

# COLUMBIA

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## INSIDE

*Young men of  
the Civilian  
Conservation  
Corps at work in  
the Northwest's  
national forests*



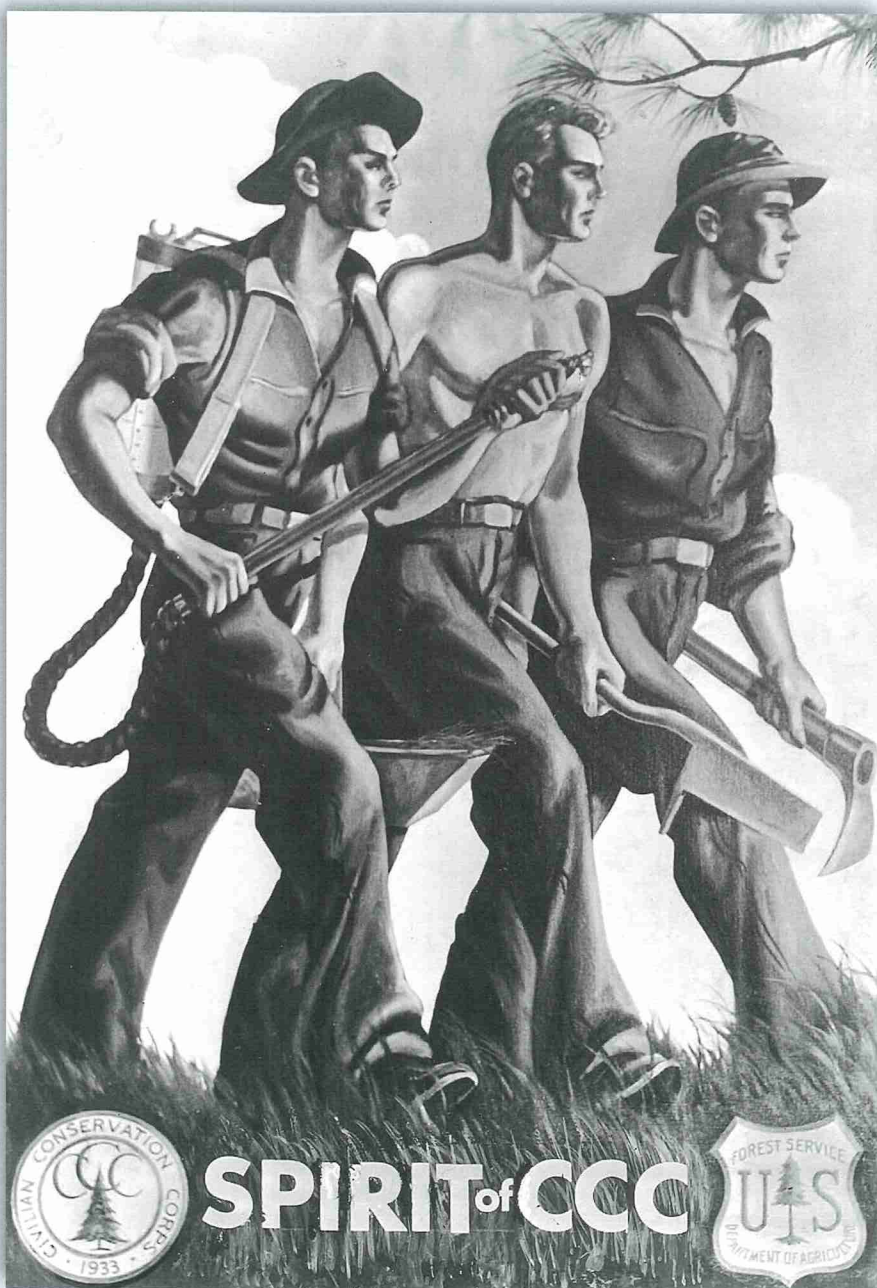
# ROOSEVELT'S GRAND EXPERIMENT

*The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Northwest*

By John T. Menard

**P**resident Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave his inaugural address to the nation on March 4, 1933. Fresh from a landslide victory in the 1932 election, Roosevelt had a clear mandate to effect change across the nation. The Great Depression had cost millions of jobs. Americans were desperate. They were unemployed or underemployed in unprecedented numbers. The unemployed “face[d] the grim problem of existence,” Roosevelt told America. The primary objective during his presidency’s infancy, he said, was to put the nation back to work and “wage war against the emergency.”

