will form the first of a series of similar investigations that the AVA, under a grant of $6,000 from the Carnegie Corporation, supplemented by an allotment from the AVA budget, is sponsoring in various communities throughout the United States. When finished, the studies will be published with the tentative title of "A Preliminary Examination of the Services in Vocational Education, as Shown by Twenty Years of Experiences in American Public Schools."

The purpose of the AVA study is to present objective data, based largely on case histories, that will serve to indicate to what extent the services of vocational education are effective in selecting, training, placing, and re-training the individual for useful employment. No such data are as yet available, and the information is much needed for the planning of programs for occupational adjustment. Williamsport was selected for the first of these studies because it is a typical industrial community, and because it has a particularly well developed and effective vocational program with a history reaching back over a period of some twenty years.

The regular classrooms of the senior high school are used for the adult and re-training classes from six o'clock in the afternoon until ten in the evening, five days a week. Here, in addition to regulation academic and commercial subjects are taught such subjects as commercial and applied art, music, dressmaking, cooking, home nursing, knitting, banking, public speaking, and radio technique. Industrial subjects are taught in a special building some two blocks away from the senior high school. This is presided over by E. H. Shore, who was introduced to me by Mr. Parkes as "a man who would get up in the middle of the night any time, if, by so doing, he saw a chance to land a man a job." Among the courses taught here are blueprint reading, mechanical and architectural drafting, electric and oxy-acetylene welding. Diesel engineering, electric work of various kinds, engineering subjects, automobile mechanics, aviation mechanics, building construction, production tooling and routing, sheet metal layout, tool and die making, and machine shop practice. In a separate room, presided over by K. E. Carl, persons having physical handicaps receive a special type of instruction designed to develop skills which will enable them to earn their living on regular jobs. On Saturday morning some one hundred and fifty CCC enrollees spend the day at this school receiving instruction in industrial subjects of their own choosing. In the evening, before they are taken back to their camp, they are given an opportunity to engage in the various recreational and cultural activities of the vocational program.

COST NOT EXCESSIVE

And what of the cost of Williamsport's determined onslaught upon unemployment through vocational adjustment? According to a study made by federal statisticians Shelter and Armstrong for the school year of 1936-1937, the outlay per year for counseling, training, and placing each student of the regular day high school is $125.77 or, if the federal and state subsidies are deducted, the local cost is $81.20, as against $116.41 for the educating of each student in regular academic subjects alone. The cost for each pupil per year in the adult evening school is only $10.22. This discrepancy is due partly, of course, to the fact that the adult school makes use of the regular high school equipment. It is estimated that the cost per year of re-training and placing on
OCCUPATIONAL ADJUSTMENT IN WILLIAMSPORT

a regular payroll job each student in the re-training school amounts to about $100.

The facilities still needed by the vocational program to enable it to do with the maximum efficiency the work lying ready to its hand are: added means of attracting to the service the individuals most needing it; provisions for adequate medical examinations and treatment for physical disabilities prejudicial to employment; the services of psychologists and experts in mental hygiene; enlarged quarters and more complete and efficient equipment; more teachers with the necessary occupational skill and experience who can be employed under existing certification regulations.

It is estimated by Mr. Parkes that anyone who takes advantage of the existing facilities to the fullest extent has an 80-20 chance to secure a good and permanent job. With enlarged and improved facilities, he is confident that this percentage of chances for satisfactory employment could be considerably stepped up. Mr. Parkes is a hearty believer in the American way of going ahead with the means at hand instead of waiting for the ideal means to be provided. Nevertheless he would welcome with the utmost cordiality the addition of any or all of the facilities now lacking.

"No one can participate effectively in the life of the community unless secure on a job." Once, long ago, Mr. Parkes read this in a book on vocational education by David Snedden. He never forgot it. It has conditioned all his thinking and inspired all his doing. Upon the enlightened social philosophy expressed thereby he has built his program. He has made of it a battle cry and a slogan.

This is the philosophy that has rallied all Williamsport to his program. This is the slogan—this the battle-cry—that has caused all the building forces of Williamsport to get squarely behind an effort to lick unemployment in Williamsport through a coordinated community program of occupational adjustment.

