

“WE CAN TAKE IT”

Civilian Conservation Corps

in Georgia



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September 2007

The Civilian Conservation Corps

(1933-1942)

America was in an economic collapse and struggling to survive the Great Depression of the late 1920's-early 1930's. Unemployment was very high and our country had been stripped of many of its natural resources. The Governor of New York, Franklin Roosevelt felt conservation of our natural resources as well as putting men back to work were important for state and national recovery. "Governor Roosevelt campaigned for the State Reforestation Act (1929) and the Hewitt Amendment (1933), which created the Emergency Temporary Relief Administration that provided work for 10,000 men on forestry projects in the state of New York. It established New York as a leader in forest policy and natural conservation." (Lee 2006: 1)

Franklin Roosevelt was elected President of the United States in 1932 and he made unemployment and saving America's natural resources a top priority for the nation. The success of his conservation policies in New York and his desire to decrease the unemployment rate and give hope back to Americans allowed Roosevelt to push forward the *New Deal*. The *New Deal* was a series of programs that Roosevelt began during 1933-1938. The goal was to provide relief, recovery and reform to the people and economy of the United States during the Great Depression. "President Roosevelt revitalized the faith of the nation with several measures, one of which was the Emergency Conservation Work Act, more commonly known as the Civilian Conservation Corps."(NACCCA ND: 1) The Emergency Conservation Work Program was under the Relief section of the New

Deal and was renamed in 1937 as the Civilian Conservation Corps. It was the immediate effort of the government to help the population most affected by the depression with a work relief program.

Roosevelt's plan was to take young unemployed boys and men from the cities (unemployment rate 50%) and place them in camps working on projects that would restore the country's natural resources. President Roosevelt signed the bill into law on March 31, 1933 and on April 17, 1933 the first group arrived at Camp Roosevelt on the George Washington National Forest in Virginia. Harry Rossoll artist of the *Spirit of CCC* poster was quoted as saying of the Civilian Conservation Corps, "a massive salvage operation destined to become the most popular experiment of the New Deal." (Golden 1994: 1) Roosevelt wanted to put people back to work while protecting the environment. The CCC became one of the largest and most successful government programs ever.

The first enrollment of boys was the responsibility of the Department of Labor at the state and local levels. The age requirements for the junior enrollees were between the ages of 18 to 25, although it varied from 17 to 28. These ages only applied to the junior enrollees though. The World War Vets and Native American companies had no age restrictions. "Georgia had one Veteran camp, NP-5, at Ocmulgee National Park near Macon, Company 1417-V." (NACCCA ND: 1) "Congress extended the program to include African Americans, Native Americans and World War I veterans." (Coleman 1963: 328) Initially Roosevelt wanted the enrollees to come from the cities. Urban areas had a much higher unemployment rate than the rural areas, but many city boys were apprehensive to leave and that opened the door for more rural enrollees. Enrolling in the

CCC was limited to six months but at the end of the six month period, men were given the opportunity to re-enroll. “During the CCC’s 9 years of existence more than 2.5 million boys passed through the camps, with most of them staying six months to a year.” (Brown 1999: 1) A boy could keep enrolling up to 2 years. Enrollees were given to a variety of conservation projects that included reforestation, soil conservation, road construction, flood and fire control, agriculture management and the construction of state and national parks.

The CCC was directed by Robert Fechner from 1933 to 1939. Fechner worked with an appointed Advisory Council and 4 federal agencies. The federal agencies involved in the administrative process were the Department of Labor, the War Department, Department of Agriculture and the Department of Interior. James D. McEntee, Fechner’s assistant, was appointed by President Roosevelt to replace him in 1940. “The boys were organized into 1,330 army-like companies under the direction of Colonel George Catlett Marshall, who found himself no longer a commander of an infantry division, but rather the administrator of an enormous labor project.” (Brown 1999: 1) President Roosevelt wanted to have 250,000 men in camps by the end of July, 1933. “The speed with which the plan moved through proposal, authorization, implementation and operation was a miracle of cooperation among all branches and agencies of the federal government.” (NACCCA ND: 2) It took only 37 days from Roosevelt’s inauguration to the first boy enrolling in the program.

