



The Legacy of Hope from an Era of Despair: The CCC and Iowa State Parks

REBECCA CONARD

The Civilian Conservation Corps was the federal government's first program for America's jobless youth. In the early 1930s, during the depths of the Great Depression, one quarter of the work force was unemployed. About 2.5 million men and women were aimlessly drifting the country. Today, we would call them the "homeless." CCC veteran Robert Wimer of Dewitt remembered that "freight trains were literally loaded with people—men, women, and children, chasing the rumors of jobs to be had, here or there."¹ Many of those people looking for jobs were young men and women, the "boy and girl tramps of America" or the "wild boys of the road," or one of several other current epithets.² Journalist Maxine Davis crossed the country interviewing young adults in the mid-1930s. She concluded that the depression had "robbed" a whole generation of "time and opportunity."³

New Deal work relief programs did comparatively little for the "sisters of the road," as Davis compassionately called them, but the Civilian Conservation Corps was a masterful attempt to rescue their "brothers." In concept, it was simple: put them to work

¹ Robert Wimer to Matt Miller, copy of an undated letter in Robert Wimer Scrapbook, CCC Museum, Backbone State Park.

² Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), 251; Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), 340; William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper, 1963), 52-53.

³ Maxine Davis, *The Lost Generation* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 4.

restoring the public domain. In operation, it worked beautifully until World War II intervened and the economy rebounded. The CCC was so popular that there have been repeated calls to resurrect the concept ever since. During the 1970s and early 1980s, the Youth Conservation Corps and the Young Adult Conservation Corps owed their inspiration to the CCC. President Clinton's ill-fated Americorps is a more recent echo of our abiding admiration for the CCC. The CCC, however, was borne of unique circumstances, which, in retrospect, account for much of its success.

One part of the successful equation was the vast number of young, able-bodied men who were without prospects for earning a living. In addition, there were no safety nets; the federal welfare system did not exist. The third part of the equation was an environmental crisis. By 1930, America had used up at least three-fourths of its continental forests; vast cut-over regions of the country were eroding. Equally profligate agricultural practices had stripped the soil of its fertility in the South and elsewhere. Then, the dust storms began. Recurring drought, overgrazing, and intensive agriculture began to turn the grasslands of the Great Plains into deserts. By the 1930s, an estimated nine million acres of farmland had been lost to erosion. Another eighty million acres were in jeopardy.⁴ The Civilian Conservation Corps addressed all three problems at once.

Congress authorized emergency conservation work in March 1933, and within a few weeks Iowa had Civilian Conservation Corps camps up and running. By the end of the year, 12,800 men were at work in thirty-four Iowa camps.⁵ Tiny Ross, who went on to become a doctor, was among them. He later wrote, "My mom had died and I'd been on my own since I was 12. I was broke, hungry and on the road when I joined the CCC."⁶ The key to surviving the depression was maintaining one's self respect. Many

⁴ Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) has become the classic study of agriculture and environmental devastation in the 1930s.

⁵ *Thirty-fourth Annual Year Book—Part I* (Iowa Department of Agriculture, 1933), 6.

⁶ Dr. L.W. (Tiny Ross) in unidentified news clipping, Robert Wimer Scrapbook, CCC museum, Backbone State Park.

Americans, perhaps the majority, were able to husband resources and make do with less. But making do was not an option for millions of young adults were just starting life on their own. Above all else, the CCC offered young men a chance to create and maintain self respect.

The complex partnership developed to implement the CCC remains one of the most fascinating case studies in the history of intergovernmental relations, in large part because it is impossible to imagine such cooperation among government agencies as they now function.⁷ The Department of Agriculture and the Department of Interior provided technical services through several agencies, including the Soil Conservation Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the Bureau of Biological Survey (now the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). The Labor Department made the final selection of enrollees, and the War Department operated the CCC camps. State agencies determined a priority list of projects and provided additional technical services.

