

Into the Woods: The First Year of the Civilian Conservation Corps

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Into the Woods: The First Year of the Civilian Conservation Corps

By Joseph M. Speakman



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Enrollees gather in Breen Burney Camp in Lassen National Forest, California. (35-GE-1E-2)

They came from all over America—from the big cities, from the small towns, from the farms—tens of thousands of young men, to serve in the vanguard of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal in the spring of 1933.

They were the young men of the Civilian Conservation Corps. They opted for long days and hard, dirty work, living in quasi-military camps often far from home in the nation's publicly owned forests and parks. But they earned money to send back to their needy families, received three square meals a day, and escaped from idle purposelessness by contributing to the renewal and beautification of the country.

By the time the CCC program ended as the nation was entering World War II, more than 2.5 million men had served in more than 4,500 camps across the country. The men had planted over 3 billion trees, combated soil erosion and forest fires, and occasionally dealt with natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, and droughts.

In office only a few days in early March 1933, Roosevelt began to tackle the crisis threatening the nation with this unprecedented experiment in federal work relief. More than any other New Deal program, the CCC was Roosevelt's brainchild and often referred to as his "pet." He had a long-standing interest in conservation, and in a 1931 speech he had articulated the conservationist critique that had been animating the American movement for a half century.

"The green slopes of our forested hills lured our first settlers and furnished them the materials of a happy life," he said. "They and their descendants were a little careless with that asset."

Roosevelt had previewed the CCC during the 1932 presidential campaign. In his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, he talked of putting a million men into forestry work, but after some criticism from the Hoover administration, he did not aggressively push the idea in the campaign.

But less than a week after taking office, on the morning of March 9, 1933, Roosevelt ordered some of his senior staff to come up with a way to put 500,000 young men to work on conservation projects by the summer. By that evening, they had a plan that became the focus of more discussions over the next few weeks.

Roosevelt sent a more modest proposal to Congress on March 21, calling for the employment of 250,000 men by early summer. It was quickly approved and signed into law on March 31. The final measure conveyed broad discretionary authority to the President in setting up an "Emergency Conservation Work" program. (ECW was the legal name of the program until the more popularly used CCC became official in 1937.)



[Enlarge](#)

African American enrollees lived and worked in separate camps. Young men of Company 2314-C, Kane, Pennsylvania, study radio code, which enabled them to run the camp radio station. (35-GC-B14-III-136)

Organized labor's opposition to a proposed wage scale of \$1 a day for the men was partially muted by leaving pay rates up to the President, who then went ahead with the \$30 a month pay rate on his own. An amendment outlawing racial discrimination was virtually the only congressional limitation on his authority. Segregation in the 1930s was not deemed by the Supreme Court to constitute racial discrimination, and separate "Colored" CCC camps were set up for young African Americans.

In signing the measure into law, Roosevelt justified it as a means "to preserve our precious natural resources" and, even more important, as a moral and spiritual boon to needy young Americans who would prefer work to the dole. Bringing an army of the unemployed into "healthful surroundings," Roosevelt argued, would help to eliminate the threats to social stability that enforced idleness had created.

Meanwhile, the task of setting up the machinery was well under way. Starting almost from scratch, working marathon days, through weekends, around the normal demands of routine business—thousands of public employees in hundreds of offices in Washington, D.C., and across the country successfully launched the CCC that spring and met the President's goal by July 1.

No wonder that when it had all been done, some of the central figures could scarcely believe what they had accomplished. At the time the closest parallel anybody could think of was the drafting of 181,000 men into the armed services in the spring of 1917 after the United States had declared war on Germany.

But the tasks of 1933 involved not just greater numbers but radically new concepts and organizational structures. Impelled by the bare-bones notion of a President, CCC administrators had to work out a wholly new administrative apparatus and detailed policies. Not only did they have to decide major issues, like who was to be recruited, where they were to be sent, and what they were to do when they got there, but also, along the way, they had to deal with a myriad of smaller issues, such as what would the men wear, what would they eat, and how would they be disciplined.