Applicants selected for the CCC program were sent from home to a processing location where they were given clothing, physicals, payroll accounts were set up, training

for some of the different projects they may be assigned, and then sent to camps. CCC camps were well-known all across the United States with over 4,000 camps set up between the years of 1933-1941. Officers from the Armed Forces were in charge of the boys and the camps functioned in military style. “The CCC workers received free meals and barrack-style accommodations, and were paid \$30 a month-under orders to send \$25 of that sum home to help with their families’ welfare.” (Anonymous, 5) President Roosevelt’s goal was to employ the needy, inspire the economy and get started badly needed conservation projects that were being accomplished by the CCC. The boys were also given the opportunity to get educational and social development training. During the boys’ free time they could take classes that taught basic reading, writing and math skills. Many of the enrollees had little or no education and this helped them greatly. They were even awarded certificates for successfully completing their classes. “Five objectives were set for the men: elimination of illiteracy, development of a respect for and a responsibility to superiors, development of social relationship skills, development of good behavior, and learning the methods for securing a job.” (Anonymous, 5) Classes in specialized areas such as forestry, vehicle repair, mechanical drafting, carpentry, bookkeeping and accounting were offered and boys took these classes and on-the-job training. Most camps used these skills on a daily basis. “The CCC left a legacy of national service that not only contributed to the public good, but also helped individuals rebuild their lives shattered by the Great Depression.” (Anonymous, 5)

There is no doubt that the CCC was a successful program that helped this country and its people during a very difficult time. Roosevelt and the Congress legislated the

program to be available to both black and white boys that met the requirements.

However, the majority of the camps were segregated and some states even tried to keep the blacks from participating in the CCC program. The camp commanders came from a segregated army and did not see any need to change this policy. CCC Director, Robert Fechner, raised in the south also shared conservative southern views and did not push to have the program open to the blacks. One of the few criticism faced by the CCC was the lack of enrollment of blacks and the discrimination against people that were admitted.

The State of Georgia was a prime example of a state government that for a time was able to keep blacks from enrolling in the CCC. “Georgia, in spite of the unemployment rate for blacks being twice the rate for whites, listed all blacks as “employed”, making them ineligible to participate in the CCC.” (Golden 1994: 1)

Georgia like most southern agricultural states faced serious problems beginning from the Great Depression. “Falling cotton and tobacco prices, reductions in workforce due to workers leaving the farms to work in the cities and poor land-use strategies wrecked havoc on the Georgia agricultural economy.” (Taylor 2001: 1) The economy in Georgia’s cities did not suffer economically as much as other cities across the country. This is largely due to newer industrial facilities; low-cost labor and a work force that was pretty much problem free because most had recently come to work from the rural areas. Many of the CCC enrollees came from Georgia’s farm communities and if they were white, they had no problems being selected for the program. “Governor Eugene Tallmadge was elected on a “friend of the farmer” platform that included the now standard fare of “keeping the negro in his place.” Tallmadge wanted the relief money to

go only to white families.” (Taylor 2001: 1) This selection process in the State of Georgia did not go over well with President Roosevelt. Roosevelt insisted that blacks had to be included in the program. Tallmadge initially ignored Roosevelt’s request and continued to have only whites selected for the program. Roosevelt finally threatened to keep back relief money selected for the State of Georgia, if Tallmadge did not follow his orders. “Tallmadge quickly reconsidered and agreed to permit blacks entry into the program, so long as they served in separate camps.” (Golden 1994: 1)

It was not only Georgians that felt the blacks participating in the CCC program were not acceptable. Many historians have argued that none of the New Deal programs did enough to help the blacks. Other historians argue the whole program was a waste of tax-payer’s money. While the Emergency Conservation Work Act clearly stated that enrollees were not to be excluded due to race, the selection process was left up to the individual states. Georgia’s population was 37% black in the 1930 census. Clark County, Georgia had a black population of 60% with no black enrollees in 1933. The three men that applied were turned down. Washington County was also 60% black with no enrollees in 1933. (Muse 1976: 103-109) Some camps in northern states were integrated but by 1934 the CCC organization was completely segregated. The number of blacks that enrolled in the CCC program was little more than 200,000, a lot less than the whites that enrolled.

