

University of North Carolina at Asheville

**Hard Times, Hard Work, and Young Men:  
The Civilian Conservation Corps and Western North Carolina**

A Senior Thesis Submitted to  
The Faculty of the Department of History  
In Candidacy for the Degree of  
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By  
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In 1937, nineteen-year-old Dolphus Parker, from Avery County, North Carolina, left his home to drive his father to pay taxes. Unbeknownst to him he was on his way to enroll in the Civilian Conservation Corp. Dolphus' father had decided that in order to keep his son out of trouble he would sign him up for duty in the CCC. October 22, 1937, would be the day that changed young Parker's life for the better. The Great Depression still lingered in North Carolina and jobs were in short demand, jobs for African Americans were even harder to find. Dolphus had a job driving a truck but his father worried he was hanging around the wrong boys and would end up in trouble. His solution was to bring Dolphus to the relief agency in Avery County, North Carolina and sign him up for the CCC.<sup>1</sup>

Dolphus signed up and went to Asheville to catch the transport to Fort Bragg for training. At Fort Bragg he took the physicals and training required, and then set off for his first camp in Shelby, North Carolina, since there were no African American camps located in the mountains of Western North Carolina. It would be in Shelby where he would learn just what being in the CCC meant, starting his day with breakfast, exercise, and then reporting for duty. This camp was run like the military without the military drills, the discipline was just what his father hoped would keep him from trouble. He drove a truck loaded with boys to wherever they were working for the day then back to camp to take another group out. When he had free time he spent it working on the trucks or teaching others how to work on them. His camp had educational programs but Dolphus preferred learning how to repair the trucks hands on rather than learning how to read the manual. When Dolphus transferred to Mount Gilead, North Carolina, his main

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<sup>1</sup> Dolphus Parker, interviewed by author, Burnsville, NC, 13 August 2004.

job changed from moving men to moving food, he drove food from Fort Bragg to the African American CCC camps in the area.<sup>2</sup>

When his enrollment was up with the CCC, Dolphus came home to his father and to almost all the money that the CCC had sent home. Dolphus' father had saved the money sent home as Dolphus' family allotment for Dolphus to use when he returned. Dolphus used this money to help his father buy a house in Burnsville and saved the rest for his future. Dolphus went back to driving trucks locally, but he never forgot the time he spent in the CCC. He would soon put the lessons he learned in the CCC back to work; on the day Dolphus and his wife purchased their first house he received his order to report to the army. The skills and training Dolphus received during his time with the CCC made the transition from civilian life to life as a soldier much easier. Dolphus still looks back on the time he spent in the CCC as an important part of his life. He will never forget that day his father took him to enroll or the times he spent in the company of the men of the CCC.<sup>3</sup> Dolphus was only one Western North Carolinian who benefited from the CCC. The CCC camps in Western North Carolina benefited the state, the men who served, the forests they protected, and the communities where they were located.

Historically, people see the Civilian Conservation Corps as one of President Roosevelt's best New Deal programs. Raymond Daughtery in his book about his life in the CCC gives his own personal perspective, "Roosevelt's programs have been criticized as being too socialistic, but I know from personal experience that the CCC was not a give-away program. It rejuvenated the forests, parks, waterways, and other facilities to conserve and add to what God had already provided." He lived and worked in the CCC

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

and saw first hand the affects it had on people and the environment. Daugherty believes that the CCC helped young men learn what it meant to work together regardless of their race, origin or background and that these young men came out better because of it.<sup>4</sup>

Historian Stan Cohen in his book, *The Tree Army*, stated:

After spending a year on this project and talking to many men who were involved with the CCC, I am firmly convinced that it was a noble idea that came along at just the right time in the history of our country, and that its legacy is still with us today.<sup>5</sup>

Those who have looked at the CCC assert that throughout its span of operations, the country as a whole benefited beyond the original expectations. Allison T. Otis in, *The Forest Service and The Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933-42*, argued, “The CCC is probably the best remembered and most successful of all the New Deal programs imitated by the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration during the 1930’s”. Otis notes that many CCC projects listed on the National Register of Historical Places are a permanent reminder to the work the CCC provided for the nation.<sup>6</sup>

Other historians argue that the CCC benefited the men, the nation and the natural resources. John Salmond in his book on the CCC agrees that it was one of the most important New Deal programs and includes the importance of the work done on the men and the natural resources of the United States. He observes, “Despite its shortcomings, the CCC was of the profoundest importance. It was important because of its effect on the nation’s national resources and the health of its enrollees, and it is important to the story

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<sup>4</sup> Raymond Daugherty, *The CCC and Me* (Mathias, WV: Raymond Daugherty, 2003), 30.

<sup>5</sup> Stan Cohen, *The Tree Army* (Missoula, Montana: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1980), II.