Between 1933 and 1942, 2.5 million men between the ages of seventeen and twenty-eight (initially, eighteen and twenty-five) enrolled in the CCC nationwide; another 450,000 veterans of World War I were put to work in the VCC. Everyone of them had a personal story, many of which have been collected in recent years, but the *average enrollee* was said to be twenty years old with an eighth grade education. He came from a family of six children. If he lived at home, his father was unemployed. Chances are the enrollee himself had not worked for at least nine months.⁸ He received \$30 per month, slightly more if he were promoted to an officer's position; either way, \$25 of his pay was sent home to his family. The pay was not great, even then, but it was steady. Equally important was the steady diet, something else many CCC boys had lacked.

⁷ John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1967) remains the best scholarly treatment of the CCC. Salmond discusses the origins of the CCC concept and its complex organizational structure. He also examines the human dimension: profiles the typical enrollee, characterizes typical camp operations and activities, and frankly discusses the racial aspects.

⁸ Salmond, 135.

In Iowa, the Civilian Conservation Corps contributed more to state park development than did any other federal work relief program.⁹ Because Iowa had adopted a long-range conservation plan in early 1933, it was among the first states to be approved for CCC camps. The *Twenty-five Year Conservation Plan* was a pioneering effort, the first comprehensive, statewide plan that attempted to relate state park planning and development to broader resource conservation needs.¹⁰ Fiscal belt-tightening, however, caused the legislature to adopt it without an appropriation. Thus, its many recommendations, which included creating artificial lakes, expanding the park and preserve system, creating wildlife refuges, and establishing state forests, awaited funding, though not for long.

Landscape architect John Fitzsimmons late recalled the excitement when Congress approved the CCC. "I had been looking over Lake Wapello for the Fish and Game Commission, and was in the dining room of the hotel at Ottumwa. Mr. Darling [Jay N. "Ding" Darling] came in and rapped on the window and said, Fitz! What do you think! Uncle Sam has just given us all the money we need. We can go ahead with the Twenty-five Year Plan."¹¹ By mid-1933, sixteen CCC camps and thirty-two projects had been approved for Iowa. Fitzsimmons also remembered that President Franklin Roosevelt was impressed with the long-range conservation plan, and, because of it, ordered CCC national director Robert Fechner to "Give Iowa all it wants."¹² The twenty-five-year plan was precisely the kind of state commitment the president was looking for. By the time the CCC ended in 1942, the number of CCC enrollees in Iowa camps would total nearly 46,000. They would con-

⁹ The Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Project Works Administration (PWA), Civil Works Administration (CWA), and National Youth Administration (NYA) also put people to work improving state parks, as I documented in my own study, "The Conservation Movement in Iowa, 1857-1942," National Register of Historic Places registration document [original located at the State Historical Society of Iowa, Office of Historic Preservation, Des Moines].

¹⁰ *Thirty-fourth Annual Year Book*, 6; Jacob L. Crane, Jr. and George Wheeler Olcott, *Report on the Iowa Twenty-five Year Conservation Plan* (Des Moines, 1933). Cartoonist and conservationist Jay N. Darling was the driving force behind Iowa's long-range conservation plan; his voluminous papers and approximately 6,000 original cartoons are located in the Special Collections Department in the University of Iowa Libraries.

¹¹ John Fitzsimmons to State Conservation Commission, transcript of remarks at 3-5 November 1941 commission meeting, Iowa Department of Natural Resources files.

¹² *Ibid.*

tribute to the development of more than eighty state parks, and leave a tangible legacy that still numbers more than seven hundred state park structures.¹³

The unusual American life of the 1930s and the federal government's unprecedented response to widespread economic distress, produced a corresponding impulse to document what was happening to common people, something that had rarely been done prior to then. Photographers, filmmakers, and writers, employed variously through the Works Progress Administration, the Resettlement Administration, and the Farm Security Administration, fanned out across America to record poverty, stoicism, and laughter in the face of adversity, and plain, ordinary, daily life.¹⁴ Unbeknownst to these slice-of-time documentarians, individual participants in America's grandest social reclamation scheme also were assembling their own private documentaries in the form of scrapbooks, diaries, and saved letters. With the fiftieth anniversary of the CCC these private collections began to surface, revealing a wealth of additional information about camp life and the touching personal transformations that many young men experienced. The CCC may turn out to be the most well-documented phenomenon of the 1930s. In Iowa, many private collections have been gathered together and are now archived at the CCC Museum in Backbone State Park.¹⁵