Frances Maule has written many successful radio skits for vocational guidance programs, and frequently contributes to educational as well as other periodicals. She is the author of She Strives to Conquer.

Calendar of Coming Events

American Association of School Administrators, Cleveland, February 23-March 2, 1939
American Council of Guidance and Personnel Associations, Cleveland, February 22-25, 1939
American Education Week, November 6-12, 1938
American Vocational Association Convention, St. Louis, November 30-December 3, 1938 (Special Vocational Guidance Program)
Educational Records Bureau Conference, Hotel Roosevelt, New York City, October 27-28, 1938
National Vocational Guidance Association Convention, Cleveland, February 22-25, 1939
American Tradition

In Williamsport, the American tradition was symbolized by a motivated working class of individuals willing to roll up their sleeves and go to work learning new techniques to secure better futures for themselves, their families, and the companies that employed them.

The heart of that tradition was found in a new machine shop, built across the street from the high school, in the midst of the Great Depression. The shop’s foundation was built by unemployed local citizens who received food baskets as payment for their efforts.

Parkes, the vocational program director, was determined to see the shop built, in spite of the economic challenges faced by the school district during the Depression. He credited his core of volunteer unemployed workers – “businessmen, salesmen, men who … didn’t seem to have too much skill but (were) willing to work” – for making it possible.

The director felt certain that a machine shop held incredible promise for the future, both for students and for industry. One of his protégés, George E. Logue, recalled Parkes describing a machine shop as a foundation for all other industries.

“The only thing that can reproduce itself in the world – that isn’t biological – is a machine shop,” Parkes told Logue while convincing him to study machining in the 1940s. “You can go in a machine shop and build another one.”

Logue took Parkes’ advice and became a successful entrepreneur. Late in his life, he gave credit for his early success to faculty in the machine shop and in his English classes, where he said the teachers persisted in the difficult task of teaching English to “shop kids.”

Despite popular thinking of the day, Williamsport’s vocational program offered an equal blend of shop experience and academics.
“No better training for engineers and scientists”

Two Pants Suit Approach to Education

George H. Parkes, who was a student at Purdue University when President Woodrow Wilson signed the first federal act funding vocational education, was one of the nation’s first fully certified vocational education teachers. But, throughout his career, he rejected the notion that college preparation and vocational education should be separate.

“In most vocational programs carried on by the public schools under the Smith Hughes Act, it was almost a standard practice, encouraged by the old federal board and later encouraged by the vocational cadre of the U.S. Office of Education, to ignore any college preparatory education under Smith Hughes funds,” Parkes wrote in a summary of activities titled “The Educational Job Concept” in 1974. “The powerful American Vocational Association is to this day generally in support of no ‘college prep’ programs for vocational students. The Williamsport faculty never liked this, since there could be no better training for engineers and scientists than a properly oriented vocational education.”

He described the unique approach of faculty, who were committed to using real work experience as a foundation for college preparation, as offering students a “two pants suit.”

“We organized a semi-volunteer program, which we referred to as a ‘two pants suit.’ A selected student could follow his usual day-time vocational curriculum and, by special scheduling, he could take courses in mathematics, science, English, and so on, under properly qualified teachers, and upon high school graduation, receive the accreditation for admission to college, chiefly in the engineering field ….. The program was developed and supervised for nearly 30 years by Arthur K. Patterson, an electrical engineering graduate who had developed into one of our best trained leaders.”

Contrary to ideas that vocational education allowed students to exhibit lower standards than traditional college preparatory classes, this approach demanded a serious commitment.

“This higher education objective required a great deal of student determination and academic zeal,” Parkes insisted. “For example, students had to attend classes in the evening, and could not always participate in some of the activities dear to high school students.”

Students who committed to the program became leaders among their high school classmates, Parkes reported.

“This pre-technical, open-door, ‘two pants suit’ approach brought to our vocational program many students who wished a vocational training program, but also wished to be eligible for college at some later date. The program added respectability to our group and Mr. Patterson saw to it that these special students participated quite fully in student affairs in the high school. At one time, I recall a high school teacher tried to have some administrative control on student activity offices, which were being excessively awarded to vocational students. Undoubtedly, this program was a strong factor in progressively reducing the inter-faculty superiority contests.”