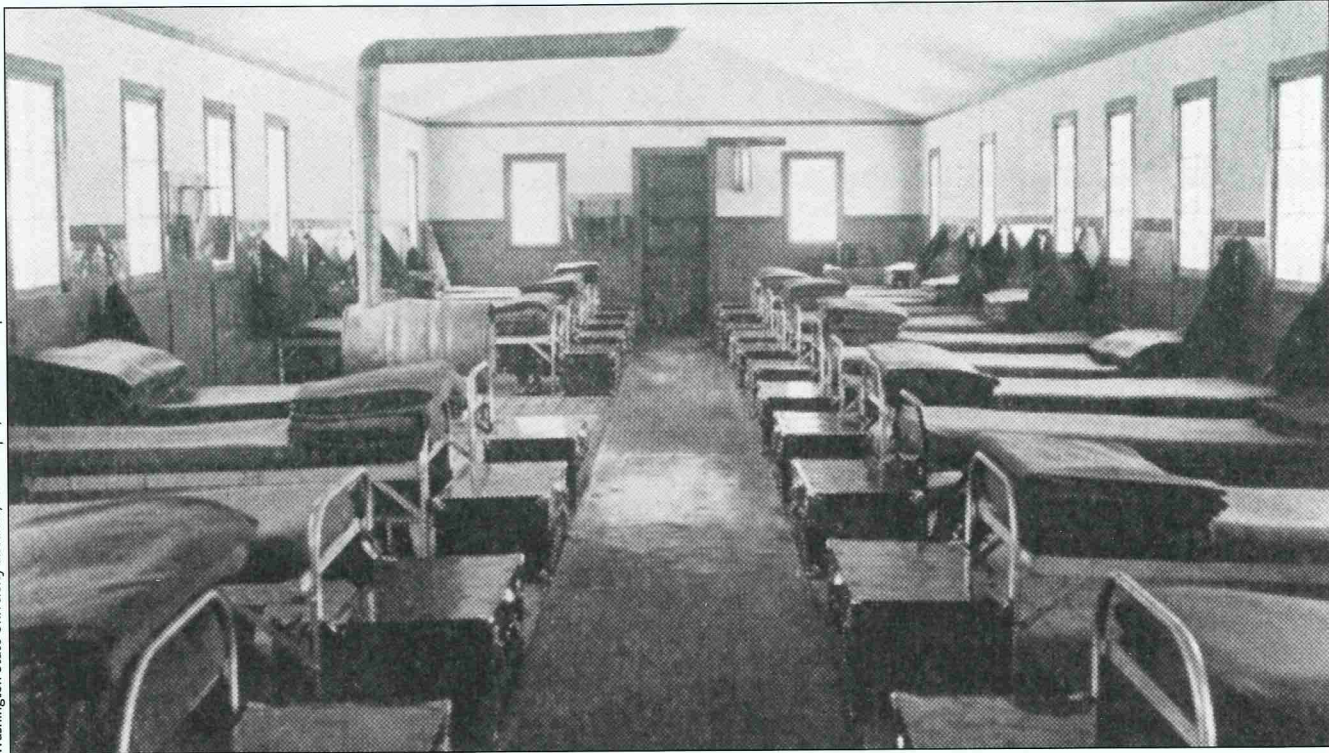
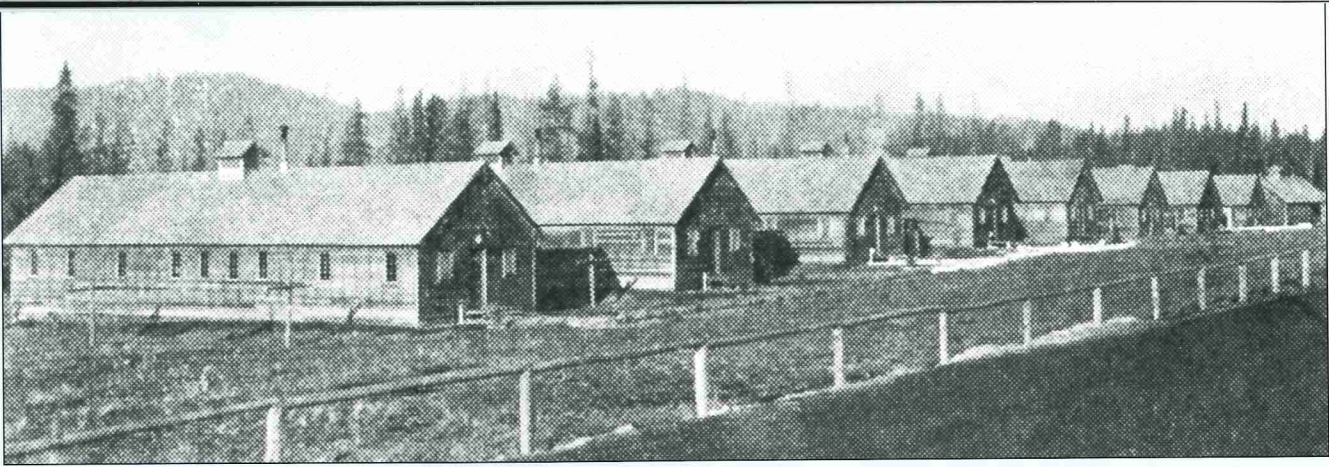
Perhaps it was fitting, then, that Roosevelt gave the United States Army the responsibility of administering the Civilian Conservation Corps. On April 5, 1933, a mere month after his inauguration, Roosevelt, empowered by Congress’s passage of “an act for the relief of unemployment through the performance of useful public work, and for other purposes,” signed Executive Order 6101, calling for the establishment of “Emergency Conservation Work.” Two days later, the program registered its first enrollee, and the first