<sup>6</sup> Allison T. Otis, and William D. Honey, Thomas C. Hogg, Kimberly K. Lankin. *The Forest Service and The Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933-42* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Forest Service, 1986), 1.

of reform in the United States.”<sup>7</sup> Conservationists also agree that the CCC was extremely effective in protecting the nation’s resources. A.L. Riesch Owen in his book on conservation writes:

Without a doubt, the C.C.C. wrote a vivid page in the history of conservation accomplishments in the 1930s of unchallengeable worth and impressive magnitude. Most professional conservationists today would agree that the work of the C.C.C. was invaluable.<sup>8</sup>

The Civilian Conservation Corp however does have its critics. Historians, writers, and environmentalists of the time were not completely happy with the work the CCC boys were doing. Ernest Dickerman was one of these opponents. He believed the CCC men in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park were doing more harm than good for the environment. “Fortunately the services [Forest Services] decided that there would be no commercial development, but it was unfortunate that the Civilian Conservation Corps was allowed to put in dozens of camps.” He was quite vocal about the CCC and the work they were performing in the Smokies, and he argued that they overdid everything in the park, cut too many trails, fire roads, and automobile camps. He considered the CCC boys as “another form of devastation”.<sup>9</sup>

Criticism of the CCC is prevalent in books written about the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. In *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park*, Daniel Pierce asserts “However, proponents of wilderness, led by Harvey Broome, argued that the CCC made the trails too wide, that they planned too many trails, and that

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<sup>7</sup> John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1967), preface, 221.

<sup>8</sup> A.L. Riesch Owen, *Conservation Under F.D.R.* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983), 143.

<sup>9</sup> Holcombe B. Noble, “Ernest Dickerman, Defender of the Wilderness, Is Dead at 87,” *New York Times*, 5 August 1998, sec. D.

much of the trail construction unnecessarily destroyed surrounding vegetation.”<sup>10</sup>

Margaret Brown in her book, *The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains*, argues that the CCC boys were more trouble than the work they did. “Over the decade, CCC boys were caught fishing and hunting illegally, drinking moonshine liquor, driving government vehicles without permission, and generally having the time of their lives.” She believes that even though they were in the park to help with its construction that they did more damage. She claims that even though they helped fight fire, they also contributed to fires “...a CCC crew, which left burning brush unattended, provoked a second [fire].” She also states that the CCC boys were at odds with not only park officials for using park stone walls to make road gravel but the public as well who believed that the CCC were making the park too formal with their landscaping.<sup>11</sup>

The historians, writers, and environmentalists that have written on the CCC, surprisingly, say very little on the CCC in Western North Carolina. Most written works pertain to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Harley E. Jolley has written the only definitive work on the subject. In his work on the Great Smoky Mountains National Park Jolley praises the CCC and their work on the park.

In short, their labors created the backbone of [the] Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Most of what they built stands today, as handsome, functional, and enduring as the day the last stone was laid.<sup>12</sup>

The historians have ignored all other camps in Western North Carolina in their works relating to the CCC.

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel S. Pierce, *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 189.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Lynn Brown, *The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains* (Gainesville, F.L.: University Press of Florida, 2000), 124-125, 128, 133.

<sup>12</sup> Harley E. Jolley, *The CCC In the Smokies*. Edited by Steve Kemp and Kent Cave (Gatlinburg, T.N.: Great Smoky Mountains Natural History Association, 2001), back cover.

This paper will show that the benefits of the CCC to Western North Carolina have all but been ignored historically. The historians have covered how the CCC assisted the United States and the men of the depression but not specifically Western North Carolina and its communities and families. The CCC camps in Western North Carolina aided the state, the men who served, the forests they protected, and the communities where they were located.

When President Roosevelt took office in 1933 he wasted no time in establishing the Civilian Conservation Corps, “Thirty-seven days elapsed between Roosevelt’s inauguration and the signing of the first enrollee on April 7, 1933.”<sup>13</sup> Western North Carolina responded quickly and twenty days later the first recruits for District A, Fourth Corps Area arrived at Fort Bragg to begin training. These same men created Company 401 that pitched their tents on Buck Creek, outside of Marion, NC, on May 20, 1933. By the end of 1933 a total of twenty-two camps established in Western North Carolina were up and running. The Civilian Conservation Corps in North Carolina contributed approximately 75,800 men with an average of 45 camps operating a year. All across Western North Carolina men poured into camps, or rather future campsites, and began their new adventure with the CCC.<sup>14</sup>

Many of these new young recruits joined because they had no opportunities elsewhere. They began their time in the CCC by reporting to Fort Bragg for processing. As each new group completed training, Fort Bragg officers assigned men to camps then transported these green recruits to begin serving their six-month enlistment. The