* * *

Apart from Roosevelt himself, the next two most important individuals in getting the CCC successfully launched were Louis Howe, the President's personal assistant, and Robert Fechner, the first director of the CCC. Howe had become acquainted with

Roosevelt when working as a reporter covering the New York legislature in 1912. There quickly developed a close friendship between the two men and a shared ambition to make Roosevelt President one day. When Roosevelt served as assistant secretary of the Navy during World War I, he put Howe on the government payroll as an assistant. Some years later, Howe became the principal organizer of Roosevelt's successful gubernatorial and presidential campaigns.

Once in the White House, though operating from a position with no formal authority, Howe did more than anyone else to put Roosevelt's vague notion of an army of conservation workers into concrete form. It seems to have been Howe, for example, who prodded Roosevelt into appointing Robert Fechner, a longtime official with the machinists union, as the first director of the CCC. The President did not know Fechner very well, although he and Howe had dealt with him during the war on Navy-related matters. But, with organized labor initially critical of the program and already miffed at the appointment of the non-union Frances Perkins as secretary of labor, Roosevelt gave the nod to Fechner over more experienced conservationists. The appointment helped win over labor leaders to support the CCC.



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CCC Director Robert Fechner, standing right, joined camp director Capt. Henry B. Wilkinson in a visit with some enrollees on May 16, 1933. (Camp Roosevelt CCC Legacy Foundation)

Although he had been unknown in the conservation community and knew no one on the first advisory councils of the CCC, Fechner earned the respect of his new associates and proved himself a hard-working and competent administrator, if not a very forceful or imaginative one.

The crucial organizational meeting in the early history of the CCC was at the White House on April 3. There the basic plan of the CCC was set up. The President's outline designated the four cabinet heads of the Departments of Labor, War, Agriculture, and Interior to appoint representatives to an advisory council under the CCC director.

Working closely with state relief agencies, the Labor Department would select single men between the ages of 18 and 25, primarily from families on the relief rolls. The men would receive \$30 a month, but they had to promise to send allotments of \$22–\$25 a month back home to family dependents. The Army would manage the work camps of 200 men each. Most of the conservation work in the field would be supervised by the Forest Service, part of the Agriculture Department, and the National Park Service (NPS), part of the Interior Department, both of which were well-prepared to make speedy use of the abundant labor now available to them.

Robert Y. Stuart, the head of the Forest Service, had prepared a comprehensive report on the condition of American forests and the need for up to 2 million men to work on improving them—planting trees, curtailing erosion, constructing forest roads, and improving communications to assist fighting forest fires. In addition, Horace Albright, the director of the NPS, had already begun to solicit from his personnel in the field ideas and cost estimates for possible CCC projects for both state and national parks. Albright invited representatives of state parks to come to Washington on April 6 to coordinate their work needs with the NPS.

State park people would supervise the CCC camps on state park lands, but they were now to be paid by the CCC, and NPS regional offices would oversee the work.