The CCC camps and its enrollees achieved significant land restoration for the state of Georgia. Before and during the Great Depression much of the land in Georgia had been stripped of her forests. “Roosevelt’s Tree Army” was responsible for the

reforestation of the land. The United States government bought the land for very cheap prices and had it improved by the CCC. The boys didn't only plant trees but they also built roads, fire control trails and dams, worked on erosion control projects and fought forest fires. The CCC can be credited with the growth of the park system in Georgia. CCC Director, Robert Fechner wrote: "The Federal Government, through the CCC camps, is turning over to the various states practically without expense to them, a state park system that under ordinary circumstances would not have been created within our generation." (<http://rptsweb.tamu.edu/Pugsley/Fechner.htm>)

"In the mid-1930's, Georgia's state parks grew from 500 to 5,000 acres with the aid of the federal government." (Vasconcelos 2007: 2) The work that the CCC enrollees did was the highest quality; many of the men were skilled craftsmen. After nearly 70 years bridges, dams, roads and buildings, that the CCC enrollees built, are still standing and being used today. Chattahoochee National Forest, in north Georgia was reforested by the CCC. The Appalachian Trail, which runs from Katahdin, Maine to Springer Mountain, Georgia, was a 2,159 mile long hiking trail that the CCC cleared and still exists today. Parks created by the CCC in Georgia were F.D. Roosevelt State Park on Pine Mountain in Harris County, A.H. Stephens Historic Park in Taliaferro County and Hard Labor Creek in Morgan County. Other Georgia parks that showed signs of the CCC's presence in some of their building structures were; Kennesaw Mountain, Cloudland Canyon, Fort Mountain, Vogel State Park, Unicoi, Moccasin Creek, Chickamauga, Chattanooga National Military Park, Lake Conasauga, the Pocket, Lake Winfield Scott, Brasstown Bald, Blood Mountain and the inn at Neels Gap (now known as Walesi-yi). "The

creation of the CCC brought jobs for the people of Georgia and provided manpower needed to restore and preserve the state's land resources." (Vasconcelos 2007: 2) There are two locations in Georgia today where remains of CCC camp structures can still be seen. They are at Hard Labor Creek State Park and Kennesaw National Battlefield Park.

In 1935, the CCC began the best years of its 9 year existence. The days of pushing vehicles up a mountain, living in drafty tents, supplies being lost or misplaced, all of this helping to create the CCC boy's motto "We Can Take It" seemed to be problems of the past. Most of the obstacles that the CCC faced with mobilizing and setting up an "army of men" in camps, across the country, have been overcome. Congressmen and Senators began to realize how important a CCC camp was for their state's future. CCC Director, Robert Fechner was constantly receiving messages from politicians demanding that camps be built in their states. "Toward the end of 1935 every state in the U.S. had a CCC camp. There were over 2,650 camps in operation and eventually there would be camps in Hawaii, Alaska (they were not states yet), Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. At the height of the CCC program, there were over 600,000 enrollees and camp personnel performing more than 100 kinds of projects." (NACCCA ND, 3)

Georgia averaged 35 camps each year between 1933 and 1942. The aggregate number of Georgia men given employment was 78,630. Of this number, 72,379 were junior and veteran enrollees, and another 6,251 were non-enrolled personnel as camp officers and technical supervisory workers. The total estimated obligations in Georgia for the CCC was \$69.5 million. The allotments sent home to dependents by the enrollees was \$19.8 million.

Work Accomplishments:

Telephone lines –	3,638 miles
Check dams, erosion control –	425,829
Erosion control, planting, seeding or sodding –	25,082 acres
Gully – trees planted, reforestation –	1,672,905 seedlings
Trees planted, reforestation –	22,915,095 seedlings
Fighting forest fires, prevention and suppression –	153,022 man-days

The CCC established eight state parks in Georgia:

Indian Springs – Butts County

Vogel – Union County

Alexander H. Stephens – Murray County

Fort Mountain – Murray County

Pine Mountain – Harris County

Cheaw – Lee-Dougherty County

Little Ocmulgee – Telfair-Wheeler County

Santo Domingo – Glynn County (State monument) (Merrill 1981: 122-124)

Adding to the list of conservation accomplishments, the CCC enrollees made several personal accomplishments that would help them once leaving the camps. “Over 100,000 young men learned to read and write and almost 5,000 enrollees completed high school and another 2,700 earned college degrees.”(US History Encyclopedia, <http://www.answers.com/topic/civilian-conservation-corps> 2007) Many of the CCC boys never lived away from home and the CCC experience gave them the skills and confidence to pursue a hopeful future. Most of the boys remained in the towns near their camps, married local girls, had children and found jobs. Those that did return home, most came back with wives and settled down to start new careers with the skills they had learned at camp. “Few records were kept of the sociological impact of the 1930's on the nation’s young men; however it seems that most left the camps as successful products of an experiment in living that had renewed and restored their confidence in themselves and in their country.” (NACCCA ND: 7)

The news from the camps and towns near camps was very positive. The boys were hard at work improving millions of acres of federal and state lands and their physical appearance was improving with good meals and better living conditions. Communities near the camps were suddenly beginning to increase again due to the purchases made by the camps and the boys at local stores. The families that received the mandatory monthly allotment were feeling some relief and finally being able to purchase goods again on a regular basis. The boost to the nation’s economy and the restoration of our natural resources was obvious everywhere. What was also clear to many was the overall improvement in not only the boys’ health but also their mental outlook on life.