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<sup>13</sup> Cohen, 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Official Annual of District A Fourth Corps Area*, (Civilian Conservation Corps Publication), (Baton Rouge, LA: Direct Advertising Company, 1936), 45; Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni, “CCCA States Listing: North Carolina,” 2000, <<http://www.cccalumni.org/states/northcaroll.html>> (27 March 2004); Cohen, *The Tree Army*, 153.

enrollees arrived in many locations to find nothing but mud, rocks, and clear-cut forests. The boys themselves hastily constructed most of their camps using surplus World War I tents temporarily to serve every amenity until they built more permanent arrangements. “Under his [Camp Commander, Captain W.E. Corkill] authority, and after a few months’ hard work by all, their efforts were rewarded by the completion of four wooden barracks as winter quarters of the company.”<sup>15</sup> Throughout these camps the men built many buildings to meet the needs of the camp, including mess halls, blacksmith shops, storage houses, latrines, barracks, and wood shops.<sup>16</sup>

The original plan for the CCC was to put young unemployed men from age 18 to 25 to work, but the President and Congress saw the need of the veterans and expanded the CCC to include camps for their unemployed. North Carolina responded and by 1939 there were twelve veteran’s camps operating in North Carolina, three located in Western North Carolina. The camps in Marshall, Black Mountain, and Rutherfordton relied on local papers throughout the region to broadcast the news for new veteran recruits. These papers reported on the locations, enrollment, and the numbers needed. Once in camps these men worked on projects from soil conservation, forestry projects, and construction projects in state parks. These men may have been older but they used their prior knowledge to make their camps as successful as any of the junior enrollee camps.<sup>17</sup>

Camp life was a new experience for most boys as all camps ran like army posts. They followed a strict schedule and that schedule started early in the morning. The men began their day at 0600 with reveille, shaved, showered, and prepared for their day. At

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<sup>15</sup> *Official Annual of District A Fourth Corps Area*, 45.

<sup>16</sup> “Progress Made In Camp Work: Captain Day In Charge of Camp NC F-1 Near Brevard,” *The Asheville Citizen*, 27 June 1933; *Official Annual of District A Fourth Corps Area*, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Cohen, 7; Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni, “CCCA States Listing: North Carolina,”; *Official Annual of District A Fourth Corps Area*, 47; *Asheville Citizen-Times* June 1933.

0630 the enrollees had calisthenics followed at 0700 with breakfast. Once they completed breakfast, by 0730 they policed the barracks and grounds then reported for work/sick call at 0745. In the field the men started work by 0800, had lunch at 1200, and returned to camp at 1600. From 1600 to 1700 the men enjoyed free time but had to be ready for retreat in dress uniform by 1700. They ate dinner at 1730, had free time from 1800 to 2145 which included time for classes, lights out warning at 2145, lights out at 2200, taps at 2250, and finally bed check at 2300. This schedule provided needed structure and discipline for the young enrollees. The Army provided more than just strict schedules, they provided army issue uniforms, which included khaki shirts, blue dungarees, hats, army shoes, kits and canteens. Each man received enough uniforms for his enrollment period of six months.<sup>18</sup> For many young men, these were the first real set of new clothes they ever owned.

One major adjustment the boys made in camp was to the abundance of food served as their daily rations. They received three well-balanced meals each day provided entirely through the camp. This was a welcome change to their previous situations as during the Depression in Asheville, many young boys, and men stood in soup kitchen lines for their source of food. “A soup kitchen on Pack Square saw long lines of men running half a block down Broadway.”<sup>19</sup> Families that farmed small plots for their food needs stretched that food as many of their family members returned home to the country. Breakfasts served in camps included oatmeal, fruit, mush, milk, bacon, bread and butter, and coffee with cream and sugar. J.B. Eudy recalled in his book that they were served “a

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<sup>18</sup> Harley E. 7; “A Day In The CCC,” *Forney News*, 19 April 1935; “Fine Work Is Being Done At Camp In Hot Springs: Civilian Conservation Workers Commanded By Captain White,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, 30 July 1933; “Men In Forest Camps Begin To Enjoy New Life: Routine Rapidly Being Established In Unit Near Here,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, 4 June 1933.

<sup>19</sup> J. Ted Carter, *Asheville: Checking the Drag and Sweet Talking*, (Asheville, North Carolina: Aaron & Carter Publishing, 1998), 31.

hearty breakfast of fruit, cereal, pancakes, or ham and eggs, and coffee.” At lunch the meal might include: cabbage, potatoes, beans, sausage, rice pudding, and coffee with cream and sugar. At dinner the men were served chicken soup, salad, bread and butter, roast beef with gravy, string beans, and a desert of tapioca pudding. A typical camp needed the following amount of food to feed their men for one month.