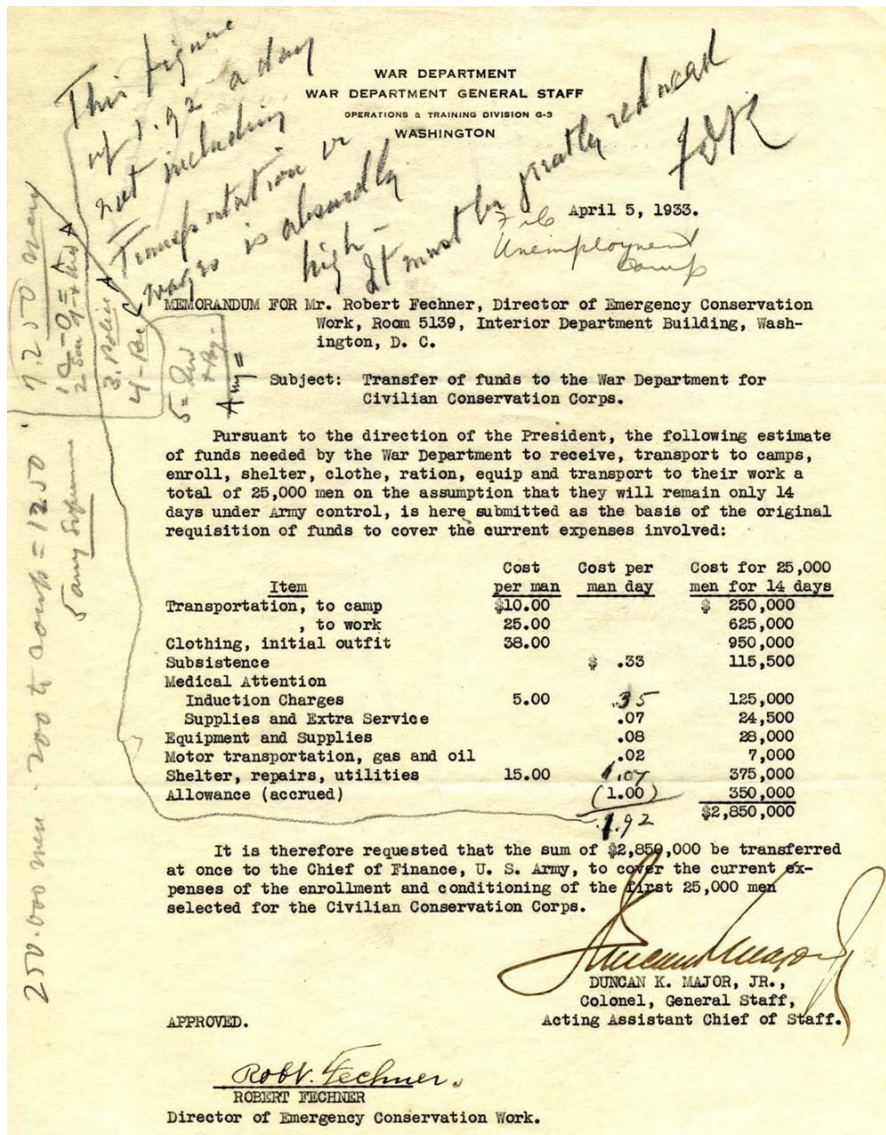
The NPS would pressure the state park people to "keep it simple" and stressed providing facilities with easy access and good water and sanitation. They wanted cheap tourist cabins constructed, not "summer homes," and generally pushed for labor-intensive projects rather than ones needing expensive materials and elaborate maintenance. Given this philosophy, the number of state park structures built by the CCC still in use today is impressive. The Park Service also employed CCC labor in historic preservation work around the country.

The Army had also been getting ready for the CCC with its own contingency plans. A proposal for the Army to construct camps for unemployed transients, introduced in the Senate in January 1933, had prompted the Army to begin preparing tentative plans. Once Roosevelt announced his own CCC project, the Army was able to wrap that earlier planning into the new proposal, and by March 24, a week before Congress authorized the CCC, the General Staff had a working plan. By mid-April the Army had essentially put together the body of regulations that it used over the life of the CCC.

In the early deliberations over the form that the CCC would take, the precise role that the Army would play produced considerable dissension. Although the Army's expertise was indispensable in transporting, housing, and disciplining the quarter of a million young men the President wanted in work camps in three months time, its heavy involvement would always be a sensitive issue.

The nation in the 1930s was witnessing the early triumphs of militaristic Fascism and was about to hear revelations of unseemly profits by war contractors, popularly labeled "merchants of death," during World War I. CCC officials, from Fechner on down, consequently tried to minimize the appearance of military trappings. There would be no drills or weapons training, no saluting, no MPs or guardhouses. On the other hand, the men wore modified Army surplus uniforms, lived in Army tents in the beginning and followed fairly regimented camp routines, sometimes announced by buglers. Only the Army could have established the CCC camps on such short notice, but as time went on, many critics found it an awkward and even unneeded partner in a program essentially concerned with conservation and remedial assistance to young men.