©
Equal Blend – Shop and Academics

Despite popular thinking of the day, Williamsport’s vocational program offered an equal blend of shop experience and academics. While the Smith-Hughes National Vocational Education Act of 1917 emphasized practical work experience over academic course work, Williamsport’s vocational program director did not give in to the notion that vocational students should be denied the advantages of a general education.

Parkes’ experience, as a railroad mechanic with an engineering degree and vocational education teacher certification, led him to believe that, while his vocational students may have wanted more shop time, they needed the right balance of education and experience.

He convinced the school’s “classically trained” English department faculty to allow alternative methods for teaching the fundamentals of language and communication to the vocational students. This included using trade publications instead of textbooks to encourage even the most reluctant students to read.

A textbook written by one of the department’s English instructors, John T. Shuman, featured the principles that were used to combine general and vocational education in Williamsport’s classrooms. In his introduction to *Spelling for Trade and Technical Students*, published in 1934, Shuman wrote:

“Teachers will find that the book properly used has in it much that tends to motivate study on the part of the vocational pupil. The different types of lessons prevent study of the material from becoming a monotonous routine ...The mixing of trade, industrial, and general words tends also among this group of pupils to arouse greater interest and to promote more purposeful and sincere study than almost any other combination.”

The book’s content focused on improving vocabulary by incorporating general and industrial words with technical words used in the most common trades. It also presented words frequently misspelled “by all high school students and people in general” and offered lessons on “specific spelling difficulties that persist in the spelling of older pupils.”

Shuman stressed the importance of customizing general education to convince vocational students that reading, writing and mathematics are among the tools needed in their trades.

He wrote: “‘I know but I can’t say it’ or ‘I know but I don’t know how to write it’ is heard frequently by the teacher of vocational classes. A reasonable degree of accuracy and proficiency in the fundamentals such as spelling and using words is absolutely necessary to a continued improvement in the pupil’s English. Yet in spite of the existing situation we have thus far done very little to provide this group with English material which for them is practical, interesting, and essential.”

He acknowledged an abundance of “many excellent books available in the field of English,” but insisted that helping students find meaning in academics by honoring their particular field of interest was the ultimate key to success.

“It is true that vocational pupils should broaden their range of interests by studying much that their fellow pupils in other courses study, by reading good books, and by participating in extra-curricular activities. But since the great majority of them enter industry from the vocational or trade school, they must also be taught in their classes something about the romance, the content, and the vocabulary of industry.”

Shuman’s textbooks integrated the fundamentals of communication with vocational interests and encouraged students and their teachers to honor the connection between academics and real work experience.

“My own experience in teaching English to such students has convinced me of the overriding importance of correct motivation,” he said.
SPELLING HELPS

I

Words, like people, are related to each other. Look for such a relationship when you are asked to spell a word with which you have trouble. Suppose that you are asked to write the word preparation, but that you cannot determine whether it is spelled prep(e)ration or prep(a)ration. To determine what letter to use after p, try to think of a shorter word from which the longer word has come. In this case the word prepare is the shorter word. Once you now determine that a follows the second p, you can easily spell the word preparation. Similarly, if you are having difficulty with the word measurement, think of the shorter word measure.

Suggest shorter words that might help you to spell the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>recommendation</th>
<th>accidental</th>
<th>omitted</th>
<th>alternating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>connection</td>
<td>mechanical</td>
<td>opposite</td>
<td>electrician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>construction</td>
<td>universal</td>
<td>specifications</td>
<td>stationary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structural</td>
<td>alignment</td>
<td>transportation</td>
<td>reciprocating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organization</td>
<td>management</td>
<td>cylindrical</td>
<td>alphabetic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II

Always spell out a word by syllables. To spell a word in this way, simply divide it into syllables by pronouncing it carefully. A syllable is that part of a word which can be said in one expulsion of breath. For example, you must say the word axis with two expulsions of breath, as ax-is. Remember also that a syllable always contains a vowel. Notice the word industrial, when it is broken up into its syllables; in-du-stri-al. It is easier to spell the word industrial by syllables or units than by any other method.