1,000 dozen eggs, 2,350 loaves of bread, 1 ½ tons of potatoes, 100 pounds of onions, 75 pounds of prunes, 28 hinds of beef, 300 pounds of spare ribs, 360 pounds of butter, 6 kegs of pigs feet, 320 pounds of hot dogs, 160 pounds of cheese, plus 1,200 pounds of cabbage, and 375 gallons of milk.<sup>20</sup>

The men began to show the results of such well-balanced meals by an average weight gain of six pounds in their first two months and an average of fifteen pounds in Western North Carolina camps.<sup>21</sup>

Health and safety played a large part in the daily lives of the men in the CCC camps in Western North Carolina. All camps had some kind of infirmary, supplied with an army camp surgeon, and were located close enough to hospitals if the need arose. As a precaution the camps ran many articles in camp newsletters reminding enrollees of the safety “dos and don’ts” of life in the forest. Many young men came from cities and were not accustomed to handling tools used in forestry work, so guidelines from the camp commander were printed for all to follow. In the July 16<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Top*, the

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<sup>20</sup> Harley E. Jolley, “Hard Times and Happy Days: The Civilian Conservation Corps in North Carolina.” *Tar Heel Junior Historian* 23 (1984):20.

<sup>21</sup> Ted Carter, 31; Men In Forest Camps Begin To Enjoy New Life: Routine Rapidly Being Established In Unit Near Here,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, 4 June 1933; “C.C.C. Boys Thriving On Rugged Life In Smokies: Doing Much To Get Ready For 1934 Opening,” *The Asheville Citizen*, 16 October 1933; “Workers Said To Be Healthy And Content: Some Members Drop Out As They Find Work; Few Are Dropped,” *The Asheville Citizen*, 30 July 1933; U.S. Department of the Interior. *CCC* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1938), 42-43; J.B. Eudy, *From the Depression Years A Great Need Gave Birth to the 3-C’s: Saga of the CCC* (Columbia, SC: Paramount Print, 1993), 33.

newspaper for Mount Mitchell, the safety page concerned itself with the handling and care of tools.

1. Adz: The foot adz must be checked for weak or broken handles. It is, of necessity, a sharp tool and must be handled with care.
2. Axes: Axes must be checked for broken or loose handles. Handles must not be wired or taped to cover splits.
7. Saws: Cross cut saws must be kept sharp. In transporting on trucks the teeth must be provided with a guard. They should not be carried on ones shoulder. Rather let two men carry it if necessary.

Even with the warnings, saw wounds were very common in forestry camps the camp newsletters reminded the men often to be careful in their handling of sharp equipment.<sup>22</sup>

As a result of their close company and isolated locations, the young men faced many diseases from meningitis, influenza, to the common cold. In the case of meningitis an outbreak became fatal in December 1935 at Camp McCloskey in Marion when they lost one man. “Member Alton Capps of Rockfish, North Carolina was victim of the dreaded disease, ‘Meningitis’.”<sup>23</sup> The outbreak was serious enough to quarantine the camp and delay the Christmas Holiday leave. In March 1936 at Camp McCloskey, “...twenty-five men have been sent to Oteen Hospital, Oteen, N.C., victims of influenza.”<sup>24</sup> Other illnesses affected enrollees but camps had Army medical personnel and the equipment needed to handle most illnesses. In the case of serious injury or illness the men went to local hospitals for treatment. One such case of appendicitis at Camp Mitchell sent Claude Peach to the hospital for an appendectomy. In response to illness in

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<sup>22</sup> *The Top*, 16 July 1936, 1 October 1936; *The Four-o-One*, March 1936, 10 May 1936. *Twin Oaks Herald*, 10 November 1936.

<sup>23</sup> *The Four-o-One*, December 1935.

<sup>24</sup> *The Four-o-One*, March 1936.

Camp McCloskey the Camp Commander procured a portable infirmary to help protect his men's health.<sup>25</sup>

Good health was extremely important to the CCC and the local camps took care to ensure their men had the health care needed. Camp newspapers ran stories on how to stay healthy. They offered suggestions such as:

Wear your overcoats to and from work or else land in the hospital with pneumonia.  
Brush your teeth at least twice a day or else in a few years you will have false teeth.  
Stop smoking your friend's cigarette "ducks" because he may have trench mouth, and will pass it on to you in this manner.<sup>26</sup>

The men in camps with health care and dental care dispensed at no charge had little to fear if they heeded the warnings and followed the safety rules set forth by the camp.