The necessarily large role for the Army also complicated the administration of the CCC camps. Stuart of the Forest Service and Col. Duncan Major of the War Department engaged in an early tug-of-war over camp operations. Stuart originally argued for his service to run the entire program by itself, including camp operations. He envisioned the Army's role as one of simply gathering the men and bringing them to what he had infelicitously referred to as "concentration camps." The Forest Service, when it was ready, would then call them to its own work camps. When it became clear that only the Army had the experienced personnel to set up and organize camps, Stuart retreated and agreed that the Army would also run the work camps and have disciplinary authority over the men, except when they were released to the technical supervisors for work projects in the field.



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An April 5, 1933, memo from Col. Duncan Major of the Army to Fechner estimates the costs to enroll and maintain 25,000 camp enrollees for 14 days. FDR commented at top that the \$1.92/day cost per man was absurdly high. "It must be greatly reduced." (Roosevelt Library)

This hastily designed set-up seemed an administrative mess on paper and occasionally led to friction but, perhaps more impressively, usually resulted in cooperative relations both in Washington and in the camps. It seems a typically New Deal approach—pragmatic, flexible, try this, try that, make it up as you go along, and avoid too much straight-jacket precision in the drawing of lines of authority.

Roosevelt himself made light of any fears arising from the CCC administrative structure.

"Oh, that doesn't matter," he blithely remarked. "The Army and the Forestry Service will really run the show. The Secretary of Labor will select the men and make the rules and Fechner will 'go along' and give everybody satisfaction and confidence." The CCC almost worked that smoothly.

The first 25,000 men selected were from families on the relief rolls of the 17 largest cities closest to Washington, D.C. The Labor Department decided that homeless and transient men would not be eligible. It was important that recruits have dependents back home to receive and spend allotment checks, thus contributing to economic recovery. On April 7 the first enrollee was selected, by April 17 the first camp was in operation near Luray, Virginia—Camp Roosevelt, of course—and the CCC was under way.

Once the state relief agencies selected eligible men, the Army, with its nine corps areas in the United States, would receive them at its various recruiting stations. If the recruits passed the physical (8.8 percent did not that first year), they would be

enrolled as "Juniors," inoculated against smallpox and typhoid, and transported to various Army bases for a short period of "conditioning" involving calisthenics and light work duty.

Three other groups of needy unemployed would be included among the first enrollees. By executive order on April 14, Roosevelt authorized the enrollment of 12,000 reservation Indians, with no restrictions on age or marital status. Over the course of the CCC's life span, some 88,000 Native Americans would be employed. Most continued to live at home and not in Army-run camps.

A decision to enroll a second group of unemployed men in the CCC flowed logically as the machinery of the brand-new organization began to be constructed and launched. Among the countless unforeseen issues was the growing realization that bringing large numbers of unemployed men from distant towns to work in rural settings amid unemployed locals would create resentment and, possibly, the kind of sabotage and arson that disgruntled woodsmen had resorted to over the years. This worrisome issue was then joined to the need felt by the technical people in Interior and Agriculture that there were not enough supervisors to oversee the enrollees who, in Stuart's words, "know nothing of the woods."

The solution was the authorization by executive order on April 22 to recruit Local Experienced Men (LEMs). These would typically be men who lived in the vicinity of the camps and had some kind of forestry experience. Unlike the Junior enrollees, they could be hired with no restrictions on age or marital status. They were received directly at the work camps instead of at conditioning camps and were not required to pay allotments to dependents. That first summer, the CCC hired about 35,000 LEMs for its camps.