US Forest Service image, courtesy CCC Legacy

Iconic image of Civilian Conservation Corps members heading off to conquer the Great Depression and, in the process, protect and preserve the nation’s natural resources.





camp, Camp George Washington, opened in Virginia ten days later. In the book *Coming of Age in the Great Depression*, historian Richard Melzer noted that the program's original name, the Emergency Conservation Work Corps, proved far too cumbersome, and the Civilian Conservation Corps moniker sprang into use almost immediately.

The army was tasked with administering the camps; recruiting, transporting, housing, and feeding the enrollees; as well as constructing the camps themselves. Recruitment drives commenced during January, April, July, and October of each year. Initially, enrollees signed up for a six-month enrollment period, renewable up to three times for a total of two years, provided they worked hard and obeyed the rules. In 1937, enrollments expanded to twelve months.

Acceptance to the CCC was primarily need based. Potential recruits had to be single and, most importantly, unemployed. Men could be no older than 23 years old and no younger than 17. Members received \$30 per month, \$25 of which went home

**TOP: View from the highway, the Camp Willow Creek barracks, just outside Emida in northern Idaho.**

**BOTTOM: Interior view of one of the barracks at Willow Creek CCC Forestry Camp F-188.**

to the men's families. The labor unions thought the wage paid to CCC members was too low. Melzer points out, however, that at the rate of roughly \$1 per day, CCC men were paid better than army recruits, who earned a total of \$252 a year. Minor opportunities for advancement, and a corresponding pay increase, existed within the CCC. An assistant leader received \$36 a month, and company leaders (separate from camp/army leadership) received \$45 a month. Over \$700 million went back to the members' families during the CCC's nine-year history.

### Fort George Wright District and Forestry Camp F-188

The Fort George Wright District of the CCC, headquartered in Spokane, came into being in May 1933. Its domain stretched from Lake Chelan to Libby, Montana, and from the Canadian border to just south of Moscow, Idaho. By August 1933 it had grown to encompass 54 camps containing some 12,000 enrollees—most hailing from the Deep South or eastern states—making it the largest district in the country. By 1938 the district had served as home to 260 CCC companies containing roughly 42,000 members. It oversaw conservation efforts in a number of national forests, including the Kaniksu, St. Joe, Coeur d'Alene, Kootenai, and Colville.