Along with new found health and safety the men enjoyed the showers and hot baths that most camps erected. These facilities, along with adequate latrines, were one way to help keep the young men healthy, and with improved hygiene in the CCC camps they regained or improved their health and wellness.<sup>27</sup>

Another important way the men in the CCC camps stayed healthy was through sports and exercise. Jolley stated that in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, "To discourage desertion and to promote good morale, recreational opportunities in most camps were impressive." Every camp had some form of sports team from baseball, football, tennis, basketball, wrestling, and even boxing. The camps built baseball diamonds and tennis courts all to help keep their men occupied. For basketball and

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<sup>25</sup> *The Top*, 1 August 1936; *The Four-0-One*, December 1935, 31 August 1936, 16 September 1936, 10 May 1936, May 1938.

<sup>26</sup> *The Four-o-One*, December 1935.

<sup>27</sup> "C.C.C. Boys Thriving On Rugged Life In Smokies: Doing Much To Get Ready For 1934 Opening," *The Asheville Citizen*, 16 October 1933; "Fine Work Is Being Done At Camp In Hot Springs: Civilian Conservation Workers Commanded By Captain White," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, 30 July 1933.

boxing most camps used facilities located in adjoining towns. Camp teams also competed against other camps in the area and sometimes fierce rivalries developed. The men in the camps enjoyed the excitement. At Camp 411 in the Great Smoky Mountains National park the “boys in the camp have been active in athletics and have given much attention to boxing.” Baseball and basketball were extremely popular with the enrollees in the park as well. These sporting events were open to all and many people from the community enjoyed the men’s events. In many camps they dammed mountain streams for electrical power and the resulting mini lake became a swimming pool which the men enjoyed. Camps also included recreational halls where the men played pool, table tennis, cards, or relaxed to read or to write home.<sup>28</sup>

Life was not all just fun and games for the men. Besides working eight hours a day in the field the men took time out for education. “When Congress established the CCC as a separate agency in 1937, it included as one of its functions the education of its recruits. It provided for up to 10 hours a week that could be used for general education and vocational training.”<sup>29</sup> Long before that order the camps in Western Carolina were providing opportunities for their men to learn. By 1936 the camp at Hot Springs had begun offering its enrollees classes in algebra, plane geometry, English, history, typewriting, shorthand, and even first aid. At the Veterans camp in Bakersville the men worked together to help teach thirteen of its members to read and write. Most camps had a Camp Educational Advisor who was responsible for any educational or vocational programs the camps ran. This advisor was also responsible for helping the CCC boys

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<sup>28</sup> *The McDowell News*, January, 14 September 1933, 5 October 1933; *Marion Progress*, 28 September 1933; *Twin Oaks Herald*, 10 November 1936; *The Top*, 1 August 1936, 31, August 1936; *The Four-o-One*, 3 September 1935, 30 May 1936, May 1938; *Memories of District C*, 58; Jolley, *CCC*, 15-16.

<sup>29</sup> Cohen, 132.

find and develop whatever talents they had. If the camps were to succeed in teaching these young men they would need materials to do so. At Camp McCloskey the local relief agency placed an ad in the paper asking for donations of books for the camp. Camp Commander, Captain W.E Corlkill, went further when he asked the community for primary books and any other equipment to teach his camp members to read and write. Many camps had complete libraries that the men had access to which included daily newspapers and weekly/monthly magazines. If the men needed instruction in forestry or any other subjects important to their work, the Camp Educational Advisor made sure they received it.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to traditional educational programs, the camps offered vocational education as an important part of training a useful workforce for the job market. Camps in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park offered programs in woods lore, first aid, auto mechanics, masonry, and conservation. In conjunction with these programs many camps had amenities that facilitated vocational training such as blacksmith shops, gasoline stations, fire departments, and facilities for machine maintenance. If the men's interest was in forestry work there were classes and talks given on the subject from members of the Forest Service. Those with an interest in photography or journalism attended classes and were encouraged to broaden their knowledge through their own camp newsletters. Clarence W. Sparks told of his training in the CCC in Ted Carter's book *Asheville: Checking the Drag and Sweet Talking*. "We had our own workshops for carpentry, paint shops, manual training, and mechanics. We studied heavy equipment. I

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<sup>30</sup> *The Top*, 1 August 1936; 31 August 1936; *The Four-o-One*, 3 September 1935, 30 May 1936, May 1938; "McDowell Men In Camp Need Reading Matter; See Scoutmaster Rabb," *The McDowell News*, 18 May 1933; "Books For Beginners Wanted at McCloskey Start Classes Soon," *The McDowell News*, 20 June 1933; Men At McCloskey Learn About Trees: Interesting Story Of Life At C.C.C. Camp On Buck Creek – Officers Praised," *Marion Progress*, 20 June 1933.

helped teach classes and taught some World War I Veterans in the Mars Hill Camp.”