Labor Department instructions to the state selection personnel expressed the hope that the sentiments of local communities would guide their choice of LEMs so as to forestall any local resentment. The process clearly left an opening for the intrusion of political patronage and favoritism. Although Fechner had promised the forestry personnel that there would be no politics involved in the appointment of technical personnel, there is considerable evidence that congressmen had some influence on the hiring of such supervisory personnel. But, compared to the record of the later Works Progress Administration (WPA), the patronage pressures on the CCC seem to have been minimal.

Veterans were the final group of unemployed men whose needs were recognized by the CCC. The Bonus March of World War veterans to Washington in 1932, demanding early payment of their promised bonus money, is well known. Less well known is the smaller march of about 3,000 veterans to the capital in early May 1933.

Roosevelt accepted the suggestion of Frank Hines, head of the Veterans Administration, that recruiting World War I veterans into the CCC would do much to ameliorate their discontent. The final resolution of any potential veterans crisis came when the President, by executive order on May 11, authorized the enrollment of 25,000 war veterans selected by the Veterans Administration to work in special camps of their own, with no restrictions on age or marital status.

There had been some thought given to integrating these older men into the Junior camps, but Frank Persons of the Labor Department argued against that idea, fearing that the older men would slow down the work projects and add a heavier odor of militarism to the program. Most of the Bonus Army veterans of 1933, about 2,600, joined up, and CCC camps employed about 225,000 veterans over the next nine years. Veterans camps tended to be a bit more relaxed than Junior camps. Most of the men were in their mid-40s and tended to remain in the CCC almost twice as long as did Juniors. Their canteens sold beer, and sometimes this practice adversely affected their reputations in rural areas. There were also occasional complaints about veterans moving their families to communities near their camps, where they often became burdens on local relief officials.

As the CCC continued to adjust its various camp personnel, one group of the unemployed notably missing was, of course, women. The need of women for relief and jobs was obviously pressing but not uppermost in the minds of most New Dealers. Eleanor Roosevelt was, on this issue as on so many others, considerably in advance of the times. Very early on in the preparations for the CCC camps, she suggested that some of the estimated 200,000 homeless women in the country could be put to work in forest tree nurseries, perhaps an unconsciously sexist idea, perhaps shrewdly deliberate on her part. She sent the idea over to the first woman cabinet member, Frances Perkins in the Labor Department, but nothing came of it. Although the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Works Progress Administration would later set up some "She-She-She" work camps for women, the CCC always remained an organization for men only.

* * *

By mid-May the CCC was up and running and men were already at work in some camps. But the process was moving slowly, and by early May it was becoming apparent in Washington that at the current pace, the President's goal of 250,000 men (now expanded to near 300,000 with the addition of Indians, LEMs, and veterans) in camps by July 1 was not going to be met. The

Labor Department was recruiting on schedule, and the Army was receiving the men into "conditioning camps" for initiation into the physical and psychological experience of barracks life, but there were serious logjams because of the slowness of constructing work camps in the states, because of the lack of approved work projects to justify the sending of the men there, and because the President was still engaged in "micromanaging" the approval of camp sites.

Fechner called an advisory council meeting for May 12 and ordered the members to bring their plans and suggestions to speed up the process. Colonel Major reported that the Army, for its part, could receive at its conditioning camps the 8,540 recruits a day that it would take to meet the President's goal. They could also send a like number out to the work camps, provided they received all the men by June 7 and provided that approved work projects awaited the men. Furthermore, he boasted that the Army was also prepared to move 55,000 men out of their home states to places where work was needed. At that point, the geographical center of the men recruited was somewhere in Ohio while the center of approved work projects was out in Nevada. FDR then issued another executive order to clear some administrative obstacles with regard to hiring and purchasing and remove himself from minor administrative decisions.

The logjam was broken, and from mid-May to July 1, close to 9,000 men a day were being recruited by relief agencies in the states, enrolled and transported to Army conditioning bases, and then sent on to work camps. Although it was impossible to make a precise count, the numbers were close enough to allow the administration to brag that it had met its goal and that some 275,000 recruits and 10,000 supervisory personnel were "in the woods" in 1,468 camps by July 1. Their numbers peaked in late July at 301,230 when all the veterans' camps had been set up. The Forest Service ran 82 percent of these camps, the NPS had charge of 11 percent, and the rest were variously managed by the War Department, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other federal agencies.