Divide these words into syllables according to pronunciation; then compare your division with the division given in a standard dictionary. Be sure to try to divide the word first by pronouncing it and not by copying it from the dictionary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>busy</th>
<th>carpenter</th>
<th>specification</th>
<th>employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>expense</td>
<td>factory</td>
<td>expenditure</td>
<td>receptacle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motor</td>
<td>application</td>
<td>manufacturer</td>
<td>micrometer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>business</td>
<td>judgment</td>
<td>superintendent</td>
<td>hypotenuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specific</td>
<td>machinist</td>
<td>agricultural</td>
<td>organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequently the vocational and trade pupil must study independently; therefore, he must often teach himself. It is easy to learn the spelling of a word if a good method is carefully followed.
In *English for Vocational and Technical Schools*, published in 1936 and 1954, John T. Shuman specifically addressed the question, “Have you ever wondered why you should learn to speak and write well?”

**TO THE STUDENT**

**English—Your Basic Skill**

Do you expect to live the rest of your life as a hermit in some forest or desert area? Certainly, you don’t.

You will probably work with different groups of people and live in a community with many other persons. Since you will be working with and through people, your success will depend on your ability to communicate with them.

Your basic skill then is the ability to organize and express your thoughts and ideas in writing and in speaking so others will understand what you are driving at and can be persuaded. You must talk and write to all those persons with whom you work and live. The ability to speak and write well is important to you whether you work in industry, conduct your own business, or practice a profession.

**What Good English Means to You**

Recently a graduate of a technical school said to me: “You know, a man feels rather cheap when he suddenly realizes that he can’t write a good letter and speak correctly.”

Another graduate wrote this letter to his former English instructor:

One thing that I have learned since leaving the school is that as I advance on my job no subject is of more value to me than English.

First, I had to use it in writing a number of application letters. Second, I have to use it daily here in the plant in my contacts with my superiors.

Third, I have to use it in making short reports on equipment of which I have charge and in writing short messages to the various foremen.

Actually the last thing that I expected to see in a factory was a dictionary. But, believe it or not, my superintendent keeps one on his desk. And he uses it, too.
Shuman's work influenced vocational teaching throughout North America. His *English for Vocational and Technical Schools* is credited as the basis for a Canadian text written by teaching masters at Seneca College.

Authors Elizabeth A. Holmes and A.C.L. Holmes said their *Communication Skills for the World of Work*, published in 1981, was designed “primarily as a textbook for a senior secondary school course in applied English or a college course in communications skills for students who are about to go out to work in industry.”

The original textbook by Shuman featured chapters on “Writing with Imagination about Your Work,” “Making Suggestions about Your Job,” “English in Advertising and Selling,” and “Report Writing,” with a range of themes from accident reports to inspection reports. A section on “Sending Telegrams,” as part of “Conducting Business by Correspondence,” reflected the era’s communication technology.

Shuman believed lessons that encouraged students to express themselves “clearly and correctly in letters, reports, discussions, and conferences” were more successful than traditional methods of teaching language arts because they allowed “correct English” to be “absorbed in terms of use rather than learned as theory through rules.”

In addition to his English and spelling textbooks, Shuman authored several books related to instruction in the machine shop, including *Machine Shop Work*, published in 1943 by the American Technical Society. In the same year, the same publisher released another book by Shuman: *Fundamental Shop Training for Those Preparing for War Service*.

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“It is true that vocational pupils should broaden their range of interests by studying much that their fellow pupils in other courses study, by reading good books, and by participating in extra-curricular activities. But since the great majority of them enter industry from the vocational or trade school, they must also be taught in their classes something about the romance, the content, and the vocabulary of industry.”

John T. Shuman
Defense Contracts

In preparation for World War II, government defense contracts created a demand for skilled machinists across the nation. In Williamsport, the manufacturer of Lycoming Engines increased its workforce to supply the French and British, even before America entered the war.

By 1940, Williamsport’s vocational education program was enlisted as a defense training operation to serve the needs of companies like Avco (Lycoming Engines). More than 5,000 students/citizens were enrolled in training and retraining programs.