Photographs from the Iowa CCC collections attest to the "bonding" experiences that were central to life in the Three C's. Men enrolled for a period of six months, and they could re-enroll successively to a maximum official period of two years, although some managed to finagle longer stays. Thus, despite short enrollment periods, it was possible to build and maintain social cohe-

¹³ Joyce McKay, "The Civilian Conservation Corps Properties in Iowa State Parks: 1933-42," National Register of Historic Places registration document, 1990, Section E, 14, 71-72 [original copy located at State Historical Society of Iowa, Office of Historic Preservation, Des Moines].

¹⁴ There are many studies of the 1930s documentary impulse. Among the first to appear were Jerre G. Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), F. Jack Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade: Roy Stryker and the Development of Documentary Photography in the Thirties* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), and William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

¹⁵ A much smaller collection of CCC material is located at Iowa State University Special Collections Department.

sion. Looking at photographs of CCC buddies, though, it is easy to overlook, or miss, the fact that the CCC accepted African Americans. The CCC legislation stated that there would be no racial discrimination, but, of course, this was not the case. Race presented a particularly difficult problem for Robert Fechner, who was a Southerner and not inclined to force the issue. Contrary to Labor Department directives, quotas were widely used to limit the number of Negro enrollees. In the South, camps were strictly segregated. Outside the South, segregated camps predominated, but blacks were sometimes assigned to regular companies.¹⁶ This was true, for instance, at one of the two camps located at Lake View, which constructed Black Hawk Lake State Park, although blacks there were housed in separate barracks.¹⁷ Personal photographs, by and large, do not reflect the story of race and the CCC. Altogether, about 200,000 African Americans enrolled during the CCC's nine-year lifespan. Surely, New Deal liberals missed an opportunity to take a bold step toward desegregation, but these 200,000 blacks nonetheless benefited from occupational training and educational opportunities.

Work projects defined each day, and physical labor was the one true common bond enrollees shared. Camp compounds were among the first work projects. These were similar from one location to the next, increasingly so after standard plans were introduced in 1936. Each compound had four or five rectangular barracks measuring one hundred feet by twenty feet, showers and latrines, a mess hall, a recreation hall, administration buildings, officers' quarters, a hospital, a garage, and often a school building. Buildings were arranged, roughly, in a "U" shape around an open space, which often doubled as a recreational field. There were about fifty variations on the basic plan, depending on the local terrain. Camp buildings were designed for temporary use.

¹⁶ Salmond, 94-101.

¹⁷ This information comes not from official records, but from a 1937 newspaper account of the murder trial of Riley McBride, identified as one of several Negro members of the National Park Service camp; "Sac County Jury Frees R. McBride of Murder Charge," *Lake View Resort*, 3 June 1937. McBride's age was reported as forty-seven, indicating that he belonged to a Veterans Conservation Corps unit. The all-white jury, incidentally, believed McBride's claim of self-defense, although one can speculate that the outcome might have been different had the victim not also been an African American.

Single-wall, single-story wood frame construction was the standard building type, sometimes painted brown or green, sometimes covered with tar paper or creosote. Interior space was arranged for maximum efficiency, with privacy consequently in short supply. Central heating meant a pot-belly stove in the center of the room. Improvements to home base varied with the officers in charge. Gravel pathways, rustic gates and railings, flower gardens, or stone fireplaces — all constructed and maintained by the boys, of course — might add a measure of character and comfort to camps that otherwise were indistinguishable from military compounds.¹⁸

