

CCC Presentation – Barb Sommer
Olmstead County Fairgrounds
Rochester, Minnesota
Wednesday, July 25, 2012

Slides 2,3

Great Depression (1930s) time of worldwide hardship and unemployment.

In MN, between 1 and 3 (33%) and 1 and 4 (25%) people unemployed. For young men, ages 18-25, unemployment rate was about 50% - 1 out of 2.

Slides 4,5,6

Slides are of Rochester during the New Deal years.

WPA established in 1935 and ended same day the CCC did. Public works projects; largest work-relief program in US history. (Built Floral Hall)

Slides 7,8,9

CCC established March 31, 1933, to alleviate unemployment among young men and to provide a workforce for conservation of the land. It was a work-relief program (explain).

CCC abolished on June 30, 1942; funding liquidated June 30, 1943.

Slides 8 and 9 show general locations of CCC camps nationally and in Minnesota.

Slide 10

One of President Franklin Roosevelt's alphabet soup programs. Established first 100 days in office. His favorite program? Now recognized as the greatest conservation program in U.S. history.

Slide 11

Conservation work followed Federal guidelines and administered by state conservation officials. DOC Forest Director Grover Conzet and DOC Parks Director Harold Lathrop.

Man in center of photo is national CCC director, Robert Fechner. Photo taken after a day of meetings on state park work at Itasca State Park, 1939. Died later that year of heart disease. His assistant administered CCC for final years.

Slide 12

US Army administered camps. HDQ in MN was at Fort Snelling. Enrollees under Army jurisdiction when not working on conservation projects.

MN in 7th Army Corps area – stretched from the Dakotas and Minnesota south through Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, Arkansas.

Slide 13

MN divided into four sub-districts for Army administrative purposes. Rochester camp was subdistrict headquarters for SE MN. Remaining three sub-districts in northern MN.

In 1934, Rochester subdistrict was commanded by:

Capt. F.C. Harding, 3rd Infantry, Commander

1st Lt. John L. Johnston, A.G. Reserve, Adjutant

Capt. Harold J. Dvorak, Medical Reserve, Surgeon

1st Lt. T.J. Conroy, Chaplain Reserve, Chaplain

CCC enrollees assigned to the Headquarters division in 1934, pictured here, included Thomas Dion, Thomas H. Morris, Clarence Brawthen, Robert Gallagher, Francis Gorman, William Foote, Thomas Schoreter

1938 – subdistrict commander was Capt. R.E. Hoyne

Slides 14, 15, 16 list of CCC camps in Southeastern Minnesota

In 1934, Rochester camp was commanded by

Capt. W.H. Plasters, Inf. Res., Commander

1st Lt. T.O. Clark, F.A.Res.

1st Lt. A.S. Brussel, Med. Res.

Work supervisors at the camp in 1934 (before organization of Soil Conservation Service, when camp was still PE-93 – a private erosion camp operating only in the summer) were

S.G. Cottrell, R.V. Sutter, R.G. Moody – Supt., F.W. Kessler, G.G. Johnson, L.V.

Tyner, G.M. Graetz, John Fry, Jr.

Slides 17,18,29,30 are photos of CCC camps in SE MN

Camps had a military look to them

Average camp had four barracks, mess hall, kitchen, work agents' office, officers' quarters, headquarters building, storehouse, welfare building, dispensary, school building, recreation hall, lavatory and bathhouse, latrine, garage, and small service buildings

In general, interiors spartan, kept clean with regular inspections

Rochester camp started out as camp for junior enrollees. Opened on June 24, 1933, as PE-93 and operated in summer of 1933 that way. CCC Veterans company V-1774 moved to camp on April 21, 1934. In summer of 1934, re-opened as summer camp PE-93 with company of veterans. On May 12, 1935, with establishment of SCS, camp opened permanent, year-round camp as SCS-12 with company of veterans (V-1774). Camp located on land leased from county on an annual basis. Closed spring of 1939.

Slides 21, 22 are the only known photos (to date) of the Rochester CCC camp

Army Camp Inspection Report gives glimpse of what Rochester CCC camp was like.

Became a permanent camp in 1935, Permanent Rochester camp, SCS-12, inspected on December 10, 1938.

By this time, John H. Walters, Capt in Inf Res. was camp commander. Edwin W. Weissman, 2nd Lt. in Inf Res was subordinate officer. Fred H. Wiechman, Capt in Med Res was medical officer. Fred W. Kesler was camp superintendent.

Slides 23, 24

Rochester camp began as a tent camp. Would have looked like this.

In 1935 it was established as a permanent camp. Described as sub-district headquarters. Camp had city water and was “exceptionally clean and well kept.” “An unusually fine camp” located on the fairgrounds of the town of Rochester. Excellent morale, mess is well-handled, fine camp area. “An excellent all around camp.” Barracks built by fall of 1935. Probably looked like this.