Enrollees in these earliest camps had a much rougher time than later ones. In some cases, officers had taken a few men on ahead from the conditioning camps to the work sites and had set up six-man tents with wood stove heaters before the bulk of the company arrived. But in most cases, the whole company arrived together at a wilderness site not always sufficiently cleared for setting up tents. Sometimes the men arrived on cold and rainy evenings and had to arrange their shelters in what must have been depressing conditions. But, like many hardships, the troubles of those early days turned into stories that became part of the proud lore of CCC men that they could "take it." Attrition took a toll of approximately 10 percent that summer, but when the time came in October for a second enrollment, about 175,000 of the original men re-upped for a second six-month hitch.

One of the most impressive efforts, in a long list of gargantuan feats that put the CCC in operation, was performed by the Army's Quartermaster Department, which was charged with supplying the camps with everything from trucks to toothbrushes. Supplying food was particularly difficult. When the men were first at the conditioning camps, they received the Army's regular rations. But because so many of the young men were arriving from distressed families and had been undernourished, the ration had to be increased by 5 percent. When the men got to the work camps and started on their conservation work, supervisors reported that they "were consuming unheard of quantities of food" and gaining about 12 pounds apiece in the first two months. Farmers and vendors in the vicinity of CCC camps appreciated the business, but the quartermaster personnel were pushed to the limit in arranging for the purchase and distribution of unprecedented amounts of food.



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President Franklin Roosevelt visited with CCC enrollees near Camp Roosevelt on August 12, 1933, at Big Meadows, Skyland Drive, Virginia. Seated from left are Maj. Gen. Paul B. Malone, Louis M. Howe, Harold L. Ickes, Robert Fechner, FDR, Henry A. Wallace, and Rexford Tugwell. (35-GE-3A-5)

While the men in the camps were sorting things out, there were, naturally, a few bumps along the way. The program was temporarily distracted by a congressional investigation into Howe's authorization of overpriced mess kits for the camps, and there was a messy riot, perhaps Communist inspired, by large numbers of recruits at Fort Dix, New Jersey, in May. But the program was otherwise running smoothly, and on August 12, FDR, Howe, Fechner, Harold Ickes of Interior, and William Green of the American Federation of Labor (now supportive of the program) traveled by car over to Virginia to tour a few of the early camps, including Camp Roosevelt. It was a delightful trip for both the visitors and the camp personnel. At one stop Roosevelt joked about the weight gains of the recruits: "I am told you men have put on an average of twelve pounds each. I am trying to lose twelve pounds!"

Once the men were in the camps and their work day set at eight hours (including transportation to and from job sites), there arose the question of how to occupy the men in the remaining hours of the day. It was Colonel Major who first raised the issue of filling in the leisure time of the boys in camp. In a memorandum to Fechner on April 29, 1933, Major accepted Army responsibility for the "welfare" of the men and announced that there would be a Division of Welfare in each of the nine corps. The officer in charge would be responsible, among other things, for ensuring that the camps received the services of chaplains, either Army personnel or recruited from local communities. Major also said that the Army was aiming to show two movies a week in each of the camps and would develop a system of rotating libraries of 150–200 books.

The Army would also run post exchanges and use the small profits for the purchase of recreational equipment, including radios and games. Based on Army experience, each camp would be initially supplied with a dozen baseballs, six bats, 10 gloves, basketballs and four sets of eight-ounce boxing gloves. Major's list was quite a familiar one to Army personnel, who had experience in organizing recreational activities for soldiers. That first summer they began what would become rather elaborate athletic competitions, both intracamp and intercamp. Appeals went out to civic groups in the local communities near the camps for donations, and soon shipments of baseball, basketball, and football equipment came flooding in, enabling camps to field teams and stage competitions, sometimes with local men.