The whole operation was well organized but flexible. Camp assignments frequently shifted. A total of forty-six camps were organized in Iowa. Of that total, forty-one of them were assigned, at one time or another, to state park projects, which offered some of the most rewarding work because the resulting products had such great visual appeal.¹⁹ Even so, the CCC was not for everyone. The desertion rate was at least twelve percent, though official statistics are vague. Many left after a few days, often because they were homesick. More left because they could not adjust to the regimen of camp life. Army officers presided over each camp, and while the Army was not eager to take on the responsibility for running the camps, by the late 1930s most top officers admitted that the CCC had proved to be a valuable training ground for junior officers.²⁰

Although the CCC was immensely popular with the American public, and communities often vied for CCC camps because of the economic boost, many people on the political extremes fretted about the Army's role. Officially, the Army housed, fed, and clothed CCC enrollees. In addition, camp officers supervised all activities, which included recreational programs, counseling, and

¹⁸ Salmond, 135-37; C.N. Alleger and C.A. Alleger, *Civilian Conservation Corps: Iowa District History* (Rapid City, S.D., privately printed, [1935?]) also contains a wealth of detail, including photographs, concerning the organization and activities of more than thirty Iowa companies.

¹⁹ G.B. MacDonald, "Report on the Status of Emergency Conservation Work in Iowa," *Thirty-sixth Annual Year Book* (Iowa Department of Agriculture, 1935), 182-93; McKay, "Civilian Conservation Corps Properties in Iowa State Parks, 1933-1942," Section E, 51-52 (Table 4) and 71-72.

²⁰ Salmond, 114-120.

educational training. Unofficially, however, some camp commanders treated the CCC as an Army recruiting ground. There also were valid charges that the Army interfered with education programs; and, on the issue of African American enrollees, the Army was, at best, ambivalent. Despite justifiable reservations about the Army, though, no other agency of the federal government was capable of administering a program so huge, so far flung, and so complex.²¹

Camps came to life each morning with reveille at 6 a.m. By 6:30, everyone was dressed and on the grounds for morning exercises, then they trooped to the mess hall for breakfast. After eating, the men cleaned up their bunk areas and policed the grounds. Considering that bed “linens” were pretty basic — sometimes a bed-roll and a pillow—these chores took little time. Then everyone lined up for roll call and inspection. By 7:45 crews were ready to depart for the day’s work. Nearly everyone took a turn at kitchen duty. The food was plain, nourishing, and served in large quantities. Food purchased amounted to more the \$3 million monthly for camps nationwide; and about half of this amount was spent in local areas. Thus, food service alone contributed greatly to local economies.²² Crews typically ate the noon meal wherever they were working. After lunch one day, Bob Wimer snapped a photograph of his crew napping, interspersed among a pile of logs they were “peeling” to use as timbers for a state park building. His caption of the photograph reads, “After chow. 3 baloney sandwiches, cake, fruit, and coffee you could float a rock in.”²³

Camp life, of course, was not all work. The boys organized baseball, basketball, football, boxing, and track teams, and camps played one another for mythical district and state championships. Baseball was especially popular in Iowa, judging from camp newspapers and scrapbook collections. In 1934, the Iowa District Baseball championship went to the Rog Rifiers, officially known as Company 772, which had a side camp at Maquoketa State Park. The unusual name reportedly derived from some unidentified camp leader’s inability to pronounce the “L” sound. As the story

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, 111, 137-39.

²³ Robert Wimer Scrapbook.

goes, he once reported that his men had been “rifting rogs” onto log dams.²⁴ His youthful charges did not let slip the chance to immortalize such a tempting human foible.