“We went day and night,” Parkes said, describing the era in which classes met 24 hours a day to train first, second and third shift factory workers.
'Winning Their Share'

When the United States entered World War II in 1941,
there was probably little reason to believe that it
would have much of an impact on the small town
of Williamsport. Unbeknownst to many, however,
Williamsport had already made a name for itself
nationally because of one man and his plan for the
community.

George H. Parkes, director of Williamsport High
School’s vocational program and later Williamsport
Technical Institute – both predecessors to Pennsylvania
College of Technology – can be considered a visionary in
his day because of the Depression-era Williamsport Plan,
which customized training for the positions available at
Williamsport-area plants. But his impact went far further
than helping the unemployed during the interwar period;
It later helped fuel the war efforts of the 1940s.

“On May 10, 1940, the world rocked with the
realization that a nation of skilled technicians was about
to smother an ancient and cultured civilization under
an avalanche of scientific thought and mechanism.”

“A nation of skilled technicians was about to smother an ancient and cultured civilization under an avalanche of scientific thought and mechanism.”

An aviation mechanic student works on an airplane engine. The student was later placed as an Army Air Corps aviation mechanic.
Williamsport School District in 1940 to make those within and around Williamsport aware of the immediate and important changes that would be happening at Williamsport High School to help the nation in its war efforts.

That year, school staff had to make immediate changes, including forfeiting their summer vacations, in order to alter a curriculum previously focused on retraining unemployed men and women, changing the focus to defense industries, especially the ever-important metalworking trades. In addition to the change in curriculum, the workload itself became more intense, as students now spent a minimum of 40 hours per week in their classes.

The school’s weekly publication, The Newsletter, noted that instructors were reprimanded for letting their classes out even 15 minutes early. Additionally, students who were absent without reason were not permitted to return to class until the absence was investigated. In the meantime, wait-listed students attended classes in their place. Training was so important for the war effort that Parkes made several mentions in The Newsletter of students and instructors both ensuring that they were spending every minute of their time on the most efficient and productive tasks, opposing any kind of busy work and unnecessary, menial tasks.

The school continued to work with important government agencies: the National Youth Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Department of Public Assistance, the State Employment Service and others.

By 1941, when the vocational program was established officially as Williamsport Technical Institute, the schools successes had become much more apparent, both locally and nationwide. According to a Williamsport Sun article in October of that year, the institute was deemed one of the city’s largest assets due to its ability to train 3,000 individuals for defense industries within a six-month period. In a separate article, the Sun reported that within seven short years, Civilian Conservation Corps enrollment in the national defense courses nearly doubled what it was when the classes were first offered in 1934. In fact, the use of WTI facilities for war training was so important that by November 1941, 10 new machines had arrived on campus in support of a course that was requested by the U.S. Office of Education in the interest of national defense.

In February of the following year, the Grit newspaper reported that the U.S. Office of Education sent the institute one of the largest pieces of equipment it had ever received – a boring mill – valued at around $5,000.

The achievements of WTI were not only recognized by the federal
government, but were also praised in national journals, which in turn helped further those successes by bringing in new students. Upon initial defense-course offerings, young men began traveling to Williamsport from the anthracite coal regions in Pennsylvania and even New York City. By 1941, however, talk of the programs at WTI had traveled so far that one youth, upon reading about the progress of vocational training in Williamsport in a national journal, decided to leave his home in Alaska to study at the institute.

In addition to the influx of male students from far and wide in the 1940s, WTI saw an increasing number of women enrolling in its courses. A 1941 Williamsport Sun article, titled “Young women swap knitting bags for tool kits as the nation prepares for defense,” outlined how WTI allowed women to break from traditional roles and move into more male-dominated areas, such as aviation, instrument repair, drafting and architectural drawing. Two such women, the article notes, were disabled due to infantile paralysis. WTI was able to provide them with a vocation and, more importantly, livelihood, despite their disabilities.

An article later that year emphasized the importance of women in the Red Cross Motor Corps taking weekly classes in the institute’s auto mechanics shop. The goal of the course was for women to be able to repair a car without outside help, a job that they undertook with pleasure and pride.

The biggest step forward for women, however, occurred in January 1942, when all defense training work at WTI was opened to women on the same basis as for men. Although preference was still given to unemployed men, according to a Dec. 23, 1941, Williamsport Sun article, Parkes recognized that women should be trained in order to avert a possible labor shortage, should the men be wholly absorbed in the war.