The Mars Hill Camp also provided classes in “...auto mechanics... [and] truck driving” these classes were popular and camp officials reported that “There were forty-nine applicants for this class, immediately after it was organized.” As the camps drew closer to closing in the late 1930’s early 1940’s vocational training turned more towards areas of national defense. The government did not want to take away from the CCC’s original objective but the world’s growing instability called for increased preparedness.<sup>31</sup>

Work projects were the backbone of life in the CCC camps in Western North Carolina and this program’s main objective was to put young men to work and in the process conserve our nation’s natural resources. Throughout the camps of Western North Carolina the men did just that, they worked on acres of timber reforestation and treating for disease and insect control. They saved hundreds of acres of farmable land from soil erosion and constructed miles of trails used in fighting forest fires. The enrollees used dynamite to blast trails and roads, logged dead trees to clear forests for new growth, built bridges and roads, and created campgrounds for tourists. In Camp McCloskey alone by 1936 the men had constructed 38.8 miles of telephone lines, improved 663 acres of forest stand, built 29.9 miles of truck trails, and fought fires that consumed 506 man days. These men built roads, bridges, trails, and camp facilities throughout Western North Carolina. At Barnardsville, Company 409 worked on trails for fire suppression. “Since the establishment of the Camp [May 30, 1933 to 1936] eighteen miles have been constructed, extending over the entire 15,000 acres.” Company 407 at Hot Springs built

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<sup>31</sup> Jolley, Smokies, 18; “CCC Boys Thriving On Rugged Life In Smokies: Doing Much To Get New National Park Ready For 1934 Opening,” *Asheville Citizen*, 16 October 1933; “Fine Work Is Being Done At Camp In Hot Springs: Civilian Conservation Workers Commanded by Captain White,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, 30 July 1933; “CCC Enrollees Enjoy Life At Camp Kephart: 176 Men And Officers Are Stationed Near Bryson City,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, 9 May 1939; J. Ted Carter, Asheville: Checking the Drag and Sweet Talking, 34; *Official Annual of District A Fourth Corps Area*, 35.

“44 miles of roads and 26 miles of trails...59 miles of telephone lines have been constructed, a free Camp and picnic ground have been constructed...”<sup>32</sup>

Work projects varied from camp to camp throughout the state, with each camp responsible for multiple projects within that camp. For Camp N.C. F-20 in Franklin, North Carolina, “The first projects set up for this camp included the construction of a Forest Service truck train from the camp into Leatherman Gap, timber stand improvement work and telephone line construction and maintenance.” Camp N.C. F-20’s other projects included building 21.6 miles of roads, planting 2090 trees and shrubs, releasing 14,000 fish, creating 8 fish rearing ponds, and stringing 8.8 miles of telephone lines.<sup>33</sup> Throughout Western North Carolina CCC camps continued to improve the natural resources of the states for both visitors and citizens alike.

Fire conservation projects were a vital part of camp projects for Western North Carolina CCC camps. The men spent hours creating lookouts, trails, and strung telephone lines all in an effort to help manage fire protection. In 1934, Company 409 at Barnardsville constructed a modern fire tower on Little Snowball Mountain and constructed eighteen miles of trails used for fire fighting. The Camp at Hot Springs patrolled approximately “225,000 acres of forests lands and occupy fire towers over this area in the capacity of lookouts, reporting by telephone or radio any ‘smokies’ which appear to be in the forest boundary.” These same men spent 3,201 man-days fighting forest fires. At John’s Rock Camp in Brevard, North Carolina, Amos Harwood remembered that they fought many fires using nothing but shovels and rakes. Ted Hall

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<sup>32</sup> John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1967), preface; *Official Annual of District A Fourth Corps Area*, 33, 35, 39, 45; Carter, *Asheville*, 33.

<sup>33</sup> Eudy, 86 – 87.

from the Bent Creek Camp spent six weeks fighting a forest fire then returned to cut down the dead timber and plant trees in the area. Clarence W. Sparks of Asheville remembered one large fire they fought at Mount Mitchell. “Our worse fire was in 1939 when we were called to Mount Mitchell. Thousands of acres were burnt over. We spent eight full days on that one. Later crews from the Marion and Morganton camps replanted the area.” Fighting fires were common in most camps, as during the depression drought heated the entire country resulting in little or no rain. In the Great Smoky Mountains National Park the CCC spent “19,442 man hours putting out blazes on park and exterior lands” during 1936.<sup>34</sup>

Under the CCC’s work projects many state and national parks benefited from improvements made by the camps. In the Great Smoky Mountains National Park the men created roads, trails, campsites, fire towers, and landscaped the park to enhance its beauty.<sup>35</sup> Jolley in his book, *The CCC In the Smokies*, applauded three such projects that have become both monuments to the CCC and their works and beautiful sites that visitors can enjoy for years to come.