For those not athletically inclined, there were more sedentary activities. Table tennis, pool, checkers, and card games were popular. Every camp also had a library, stocked with popular books and magazines. Education was an integral part of CCC life, too. Everything from journalism and orchestra music to dynamiting and cooking were offered, depending on who was available to teach whatever might be needed or in demand. The boys could also seek out diversions in the local community. There were no restrictions on leaving the camp, but everyone was expected to be back at the barracks by 10 p.m. Taps sounded at 10:15; bed check was at 11:00.²⁵

Weekend activities might include sporting events, social dances, and drama or choral practice. Religious services were held in all camps on Sundays. Getting out the camp newsletter was a continual weekend activity, with production underwritten by local advertising or a local newspaper. Newsletter titles, like team names, reflected a camp’s chosen identity. *Camp Hawkeye Newsletter* came from Maquoketa Co. #2716. Eldora Co. 1752 published the *Erosioneer*. *Camp Chin Chat* came from Keosauqua, and the two Backbone State Park camps published the *Backbone Timber Cadet*.²⁶

As of the early 1930s, Iowa had established thirty-eight state parks, and it was among a handful of states considered to be leaders in the state park movement.²⁷ By the end of the New Deal, thanks to the CCC and other work relief programs, state and national parks were recreational staples of American life. Iowa was but one of thirty-seven states to acquire new lands and expand park systems between 1933 and 1942. The CCC program prompted another eight states to establish their first state parks: Colorado,

²⁴ Tom Phipps Scrapbook, CCC Museum, Backbone.

²⁵ Salmond, 139-141.

²⁶ A small collection of CCC newsletters is located in MS188, Civilian Conservation Corps Material, Iowa State University.

²⁷ Iowa passed legislation authorizing a state park system in 1917, among the first states to do so. New York, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois also were leaders in the state park movement.

28 MEN DISCHARGED ON MARCH 31

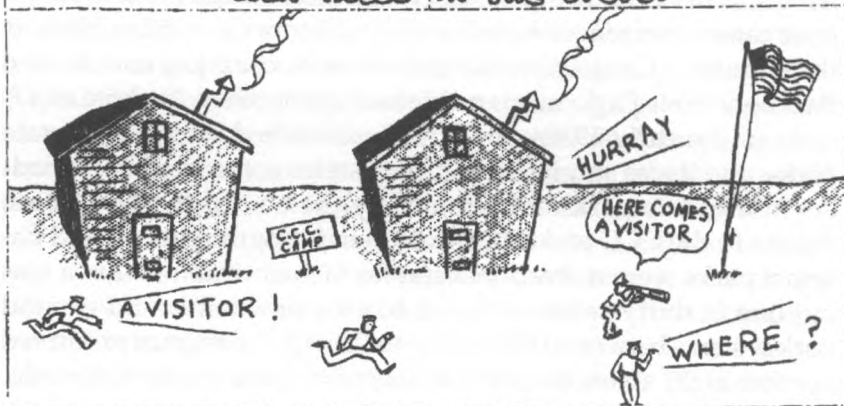
Twenty-eight men were discharged from Company 1752, Wednesday, March 31, 1937, at the end of their enrollment period. This leaves the Company strength at midnight Mar. 31, 1937 at 116. It is estimated that 40 or 50 new enrollees will join the Company during the period of April 1 to 20th. The men who were discharged are:- Richard Arkland, Franklin Berry, Merle Bird, Stanley Braye, Chester Brighton, Russell Clark, William Cowart, Allen Goodwin, Vincent Hamm, John Helm, Melbourne Hill, Everett Huisenga, Harvey Jacobsen, Lyle Palmer, Albert Lettow, Vernon Luft, Clifford Mahan, Frank Maruk, Hugh Monohan, Gerald Murray, Max McGue, Alvin McKnight, Carl Neuenndorf, John O'Meara, Lawrence Rucker, Fred Ruthenburg, Delbert Scheuller, Corwin Slate.

CHARTER MEMBER OF COMPANY LEAVES

With the honorable discharge from the Company of John "Brogie" O'Meara the charter membership is reduced to two. Keith Vittetoe and John O'Rourke are the two men remaining of the original membership.

O'Meara was one of the sixteen men selected for possible leader's rating at the time the company was organized. He was rated assistant leader and in June, 1934 was advanced to leader. A restriction limiting the number of leaders to six returned him to the role of assistant leader. Later he served as leader at the Ames side-camp and held that rating when the side camp membership was returned to the main camp. Ability untiring energy and willingness to always cooperate made him one of the company's outstanding men.