Slide 25

All enrollees seemed to have clear memories of mess halls. Food for Rochester camp came from quartermaster at Fort Snelling, open market, and contracts.

Meals served in Rochester tent camp in May 1934 were:

Breakfast – French toast, bacon, fried potatoes; scrambled eggs, buttered toast, prunes; wheat cakes, pork sausage, bread and butter – and always coffee and jam
Dinner – midday meal – roast pork, brown gravy, mashed bagas, salad, pie; roast beef, lima beans, head lettuce; boston baked beans, boiled potatoes, pickled beets, peas – and always bread, butter, coffee

Supper – evening meal – meat balls, fried potatoes, spaghetti, radishes/onions, creamed string beans, cake and sauce; polish sausage, fried potatoes, spinach, pickles, cake and sauce; beef steak, fried potatoes, salad, stewed tomatoes, cake and sauce – and always bread, butter, coffee

Slide 26

Enrollees paid \$30 a month; \$25 sent to dependents. \$30 translates to about \$450 in today's dollars.

Signed up for 6 months in January, March, June, October. Could re-enlist once in beginning, more often as CCC went along.

Slide 27

One company of 200 enrollees per camp. MN had about 150 camps during the 10 years the CCC operated.

Slide 28

The Rochester camp was a veterans camp with company 1774-V assigned to it. This photo shows men from 1774-V in 1940 after the company transferred from Rochester to Bayport when the Rochester camp closed. Their ages ranged from 37-66, with an average age of 47. Nationally about 10% of CCC enrollees were veterans.

Slide 29

Photo of Rochester CCC camp kittenball team, 1934, won 15 games out of 15 in Rochester City League. Company newsletter was Veteran's Voice, started in Rochester in 1934. Became Vet's Voice for short.

Slides 30, 31

Soil conservation in the area – Minnesota's first state work program supervisor, Herbert Flueck, transferred to Spring Valley in 1934. Soil conservation work supervisor's office opened in St. Paul in 1937 with Flueck as acting state coordinator. 1938 SCS project management consolidated under Faribault project office, where it remained until 1942.

Slides 33,34

Deer-Break Creek area – Rochester CCC camp soil erosion work assignment. "Some of the most severe soil losses from water erosion in Minnesota occur in the southeastern portion of the state." Some of it is part of the Driftless Area (unglaciated and steep). In 1936-7, average annual farm income in the area, after expenses, was \$2,000 (on the larger farms). Average farm size was just about 150 acres. About 60% predominantly dairy and livestock. Most crops raised

for livestock feed. Farm woodlots were used for fenceposts, firewood, and sawlogs.

Slides 35,36,37

Soil conservation work recommendations for the Rochester area were: contour tillage, terracing, strip cropping, improvement and maintenance of soil productivity with good rotation and soil management procedures, retirement of steeper slopes to hay, pasture, and trees, and planting trees on rough stony land.

Masonry structures were built to control large gullies. Types include gravity type notched spillway dams and flumes, earth fills with sod spillways, rock flumes with sod used as mortar, creosoted lumber flumes and sodded flumes. For smaller gullies, wire basket type of dam and brush and post dams also used.

Recommended vegetation is grass, sod, shrubs and trees complete permanent gully control.

Slides 38,39,40

PE-93 – May 23, 1934:

Camp had 162 enrollees (veterans, company V-1774) working on private erosion projects including planting (trees), building erosion dams, and terracing. Assigned work area when established as a private erosion summer camp – 540 miles serving 345,000 acres

SCS-12 – December 10, 1938

Camp had 194 enrollees (veterans, company V-1774) working on contour farming and stream bank cleanup in an area of 15 miles around the camp

Slide 41

Work of veterans at PE-93/SCS-12 described as helping stem erosion in steep farming areas of SE MN. Constructed erosion dams, graded terraces, planted trees on steep hillsides. In 1939, described as serving 83 Olmstead County farms establishing conservation practices on about 12,000 acres.

Slides 42,43,44

Rochester *Post-Bulletin* reported on March 9, 1939, CCC administrators had not signed a new lease for the camp. Noting the current lease would run out on July 1, 1939, the article speculated the camp would be closed on or before that date. At a local meeting reported in the March 16 edition of the paper, Flueck and C.C. Alleman, assistant regional administrator, told camp supporters the camp had been ordered closed because conservation demonstration work in the area was done.

Closing was protested. Group from Rochester said work in the area was not yet done and there was growing interest among farmers for it. Members of group questioning the closing represented Izaak Walton League, the American Legion, the Kiwanis Club, the rural-urban committee of the Rochester Chamber of Commerce, the Olmstead County Farm Bureau Association, the Olmstead County Soil Conservation association, and the Olmstead County Fair Board. People representing these organizations included: Ray Aune, Harry Gimbert, Samuel P. Allen, Mr. Gortting, A.C. Burgan, and Arthur Boie.