Today this magnificent stone bridge continues to straddle the pristine waters of Little River. White Rock Tower still stands atop Mt. Cammerer. It was originally constructed as a fire lookout. The visitor Center at Oconaluftee serves as an eloquent monument to the CCC achievement in the Park.<sup>36</sup>

In her book *The Wild East*, Margaret Brown mentioned the work the Cherokees contributed to the park with their construction of watchtowers. “Cherokee CCC enrollees built such a tower on Burnett Knob, which the new park agreed to man. In addition to

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<sup>34</sup> *Official Annual of District A Fourth Corps Area*, 33, 39; Carter, *Asheville*, 33-34; Margaret Lynn Brown, *The Wild East*, 125.

<sup>35</sup> *Memories of District C: Civilian Conservation Corps 1934*, 58.

<sup>36</sup> Jolley, *Smokies*, 10-13

constructing the tower CCC and other public works strung telephone lines from towers to CCC base camps and the Gatlinburg office.”<sup>37</sup> The camp located in the Mount Mitchell State Park worked on projects such as “reforestation in the park, planting additional Fraser fir and Norway spruce.” The men built trails, cut red spruce for buildings, installed new water and sewer systems, and installed flush toilets. Another project the CCC worked on was improving tourism through campground improvements. The CCC worked with the Forest Service to “make Carolina Hemlocks a first-class recreational facility designed especially for autocampers.”<sup>38</sup> The CCC in this project:

constructed a long ‘loop road’ through Carolina Hemlocks with parking spurs large enough to accommodate automobiles and trailers...built picnic tables from native hardwoods and cleared three miles of nature trails, including an old nine-mile path from the campground to the East’s highest peak....[and built] an amphitheater and bonfire pit<sup>39</sup>

Throughout Western North Carolina the men worked on Forest Service lands and even on privately owned land. “Within the national forests, first and probably foremost, was forest protection.” In August of 1933 North Carolina had established 14 camps of US National Forests, 4 on US National Parks, 1 on Federal Reserves, and 11 on private land forests. These included The Nantahala National Forest, the Pisgah National Forest, and the Cherokee National Forest in Western North Carolina. One of the main objectives of camps located on Forest Service lands was to construct and improve picnic sites throughout this region. <sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Brown, 127.

<sup>38</sup> Timothy Silver, *Mount Mitchell & the Black Mountains: An Environmental History of the Highest Peaks in Eastern America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 182-183.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>40</sup> Allison Otis, and William D. Honey, Thomas C. Hogg, Kimberly K. Lankin. *The Forest Service and The Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933-42* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Forest Service, 1986), 9-11, 51-52.

Western North Carolina enrollees enjoyed the community's involvement in their lives and camps, as it helped to ease the separation of being away from their homes and families. They used every opportunity to intermix with the community through sporting events, dances, and camp visits. The camps were always available for visits from the locals and the camps enjoyed the times when they opened up their home and allowed people to see what they were accomplishing. The enrollees enjoyed the dances since it allowed them a place to meet the local young ladies. They knew however they must present their best behavior or camp commanders would refuse them the opportunity again. The CCC camps also helped the community in other ways through their involvement in local churches. The men attended local churches and began supporting them with donations. One such group, Camp 413 on Mount Mitchell donated \$50 dollars to the local church in Busick. In all, these men became members of the community if only for a short time, and with that helped continue the New Deal idea of national improvement.<sup>41</sup>

The CCC men got involved in the communities by providing help when and where the community needed. Dolphus Parker worked in a camp in Shelby where they helped the surrounding town with clearing roads, building ditches, and repairing fences. They worked on things the community needed and with this work helped improve life for the residents of that community.<sup>42</sup> Snow removal was one of many community-based projects and camps at Barnardsville and Mars Hill cleared snow from the roads to make them passable. In Mars Hill the men cleared the roads to help an ambulance take a sick

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<sup>41</sup> *Forney News*, 3 May 1935; *The Top*, September 1935 – October 1936; *The Four-o-One*, September 1935 -May 1938.

<sup>42</sup> Dolphus Parker, interviewed by author, Burnsville, NC, 13 August 2004.

student to a local hospital. Enrollees at Mars Hill fought forest fires every season but they were most proud of the fire they fought for a local farmer.

Just a few days ago the boys carried their fire fighting equipment to a farmhouse on fire and saved the house from burning down. Later they collected funds to make up losses of the family who were in destitute circumstances.<sup>43</sup>

This community involvement spread from the camps in many other forms as well. As the boys of the CCC situated themselves in camps around Western North Carolina they began interacting with the locals. The men made contact through their community work as well as the sport activities each camp provided. This contact continued on weekends when most camps allowed their men free time resulting in trips to town. As an example the camp at Old Fort had weekly recreation trips into the town of Marion where they could see a movie, go skating, or visit the community building.<sup>44</sup> Jolley explained that some camps in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park announced to the towns when the boys received pay. “Well, Folks! This is pay week for CCC boys and we are going to have a swell time spending all our money in Your Fair City!”<sup>45</sup> This notice let the merchants know the boys would be ready to purchase things not offered in camp. Since the majority of their pay was sent home, the CCC enrollee was allowed only about \$5 to \$8 dollars a month to spend. The camp newsletters included advertisements from the local merchants hawking their wares; this was of mutual benefit to the camp and the local towns. The men only had so much to spend in town and the merchants needed every extra penny to help keep their businesses running. In areas around the camps in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park communities created farmers’ markets to attract

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<sup>43</sup> *Memories of District C: Civilian Conservation Corps 1934*, 35.