OPEN HOUSE IN THE C.C.C.



-2-

A page from *The Erosioneer* of April 4, 1937.

Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia.²⁸ When the New Deal came to a close, Iowa's system contained eighty-seven parks, preserves, forests, historic sites, waysides, and parkways. There were seventy-three overnight cabins in nine state parks, accommodations that did not even begin to meet demand. For those who preferred or were forced to accept more primitive conditions, tent camps were available in thirty-two parks. Three natural lakes had been dredged to enhance boating and fishing; eighteen new artificial lakes were open for public use.²⁹

In recent years, CCC improvements to state parks throughout the nation have been the subject of numerous surveys.³⁰ When we think of CCC-era architecture in parks, we tend to think first of the impressive stone lodges and shelterhouses, but construction in state parks included everything from drinking fountains to fishing piers to toboggan slides. Importantly, the park rustic style was a total design concept, which included the creation of naturalistic settings. Among the most pastoral of these is Richmond Springs at Backbone State Park, enhanced with rock-lined pools where the spring emerges from a limestone outcropping. CCC crews also built hundreds of miles of foot trails. Ironically, given the demand for trails today, park planners overestimated the popularity of hiking in the 1930s and 1940s, and Iowa built more trails than actual use warranted at the time. In keeping with the rustic style, stone trail steps were blended into the natural landscape, and wooden footbridges were embellished with guardrails of small unpeeled logs. CCC crews, in addition, built or improved miles and miles of winding park roads. During the 1920s,

²⁸ Linda Flint McClelland, *Presenting Nature: The Historic Landscape Design of the National Park Service, 1916 to 1942* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1993), 252-54.

²⁹ Figures compiled from *Biennial Reports of the State Conservation Commission, 1934 through 1942*.

³⁰ In addition to McKay's Iowa survey, others include Mary Elizabeth McCahon and John Herzan, "Connecticut State Park and Forest Depression-Era Federal Work Relief Programs' Structures," NRHP Thematic Resources Nomination, December 1985; James M. Denny and Bonita Marie Wright, "Emergency Conservation Work (ECW) Architecture in Missouri State Parks, 1933-1942," NRHP Thematic Resources Nomination, December 1984; Rolf T. Anderson, "Minnesota State Park CCC/WPA/Rustic Style Historic Resources," NRHP Multiple Property Documentation form, 1988; Glory-June Greiff, "New Deal Resources in Indiana State Parks," NRHP Multiple Property Documentation Form, July 1991; see also, Carol Ahlgren, "The Civilian Conservation Corps and Wisconsin State Park Development," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 71 (1987-88), 184-204.

automobile touring became an accepted, and popular, form of leisure activity. Although early-day park advocates in Iowa did not envision heavy recreational use in state parks, the automobile changed all that.

CCC carpenter shops turned out picnic tables, park benches, and park furnishings to complement stone lodges and shelterhouses. Few of these objects remain, and those that do are much valued. Visitors to the CCC Museum at Backbone State Park, for instance, can rest on a 1930s park bench that has been incorporated into the exhibit. The millions of trees planted in state parks and forests constitute an even less obvious legacy. Most crews spent at least a portion of their time on forestry projects, so much so that a contemporary nickname for the three C's was "Roosevelt's Tree Army." Nationwide, CCC boys were responsible for most of the reforestation accomplished prior to World War II.³¹ Reforestation also was high on the agenda of state forester G.B. MacDonald, who served as the state CCC director. MacDonald took full advantage of federal and state appropriations to acquire about 13,000 acres of land for state forests in Iowa. Two CCC camps were assigned to full-time forestry work: surveying newly acquired lands, building erosion control structures, grading and surfacing roads, and planting trees. MacDonald also established the state tree nursery at Ames, and a third CCC camp provided the labor to operate it. CCC camps throughout the state planted trees in state parks and collected seeds for propagating more.³²

The rustic architectural style adopted for national and state park structures called for native building materials, which meant tons of split stone for walls and thousands of felled trees for log beams and posts. Heavy equipment was used only when necessary since it was policy to maximize federal expenditures for human labor. The work could be back-breaking as Bob Wimer notes: "16 pound mauls and 3 ft. start drills, crow bars, combined with brute strength and awkwardness got the rock out of the quarry."³³ Even concrete

³¹ Leuchtenburg, 174; Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal*, 341.