Major also mentioned that there would be opportunities for forestry education and even vocational education "where practicable." On the other hand, he was dead set against any other type of education in the camps and would remain cool to the idea of hiring teachers for the camps. He feared that they would be idle most of the day and then have maybe seven or eight students in the evenings. "I have consistently fought the attempts of long-haired men and short-haired women to get in our camps," he wrote.

While this Army-run welfare program was all well and good and had served the Army's interests in training soldiers, some CCC

administrators soon came to realize that the concentration of large numbers of poor and usually unskilled young men in the camps afforded a marvelous opportunity to provide education and job training so that, when the men left the camps after six months or a year, they would be more employable than when they went in. Of course the men were expected to get some on-the-job training, but as Mrs. Roosevelt pointed out, very few of the CCC boys would be finding employment as foresters when they returned home to Detroit, Birmingham, or Los Angeles.

Consequently, some of the civilian officials in the CCC began to think about something more ambitious and potentially more valuable to fill up the boys' free time. Persons, whom Secretary Perkins had recruited from the Red Cross to head the selection process of the CCC, began to talk up, at least as early as May 18, the possibility of a more advanced educational program, including university extension courses. He proposed appointing "Camp Counselors" to supervise unstructured lessons in the camp and naively envisioned nightly campfires where the men would sing, tell stories, and put on theatrical performances.

Through the long days of summer and early fall of 1933, outdoor recreation was enough to occupy the time and energies of most enrollees. Moreover, most of the attention of CCC officials in that period had to focus on organizing work projects and constructing facilities more substantial than tent camps. But many state foresters as well as educators around the country steadily kept the issue of camp education alive. On October 15, 1933, Howe asked Persons to formulate an educational plan. Persons submitted his ideas to Fechner on November 2, recommending that the CCC director be in direct charge of all educational activities in the camps.

However, the Army wanted more control of this camp-based activity, and Army Chief of Staff Gen. Douglas MacArthur modified Persons's ideas and sent along the Army's recommendations to Roosevelt on November 22, who approved them. What emerged was a program whereby the Office of Education in the Interior Department would appoint a director of CCC education, who would appoint advisers from the nine corps various agencies. These corps advisers then appointed educational advisers for each of the camps. The camp educational adviser would choose one enrollee to serve as an assistant who would receive an extra \$6 a month in pay.

So began the difficult task of conceptualizing and implementing a suitable educational program for the CCC. While there is no question that many young men, especially the 57,000 illiterates who learned to read and write in camp, benefited from the educational opportunities the CCC was able to offer, the whole program always had the quality of an afterthought about it and lacked any kind of system or even clear-cut purpose.

* * *

Placed as it was under the effective control of Army camp commanders, the educational program would be as good or as bad as those individuals chose to make it. While some commanders enthusiastically cooperated with the advisers, many others saw the whole program as an "unwelcome chore, outside the proper interests of professional fighting men," in the words of a critic in *The New Republic*.



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Enrollees of Companies 1951 and 2950 studied art at the Lompoc, California, camp. (35-GC-IX-779-D1)

Over the years there evolved an amazing variety of subjects taught after hours in the camps, and a popular image emerged of young Abe Lincolns studying into the nights after long hard days of log splitting. By 1938, for example, 603 different subjects were being taught in camps. Of the 23,168 people offering this instruction, only 1,537 were the educational advisers. In addition to paid WPA teachers, Army personnel, technical people, and local citizens volunteered their services, and 5,767 of the camp instructors were the enrollees themselves! But a critical study of the educational programs of a small sample of camps in 1939 found that the costs of camp education were higher on a per capita basis than they were in public schools and that enrollees dropped out of programs in disheartening numbers after some initial enthusiasm. The average enrollee received only 27 hours of instruction over a two-year enlistment period.