The war program at Williamsport Technical Institute was terminated in June 1945, according to a Gazette and Bulletin article that year. Despite having existed for only a few years, the WTI defense-industry program excelled, in part because of the full support of the faculty and staff, but also because of the strong and selfless youth who wanted to do all they could to assist during the war. The administration at WTI had set very high standards for its students – a quality that was praised by civic and government officials – but continued to accept strong applicants regardless of where they came from, their gender or their physical disabilities.

Those students then worked hard to excel in their programs at a time their country really needed them, giving so much of themselves that some even volunteered their spare time to help rush the completion of one of the school’s new buildings, Unit 4, in 1942.

This building, the school’s new machine shop, was especially important to the war effort, because this is where emergency orders were sent for jobs that were needed for local war plants. The March 30, 1942, issue of The Newsletter announced, “Word has been received from the government that Unit 4 must be prepared for a large new war assignment in two weeks. This is a big and entirely new development, the nature of which is confidential.”

The article’s ending statement – “The boys are winning their share of this war!” – refers to those who volunteered their time to rush completion of the project and couldn’t have been more true.

From students in the commercial art and technical illustration classes who designed posters to aid in the country’s defense, to radio communications students who found important work aboard naval ships, to students working on intricate aviation instruments, the Williamsport Technical Institute was able to help its young students, men and women alike, to defend their country with honor and pride.
Like other cities in 1930, Williamsport found itself in the midst of the Depression and facing rising unemployment. To add to its difficulties, the U. S. Rubber Company closed its plant in Williamsport in 1932, putting an additional 2,500 people out of work, swelling the already overburdened relief rolls and leaving most of the workers without marketable skills.

Faced with rising relief bills, businessmen worked through the Chamber of Commerce to collect data to determine what type of worker was unemployed. The results showed that 75 percent of the unemployed were unskilled, 85 percent of whom had adequate backgrounds to become skilled or semi-skilled workers. A shop-to-shop survey made the surprising disclosure that while unemployment was rising, many shops reported an increasing shortage of workers with particular skills. Dr. George H. Parkes, director of the vocational department of the Williamsport High School, was appointed to design a program that would equip the unemployed with needed skills.

A plan, which became known as the Williamsport Plan, was designed to screen, train, and place the unemployed through the coordinated efforts of the Williamsport Retraining School—also directed by Dr. Parkes—the state employment office, the YWCA, the YMCA, and numerous other agencies.

The Williamsport Retraining School was to serve also as a training center for the WPA, PWA, NYA and CCC. In the Williamsport High School at the corner of Third and Susquehanna Streets, the staff of the Williamsport Retraining School set up an electrical shop in a coal bin, reclaimed a locker room for the automotive department, and set up a machine shop under the new school bleachers. With only a $1000 grant from the Williamsport School District, the Williamsport Retraining School could afford little in the way of manpower. About $10,000 in equipment was salvaged from area junk yards and reconditioned. Another
$10,000 worth of equipment was borrowed from area industries.

By 1933, Parkes decided a separate building for the Williamsport Retraining School was needed. The Williamsport School District could offer no funds and did not agree that a separate building was necessary. So the staff of the Williamsport Retraining School chose a site on school property, designed a blueprint of the building, and tapped the County Relief Board for a work force. Every day a different crew of 20 workers was sent to the school with materials bought on credit and borrowed tools; the crew dug out a foundation and constructed a one-story, saw-tooth building with walls of glass to admit a maximum of natural light. By 1934 the three-unit building at the corner of West Third and Park Streets was ready for use.

When surveys projected a need for truck drivers, the staff of the school borrowed trucks, dug a regulation-sized mechanics pit in the yard of the school and started one of the first trucking schools in the country. When there was a shortage of men skilled in the use of the acetylene torch, the staff rounded up several second-hand and discarded torches and borrowed a skilled worker as an instructor.

The single objective of the Williamsport Plan was to place the unemployed in jobs for which they were trained. Toward that end, eight industry-experienced coordinators were employed by the Williamsport Retraining School to determine what skills local industries would be needing in the near future and what student was best suited for training in that area. Follow-up training was offered until the employee was settled in his job.