³² G.B. MacDonald, "Forestry Progress in Iowa," *Ames Forester* 29 (1941), 10-13; *Biennial Report of the State Conservation Commission* 1938, 117-118; 1940, 160-67; and 1942, 117.

³³ Robert Wimer Scrapbook caption.

was mixed one small batch at a time and wheeled to its destination the old fashioned way. CCC men spent so much time outdoors that they developed what Bob Wimer knew as "moon bottom." Beside a mischievous photo of two boys with exposed backsides to the camera and broad smiles on faces turning back to look at the photographer, he wrote, "a skin condition generally thought to be caused by fresh air and sunshine."

Stonemasonry was one of the skills in high demand for park work. This, of course, was a skill that CCC boys typically did not have at the beginning of their tour, so local experienced men, or LEMs as they were called, often provided the technical expertise. If the boys were greenhorns going in, though, they began to take pride in their work as experience set in. Richard Steele, who was assigned to Lacey-Keosauqua State Park, photographed and kept a list of all the park improvements he worked on during 1933 and 1934. "My crew did the stonework," appears over and over in his captions.

The administrative framework of work relief programs required states to work closely with National Park Service park planners. This, plus the magnitude of federal aid, gave the National Park Service an unprecedented opportunity to promote rustic architectural design principles in state parks throughout the country. The rustic design aesthetic, however, had been evolving since the late 1910s; and landscape architects at Iowa State College, primarily P.H. Elwood and John Fitzsimmons, were among those who contributed to the development of this style throughout the 1920s.³⁴ Photographs and architectural drawings of 1920s improvements to Iowa's state parks, though few in number, portray simple stone lodges and shelterhouses, log cabins, open-walled pavilions, and split-rail fences.³⁵ These are valuable records of the park rustic style in its evolutionary phases. Equally valuable are the stone lodge at Lacey-Keosauqua State Park and the stone pavil-

³⁴ McClelland, *Presenting Nature*, 253-62.

³⁵ Collection of architectural drawings are located at the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and at Iowa State University. In addition, DNR records include scattered collections of photographs taken during the 1920s and early 1930s; additional photographs were published in the *Bulletin: Iowa State Parks*, published by the Board of Conservation from 1923-1927.

ion at Backbone State Park, which are among the best surviving examples of early state park architecture.

From these early works, the National Park Service began to compile and standardize park designs in the 1930s, finally codifying the rustic style in two edited publications, *Park Structures and Facilities* (1935) and the three-volume *Park and Recreation Structures* (1938). Both works contained examples from Iowa. The 1938 publication, in particular, featured photographs or architectural drawings of stone barriers, picnic shelters, cabins, camp stoves, picnic tables, and trailside benches located at Backbone, Dolliver, Swan Lake, Springbrook, Pine Lake, Ledges, and Gitchi Manitou state parks. It also highlighted Iowa's partially enclosed shelterhouse type, of which there are many variations, as an "agreeable and vigorous" regional design. Park users still appreciate this design as particularly well suited for a climate that can deliver impromptu rain showers in the middle of an otherwise sunny summer day. NPS designers also credited Iowa with originating the hearth ring, a notable example of which is located at Maquoketa State Park.³⁶