The CCC prepared boys for their future, and it gave many a needed basic education. Good moral behavior, taught them a trade and if called to serve their country, they were now prepared for military life.

America did not foresee our involvement in another World War when the CCC program was devised. However, the boys' camp experience, which mirrored military life and the military's involvement in the CCC program turned out to be beneficial when the United States declared war on Japan and Germany in 1941. "The U.S. Army operated the CCC camps, using 3000 reserve personnel called to active duty. The Army gained valuable experience handling large numbers of young men." (Wikipedia, <http://www.answers.com/topic/civilian-conservation-corps> 2007) Many of the same men that had participated in the CCC program would be drafted and sent off to fight in the war. The lack of suitable men enrolling in the CCC program, the increase in jobs from a growing economy and a reorganization of the federal agencies under Roosevelt's administration all contributed to the end of the CCC.

The years from 1935-1936, considered the peak years of the CCC, showed how successful and popular the program had been for the nation. Even Roosevelt's attempts to downsize the CCC in 1936, to balance the budget in an election year, did not happen because of the popularity of the program. But, starting in 1936, certain factors influenced the CCC's future that ultimately caused the program to be canceled. President Roosevelt appointed Harry Hopkins, an advisor who established new guidelines for the selection of enrollees. "His procedures, based on relief rolls, effectively ruined the quota systems in use by all the states." (NACCCA ND: 5) Robert Fechner struggled with the changes that

caused so much confusion which resulted in a lack of Recruiting efforts. Never again during the life of the CCC would the program have the number of enrollees it did in 1935-1936. The CCC would experience huge setbacks in the 1940's. Robert Fechner died on December 31, 1939, America activated the draft, and Congress and the nation were beginning to feel that the country's defense budget should take priority over the CCC. "Congress added \$50 million to the CCC's 1940-1941 appropriation and the CCC remained at its current strength of about 300,000 enrollees. Congress would never again be as generous." (NACCCA ND: 8)

America declared war in December of 1941 and most of the CCC projects, besides fire fighting, were moved to military bases, to help with construction projects. Congress voted to cut off funding for the CCC by July 1942 and though the program was never officially abolished, Congress just refused to award the program any more money. "Pearl Harbor had shaken the country to its core, and it soon became apparent that any federal project not directly associated with the war effort was in trouble." (NACCCA ND: 9) After the CCC ended the surviving CCC camps continued to serve during WWII as housing for Japanese internees and German POWs during the years of 1941-1947. It would not be until the 1970's that the state and local agencies would incorporate programs for their youth that were reminiscent of the CCC program.

Today, the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC) exist in 41 states and the District of Columbia. The focus is on youth development rather than financial need. The enrollees commit their time to community service, training and educational programs. The National Civilian Community Corps, part of the AmeriCorps

program is similar to NASCC and promotes volunteer work opportunities for young adults. The training and networking is not valuable to these people for future job opportunities. Youth development and conservation are the primary missions of these non-profit organizations, equipping young people with the skills and values so they are able to improve their communities and environment. California established the California Conservation Corps in 1976 as a youth conservation program. Montana established the Montana Conservation Corps in 1991 and it contributes 90,000 volunteer work hours towards community and environment enhancement projects. Washington State has established the Washington Conservation Corps and it employs men and women in projects to protect and beautify Washington's natural resources. The tradition of the CCC exists in all of these programs.

The men of the Civilian Conservation Corps are thought of as heroes. Sometimes I wonder what our country would be like today without the help of these men and the achievements they made. Unfortunately, many of these alumni have passed on and with them taken their memories. Some of these great men however are preserving the CCC's history by giving interviews, having reunions and establishing museums. The success of Roosevelt's New Deal and the CCC program to restore our countries natural beauty, give people hope that tomorrow will be a better day and improve the economy are all accomplishments we as Americans should be thankful for every day. The parks and hiking trails, the dams and roads and the thousands of trees were all part of the CCC's contributions to us and future generations

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CCC Camp in Dalton, GA



A view of Camp Kimbrough in ChIPLEY, GA, CO. # 4463



CCC Camp Meriwether in City Limits Warm Springs, GA, CO. # 1429