Most employers were unable to predict their future needs, but interviews with shop foremen and supervisors uncovered specifically needed skills. Applicants to the program were interviewed to determine their aptitude as well as their interest.

In the Williamsport High School at the corner of Third and Susquehanna Streets, the staff of the Williamsport Retraining School set up an electrical shop in a coal bin, reclaimed a locker room for the automotive department, and set up a machine shop under the new school bleachers.
Unless an applicant showed no aptitude for a skill needed by industry, he received this skill with the near certainty of placement. The strength of the program rested in the ability of Parkes and his staff to determine the applicant’s ability and to equip him with a marketable skill. Coordinators kept close contact with area employers to be certain applicants would be trained in skills that would be needed.

Between 1930 and 1940, about 4,000 unemployed workers were placed, each at a cost of only $100. More than half of them had been on Williamsport relief rolls. The program was so successful that in 1940, 3,100 people were enrolled, 600 of whom were placed in that year. Lycoming County had been the first county in the state to initiate a program to pay relief recipients as they trained for employment.

The staff of the Williamsport Retraining School was far superior to any in the country in its job placement record and its ability to predict the job market. Educators, state and federal groups, and businessmen visited the Williamsport Retraining School, a predecessor to the Williamsport Technical Institute and the Williamsport Area Community College, to study its organization. The Williamsport Plan was applauded by the federal government, by numerous newspapers, and in 1940 by Nation’s Business, Woman’s Day, and The Saturday Evening Post.

The purpose of the Williamsport Plan was to retrain workers left jobless by the economic crisis. At the time, Lycoming County experienced an unemployment rate...
of 25 percent. The Williamsport Plan was so successful at retraining workers for the skilled positions opening up in area plants, that it won national recognition. It was praised as a creative and responsible way for a community to deal with the problems of unemployment on its own initiative. The high school adult training program provided the necessary instruction from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. so that trainees could pursue whatever employment they could find during the day.

The Williamsport Plan eventually made training available to other persons at the technical school through federal government programs, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Youth Administration. The NYA brought high school age boys to Williamsport from throughout Pennsylvania for technical training at the high school shops on Susquehanna Street. Each boy stayed in the program for a year, which consisted of 80 hours of training alternating with 80 hours of work. While at work the boys repaired and reconditioned machines for the government and military. The Center was able to train 100 boys at a time and helped many get a start in life when they needed it most.

In 1940, with America’s involvement in World War II just around the corner, the Williamsport School Board established a special Emergency Training Commission to undertake the training of men and women for defense work. The Williamsport vocational operation at the high school became one of the first in the country to begin a defense training program. The school operated on a twenty-four hour a day schedule.

Between 1930 and 1940, about 4,000 unemployed workers were placed, each at a cost of only $100.

The staff of the Williamsport Retraining School was far superior to any in the country in its job placement record and its ability to predict the job market.

Lycoming County had been the first county in the state to initiate a program to pay relief recipients as they trained for employment.
Williamsport’s program – focused on developing highly skilled metal workers in its instructional shops – became one of the first vocational education programs in the nation adapted for the war effort.

As the war expanded, so did the demand for manufactured goods. Most factories in Lycoming County converted operations to respond to wartime needs. Williamsport’s training program operated working classrooms around the clock to provide workers with the skills needed to increase production and expand the local economy.

By 1941, the vocational program was “so large and diverse,” according to A Picture of Lycoming County, “that the School District voted to turn it into a technical institute separate from the high school....

The emphasis on defense industry training significantly increased adult enrollment at the technical institute. According to The WTI Story, a multimedia promotion presented by the institute in 1952, enrollment during the war years reached 6,500.

Many companies partnered with the institute, including the area’s largest private employer, the Lycoming Division of Aviation Corporation (Avco). Parkes, the institute’s founding director, said “Lycoming Motors was a big factor” in WTI’s early growth.

The company’s 4,000 workers manufactured 600 engines per month, including those for a Navy bomber, B-29 bombers, the Packard Rolls-Royce P-51, the Stinson Flying Jeep, the Spartan, Curtis, Cessna, and Beechcraft, according to A Picture of Lycoming County.