If the program had been given some firmer system, with more structured curricula and clearly spelled out articulation agreements with school districts and colleges, something akin to the post-World War II expansion of community colleges, the appeal of the CCC might have been even broader. But all the boldness of the CCC had been in Roosevelt's initial notion of putting all those unemployed young men to work in the woods. That had been typical of his "management strategy," according to Frances Perkins. He would conceive of a program, rush it through, and let other, less imaginative people, handle the details while he moved on to other matters. While he never lost interest in the CCC, his "pet," the crises of the 1930s, domestic and foreign, necessarily consumed more and more of his attention.

* * *

On August 19 Roosevelt authorized another six months for the CCC, thus ensuring that the men would be in camps during the winter months. Fechner was given the go-ahead to build more permanent and comfortable quarters for them, and he told Howe he had decided that wooden structures would make the cheapest and most suitable type of buildings. Howe had been pressing the Army to assume control of building permanent camp living quarters for the men, but Colonel Major pointed out that the peacetime Army, down to interwar lows in 1933, lacked the personnel and skills to do this work. He also raised the touchy question of Army morale. Putting Army privates, paid \$17 a month, to work constructing housing for \$30 a month CCC recruits could cause serious conflict. Major argued that having the men construct

their own camps would boost their morale and *esprit de corps*.

Instead, most of the camp buildings erected that summer and fall were contracted out to local builders, usually at union wage levels; with construction of 1,443 camps, it was a task described as the biggest housing project in history. The Army quartermaster oversaw the letting out of contracts for lumber and building materials, and local builders were hired by the corps headquarters. By Thanksgiving, most of the CCC men were in the newly constructed and warmer barracks.

Although most of these early CCC buildings were built by local contractors, the CCC men frequently built mess halls, officers quarters, recreational buildings, and storage sheds. Even though few of the CCC men had any skilled background, with supervision and direction they were obviously capable of impressive construction work. The handsome and sturdy tourist cabins at many state parks throughout the country are clear evidence of that.

* * *

Franklin D. Roosevelt combined his own long-standing interest in conservation with his desire to quickly create jobs for out-of-work Americans in the 1930s to create a program that has had a strong and lasting impact on the nation—and on those who participated in it.

It has been more than 70 years—a lifetime—since the pioneering group of CCC men helped launch one of the most imaginative and popular government programs in American history. And it has been more than 60 years since the last enrollees left their wooded camps in 1942 to embark on an amazing variety of adventures and careers.

Tens of thousands of the 2.5 million former CCC men are still alive at this writing, and many are proud members of the National Association of Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni. Many hundreds attend yearly CCC reunions, usually held in areas close to their old camps.

They often joke about how they and the trees they planted have grown old together. The trees will undoubtedly outlive their planters, but Americans will do well to long remember the young men who provided one of the few positive and colorful chapters in the drab decade of Depression and bequeathed them a more beautiful and healthier environment.

Joseph M. Speakman is professor of history at Montgomery County Community College in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania. His interest in the CCC began with the stories his father told him of his time in a CCC camp at Wolf Rock, Pennsylvania, in 1933–1934. Speakman is the author of *At Work in Penn's Woods: The Civilian Conservation Corps in Pennsylvania*, which has been recently published by Penn State University Press.

Note on Sources

Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Record Group (RG) 35, in the National Archives at College Park, Maryland, are voluminous. The finding aid compiled by Douglas Helms, *Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps*, PI 11 (revised, 1980) ably guides the researcher through these records. Of particular value are the Annual Reports of the Director and the Minutes of his Advisory Council. At the same facility are the valuable records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1917– (RG 407), the National Park Service (RG 79), and the Forest Service (RG 95).

The most authoritative work on the CCC is still that by John Salmond, published in 1967: *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1942: A New Deal Case Study*. Also of interest is Stan Cohen's *The Tree Army: A Pictorial History of the CCC, 1933–1942*, published in 1980. The National Association of Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni publishes a monthly journal with reminiscent accounts and news of interest to supporters of the CCC ideal.

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