Even though CCC crews may not have realized it at the time, they were engaged in creating an indigenous architectural style. The state and national parks of the United States draw admiration and praise from around the world, in part for their abundance, but also because they reflect a respect for nature. Such respect is arguably more apparent than real, but there is no denying that the genius of the "naturalized" rustic architecture of the 1930s is that it succeeded in fitting human activity into nature rather than the other way around. As these picturesque structures have turned into historic architecture, they have likewise enhanced the legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Cost-benefit analyses are nothing new. During the 1930s, there were charges that the cost of the CCC was excessive for a relief agency. And, if one assesses the situation purely in terms of relief work, the cost was high: \$1,000 annually per enrollee as opposed to about \$800 per person under the Works Progress Administra-

³⁶ Albert Good, ed. *Park Structures and Facilities* (Washington, D.C.: NPS, 1935); Albert H. Good, ed., *Park and Recreation Structures*, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C.: NPS, 1938), see especially vol. 2, 40, 58-59.

tion. Benefits, both tangible and intangible, are much harder to assess. The Iowa Conservation Commission did not keep consistent records on state park improvement expenditures, although, as of 1940, it estimated the value of new "artificial construction" in state parks at \$5 million.³⁷ Factoring in all the related costs that went into planning and construction would raise this figure substantially. For instance, during the calendar year 1935, the highest level of CCC operations, the combined total of funds expended in Iowa was nearly \$6.1 million for labor, CCC camp construction, food, direct project expenses, and operational expenses.³⁸ Direct project expenditures from July 1935 to June 1938 were reported at approximately \$3.9 million for land acquisition, lake dredging, surveys, and construction. Of this figure, \$3.7 million came from federal sources. State expenditures covered a much smaller portion of the total cost, although the legislature did augment emergency conservation work in 1934, 1935, and again in 1937 with supplemental appropriations totaling about \$1 million.³⁹

The cost analyses of the 1930s also ignored intangible benefits that are difficult, if not impossible, to calculate. Each CCC certificate of service signified a measure of human conservation, and the number of certificates carefully stowed in scrapbooks symbolize how dearly many men treasured their CCC years. A few dry statistics also suggest the importance of the CCC as a rehabilitation agency. On balance, each enrollee grew an average of one-half inch and gained anywhere from eight to fourteen pounds. In addition, the disease rate among CCC camps was lower than the national average for men of the enrollees' age group. The value of the educational program speaks through the range of occupations and careers that CCC "graduates" entered.⁴⁰

There is simply no way to calculate the value to society that the CCC contributed in terms of fire prevention, soil conservation, flood control, reforestation, or the development of national and state parks. For the enrollees, personally, the CCC rekindled hope.

³⁷ *Biennial Report of the State Conservation Commission*, 1940, 19.

³⁸ G.B. MacDonald, "Report on the Status of Emergency Conservation Work in Iowa,"

183.

³⁹ *Biennial Report of the State Conservation Commission*, 1936, 123-24; 1938, 16, 116.

⁴⁰ Salmond, 129.

For hundreds of thousands of young men, the CCC was, quite literally, a turning point in their lives. It blended people of different cultural if not racial backgrounds, relieved them of economic stress at a time in their lives when society expected them to begin producing, gave them time to think about their futures, provided them with educational training and job skills, and expanded their horizons.

What happened to the CCC camps? Most of them were cannibalized or recycled, and a few of those that were recycled can still be seen in state parks. For instance, ten cabins at Dolliver State Park were built of lumber recycled from CCC barracks. Likewise, CCC buildings at Springbrook were reused to build a teacher education camp in the 1940s. The Dolliver group camp is still a popular spot, where several cabins are situated in a meadow along with a stone lodge and a recycled CCC barrack building.

What did the CCC mean to the young men who enrolled? "My reaction to the CC can be summed up like this," wrote Bob Wimer. "They were the years that took me off the streets, where I was about to be in a lot of trouble. They were maybe the happiest years of my life. Not only were they formative years; they were *informative* years. To this day I thank those sergeants, work leaders, engineers, and army officers who shook the living hell out of my attitude toward what I *thought* was okay and what was *really* right."⁴¹

⁴¹ Robert Wimer to Matt Miller, Wimer Scrapbook.