## THE ARMY WAS TASKED WITH ADMINISTERING THE CAMPS; RECRUITING, TRANSPORTING, HOUSING, AND FEEDING THE ENROLLEES; AS WELL AS CONSTRUCTING THE CAMPS.

The most important task undertaken in the district was blister rust control. Blister rust is a spore that attacks white pine trees. The spore spreads to the trees via contact with ribes bushes (a subgenus of flowering plants commonly known as gooseberry or currant). It works its way into the bark and cuts off the flow of sap, killing the tree. By 1939 CCC crews managed to protect over 200,000 acres of white pine timber by removing the disease-spreading shrubs. White pine forestry was an incredibly valuable industry during the Depression, and the local communities of northern Idaho closely followed the CCC's efforts. Other important tasks undertaken in the Fort George Wright District were soil conservation, fire control, fire hazard reduction, and reforestation in the national forests, along with flood control and construction of bridges, roads, campsites, and recreational campgrounds.

Blister rust was especially prevalent in St. Joe National Forest in northern Idaho, the location of CCC Forestry Camp F-188. Camps such as F-188 served as both work relief and education programs for the impoverished youth of the Great Depression. They also instilled in their members the virtues of discipline, pride, and hard work while

Young CCC members eradicate ribes (gooseberry) bushes in northern Idaho as a means of combating blister rust in western white pines, 1933.

conserving precious natural resources during a time of great duress for the United States.

### Daily Life in a CCC Forestry Camp

Forestry Camp F-188 was stationed at Willow Creek along both sides of State Highway 95 E (now State Highway 6), a few miles southwest of the town of Emida in Idaho's Benewah County. Construction on the camp began May 5, 1935. A contingent of corps members from Camp F-117, near St. Maries, broke ground on the camp. Barracks and administrative buildings on one side of the highway faced the mechanical shop and garage buildings on the opposite side. According to the official camp history, the men spent their summer fighting fires in Idaho, though it was an uncommonly calm fire season.

On October 20, 1935, the men of F-117 gave way to Company 2524, a brand new unit made up of youths from Ohio. The "Ohio boys," as they were known, boarded a train making its way through the state and eventually winding up in Fort Knox, Kentucky. There they were separated into two companies, 2524 and 2525, with the men from 2525 disembarking near St. Joe River, presumably at Camp F-120 near Avery, Idaho, while those in 2524 continued on to Willow Creek. The first assignments handed to Company 2524 were the diversion of Cedar Creek to protect white pine trees in the area and the construction of sidewalks within Camp F-188.



US Forest Service photo; courtesy Gerald W. Williams Collection, OSU Special Collections & Archives





## THE CCC NOT ONLY SAW TO THE PHYSICAL AND INTELLECTUAL NEEDS OF ITS MEMBERS BUT ALSO MADE SURE THE SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF THE MEN WERE ATTENDED TO.

The original roster of Company 2524 included 187 men, including 154 enrollees, 16 assistant leaders, 10 leaders, 5 officers, an educational adviser, and a camp surgeon. Discipline in the CCC was tightly handled by camp and district leadership. Serious crimes were deferred to the civilian system for trial. Minor offenses, such as insubordination, were judged by the company commander and could result in anything from mere admonishment to loss of pay or discharge from the company.

Once established at Willow Creek, the men of Company 2524 followed a set schedule. A typical day at camp went as follows: At 6:10 in the morning the men awoke to reveille. Roll call lasted from 6:50 to 7:50, after which they made their beds, cleaned the barracks, and ate breakfast. They worked until 11:45, whereupon they cleaned up and took an hour break for lunch. From 12:45 to 3:45 they worked again, then spent the next hour subject to roll call and inspection. The men ate dinner at 5:00 and received the day's mail at 5:30. There was a gap in the camp schedule from 5:30 to 9:20, when presumably they were free to engage in leisure activities or attend night classes. At 9:20 they prepared for bed, and the lights went out at 9:30. This routine prevailed Monday through Saturday, with Sundays off.