<sup>44</sup> *Twin Oaks Herald*, 10 November 1936.

<sup>45</sup> Jolley, *Smokies*, 16.

men from the camps. “Swain County reported that its men in camp were making and spending \$3,300 per month. Merchants all around the park report major increases in sales.”<sup>46</sup>

The community was also heavily involved in supporting the camps through their own charity. The people in Marion on multiple occasions donated textbooks, reading materials and even furniture to help improve camp life. Local communities offered the use of schools and community buildings to camps where facilities were not yet constructed. Church services “were available in most camps, with local churches supplying programs.” The community in Marion, North Carolina donated a piano to Camp McCloskey for use with their camp church services. When needed the local men helped construct barracks and camp buildings where the inexperienced enrollees did not have the skills. The community helped in other ways through the use of local men who enrolled in the camps as advisors to the young CCC members. They used their knowledge of the area and forestry practices to help instruct and lead the new recruits in their work projects. The communities supported the camps with young recruits, many of which came to camps from the surrounding areas. These young men helped their communities twofold as they helped reclaim the forests of their home areas, and with their monthly allotments infused money back into the community.

The reasons behind the allotments and how they were distributed was a direct result of no federal relief agencies and the breakdown of local or state agencies from lack of funds. The enrollees of the CCC were required through their CCC service contract to send a portion of their pay home each month to their dependent families this was their allotment. This allotment varied from \$20 to \$25 of the enrollees \$30 a month salary. In

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 9.

North Carolina the State Board of Charities and Public Welfare noted in the 1938-1940 Biennial report that:

Each CCC enrollee who has dependents of blood or obligation is required by law to make an allotment in the amount of \$22.00. During the biennium [July 1, 1938 to June 30, 1940] North Carolina enrollees have willingly returned to their families, in the form of allotments, the sum of \$3,437,856. During the past seven years more than \$13,000,000 has been returned to North Carolina in the form of allotments from CCC enrollees.<sup>47</sup>

This money made its way back into the Western North Carolina communities as a majority of the young men enrolled in these camps came from the surrounding areas. In 1936, 90 of the 140 men at Camp 409 in Barnardsville came from local communities. At Camp McCloskey, 35 of the 139 enrollees were local men. In 1933 half the men enrolled at the Curtis Creek camp were from the local counties of McDowell and Buncombe. As a result large amounts of money began returning to local communities thus helping the communities to recover from the Great Depression.<sup>48</sup>

The men of the CCC helped North Carolina and the United States to recover from the Great Depression through their abundant support. North Carolina was the first state to complete the enrollment numbers set forth by President Roosevelt and when asked, enrolled extra men to make up the difference from states that did not meet the call. The state was able to retain camp sizes through the continual enrollment of young men willing to spend six months working in the CCC camps. In North Carolina, these men worked on erosion control projects, forest improvement programs, and state and national park projects. These young men made valuable contributions to the preservation and

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<sup>47</sup> Report of The North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare: *July 1, 1938 to June 30, 1940*. Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Company, 1940, 168.

<sup>48</sup> *Official Annual of District A Fourth Corps Area*, 32, 44, 159; "Young Men Enjoy Life at Curtis Creek Camp: Conveniences Provide for 212 Workmen in Civilian Corps", *The Asheville Citizen*, 20 June 1933.

rehabilitation of the Forest Service Lands. They created new and improved previous tourist recreational areas to help increase tourism to this area. The CCC in the end helped create a new generation of men who had the skills to protect our nation in a state of war. These young boys gave their all and in return gained new respect for the environment and themselves.<sup>49</sup>

The young men in Western North Carolina made many great contributions to the state from protecting the forests, replanting vegetation destroyed through disease and neglect, finishing state, and national parks for recreation, or improving their bodies and minds through hard work and education. This program returned much needed monies to needy families and it helped return the youth of North Carolina back into the workforce. If anything is worth remembering of the CCC in North Carolina it is that throughout the time span from 1933 through 1942 the young men of this state made vast improvements to Western North Carolina that we all might enjoy today. We must not forget if not for men like Dolphus Parker and others who worked so vigilantly in the CCC our beautiful surroundings may have vanished under mismanaged loggers and businesses during the Great Depression.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 168-170.

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