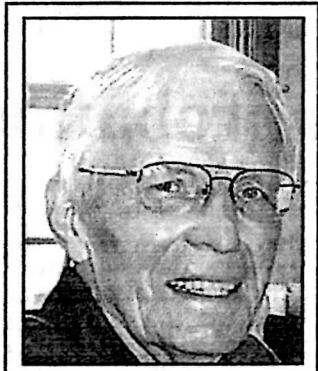


Washburn During The Great Depression: the CCC PART 6

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The Civilian Conservation Corps, created in March 1935, was a special work relief program in that it was directed at a particular segment of the unemployed population, young men. The CCC provided discipline, work, and training to these men in an outdoor setting with the purpose of repairing and restoring a natural environment ravished by years of exploitation and neglect. Men between the ages of 18 and 25 on the relief rolls, who volunteered, were enrolled for renewable six month terms. Veterans of the Spanish-American War and the Great War along with expert woodsmen to supervise and train the inexperienced young enrollees were recruited without age limits. The men were paid \$30 a month (\$25 of which was sent directly to their families) plus board and room, and were issued army uniforms. The enrollees were assigned to military type companies and sent to camps located in national or state forests, state parks, or other forest or wilderness areas, where they lived in army style tents or barracks. Some camps were open only during the summer, while others operated all year. The camps were administered by junior army or navy officers with quasi-military discipline, but there was no military training as such. Representatives of the National Park Service and other civilian agencies planned and managed proj-



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ects, while the work crews were supervised by experienced woodsmen or craftsmen. Washburn's introduction to the CCC occurred in early May 1933 when 212 men of Company 640 arrived from Milwaukee by train, assigned to Camp Brink, a summer camp located in the Moquah National Forest about 14 miles from Washburn. The men marched to the camp, their baggage and equipment transported by truck. Living conditions at the camp were primitive, the men living in tents without floors and eating food prepared in an open kitchen. Later in May 145 men from Bayfield County, including 85 expert woodsmen, were enrolled. In early June they were sent to Fort Sheridan in Illinois for two weeks of conditioning, after which they returned to Camp Brink as part of Company 640. In early November Company 640 moved from Camp Brink to Camp Morris, near Morris, Wisconsin

for the winter. They returned to Camp Brink in early May 1934, where living conditions had been improved with wooden floors in the tents, a mess hall, and other improvements. In late October the company moved to the all-season Camp Pigeon Lake, where it remained until it was disbanded in 1938. The work done by Company 640 while at Camp Brink and Camp Pigeon Lake provides an example of what was accomplished by the men in the camps in Wisconsin and across the nation during the eight year life of the CCC. At Camp Brink, 4,703 acres of trees were planted, 20 miles of telephone lines constructed, 512 acres of timber stand improved, 44 miles of truck trails built, and 144,500 fish planted; and at Camp Pigeon, the company assisted in the construction of a ranger station, the resettlement of 32 unemployed families on twenty acre homesteads, construction and manning of a fire tower, fought three forest fires, planted 1,568 acres of trees, improved 1,944 acres of timber stand, and carried out various types of surveys. The CCC was probably the only New Deal program that had strong bipartisan support. The closing of a camp, much like the closing of a military base today, aroused immediate objections, eliciting urgent pleas to the president and CCC officials to reverse the decision. But the relief contribution of the program

became less important as the economy began to recover in 1939, and the unemployed were absorbed by the defense industries and the military services. In 1937 President Roosevelt proposed to Congress that it be made a permanent agency, but the bill was defeated. Finally, in June 1942, as part of the drive to reduce non-essential expenditures, funding for the CCC was denied, thereby abolishing it. Eighty-six enrollees and 22 woodsmen from Washburn, served in the CCC between May 1933 and October 1939. The nation benefited enormously from the Civilian Conservation Corps in several ways. Thousands of young men from different places and walks of life, many of whom had never been away from home, were brought together in the camps. There they learned to live and work cooperatively, gaining valuable knowledge and experience, while the hard work provided a constructive outlet for youthful male energy that otherwise might have been turned to less socially desirable activities. Also, the monthly allotment of \$25 to their families saved many from destitution, while providing an invaluable stimulus to local economies. In the long term, the immense amount of work accomplished in forests and parks, and the reconstruction of the infrastructure, continue to benefit the nation today.