The camp was closed in the spring of 1939 and Company 1774-V was moved to the Bayport SCS camp. The first contingent left on May 8, 1939, to begin building the camp at Bayport. Lt. L.M. Gable, Inf. Res., and Joe Malherek, Leader, led the contingent. A second contingent of 20 men left the Rochester camp several weeks later to help build the camp. The remainder of the men left on July 3 (8).

Slide 45

Bayport camp, shown on this slide, closed in the spring of 1942. During WWII Bayport camp site was used as a glider training field. It now is the site of the Bayport golf course.

Article in January 1942 issue of *Vet's Voice* asked "Is It The End of the CCC?"

Said that even though number of junior enrollees were decreasing, “the veterans continue to come.” “What is to become of the CCC. Only time will tell.” Funding for all of CCC liquidated on June 30, 1942.

Slides 46,47

African American story – MN

Nationally about 10% of CCC enrollees were African American. Most served in all-black companies led by white officers. In June 1933, a company including 52 African American enrollees was sent from Iowa to Preston, MN, where they set up a tent camp on the fairgrounds to begin soil conservation work on streams emptying into the Mississippi River. Within about a month, the black enrollees were moved to one of MN two all-black camps at the time – either Temperance River near Tofte, MN, on the North Shore of Lake Superior, or to the Day Lake camp just north of Grand Rapids, MN. Enrollees in both companies were from Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa, and Arkansas. Both companies were moved from MN by June 1934.

In MN, about .02% of enrollees in the state’s camps were black. Enrollees from Minnesota’s black communities served in Minnesota camps from 1933-1938 – mixed camps – until 7th Army Corps leaders pulled the 13 serving in MN at the time from their camp (Cusson) and sent them south.

Full story in “‘We Had This Opportunity’: African Americans and the Civilian Conservation Corps in Minnesota” in *The State We’re In: Reflections on Minnesota History* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010):134-157.

Slides 48,49,50

American Indian story – MN

The Civilian Conservation Corps – Indian Division (CCC-ID) was a separate program run under the direction of the Office of Indian Affairs (rather than US Army) for federally recognized tribes. Led by John Collier of the BIA. One of the first pieces of New Deal legislation to benefit American Indians. Established on June 19, 1933.

In Minnesota, the CCC-ID camps were on the Red Lake reservation, Consolidated Chippewa reservations (Cass Lake, Fond du Lac, Grand Portage, Lake Vermilion, Nett Lake, White Earth), and at the Lower Sioux Agency (Eggleston, Granite Falls, Morton, Shakopee).

Two 200-person CCC camps in the state – one on the Nett Lake reservation and one on the Grand Portage reservation. Remainder were mobile camps and or work units employing day laborers.

Slides 51, 52,53

Did standard conservation projects and projects of cultural significance to Indian people including, in MN, wild ricing and sugar bush sites, Pipestone National Monument and Grand Portage National Monument.

As with veterans program, CCC-ID ended when CCC funding liquidated on June 30, 1942. Many Indian leaders protested saying the program continued to be needed, but no part of CCC continued after funding liquidated.

Slide 54 shows photo of CCC Camp Rabideau in the Chippewa National Forest, one of the few remaining intact CCC camps in the country

Overall:

CCC in MN planted over 124,000,000 trees – most in no. forests, but many on hillsides in SE MN keep that black dirt from going down the river to New Orleans

Worked in 12 state parks – Camden, Flandrau, Fort Ridgeley, Gooseberry Falls, Itasca, Jay Cooke, Lake Bemidji, Monson Lake, St. Croix, Scenic, Sibley, Whitewater

MN land conservation total in 1936: 1,399 farms, 156,050 acres. In 1937, enrollees planted 1.4 million trees in SE MN – 460,000 conifers, 790,000 hardwoods, 145,000 shrubs. Collected 20,000 hardwood seeds for future planting. Tree nursery in Winona, started in 1935, contained 18.5 million coniferous and deciduous trees raised from seed and ready to plant.

Soil conservation reports recommended ongoing documentation not only of physical work done, but of its economic and social effects.

MN spent total of \$85 million on CCC; average value of work of enrollee was \$664; Minnesotans received \$17 million in dependents payments. CCC-ID served over 2,500 families in MN with expenditures of about \$3 million.

Today, Building 31, a limestone building on the Olmstead County Fairgrounds built as WPA project in 1938, is recognized for historical importance. The fairgrounds administration building may be one of only two or three remaining CCC administration buildings left in the state. (Norris and Rabideau are others)

Slide 55 contains information about Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa work today

Poem from CCC enrollee

Hordes of gullies now remind us,
We should build our lands to stay,
And departing leave behind us,
Fields that have not washed away,
Then when our boys assume the mortgage,
On the land that's had our toil,
They'll not ask the question,
"Here's the farm, but where's the soil?"

For more information, see:

Barbara W. Sommer, *Hard Work and a Good Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps in Minnesota* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2008).