Like most CCC members, the typical F-188 member came from extreme poverty. One enrollee, George W. Rairden, serves as an excellent case study of the poverty CCC members endured prior to enrollment. The oldest of nine children, Rairden was born August 10, 1918, to farmer Clay Rairden and his wife, Margaret, in Bath County, Kentucky. His schooling ended after eighth grade. Two weeks after his 17th birthday he enrolled in CCC Company 3547 in Alexandria, Kentucky, and spent four months there before transferring to Camp F-188 in January 1936.

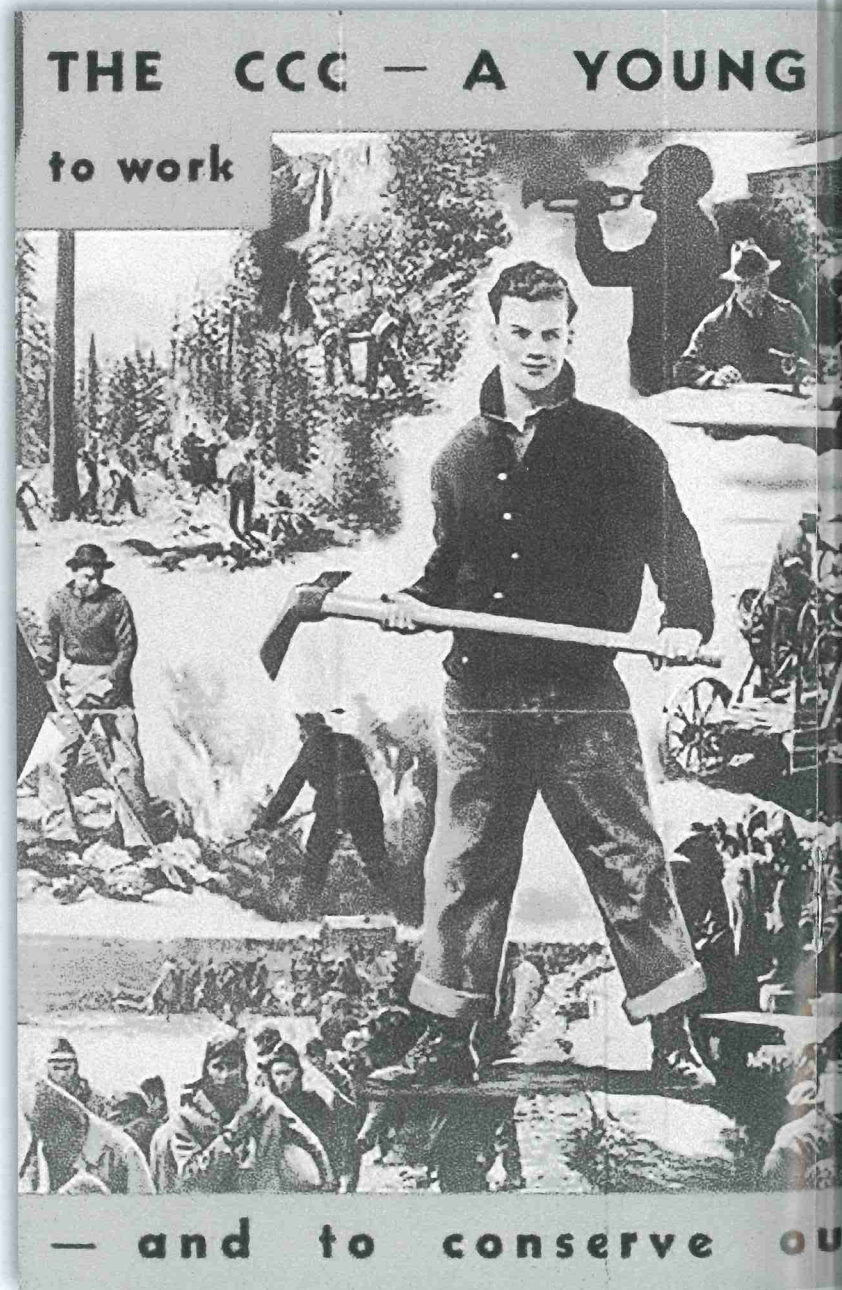
The information contained in CCC personnel records is extensive. Applicants disclosed their religious affiliation, leisure activities, and work experience, answering such questions as, "What church do you belong to?" "Have you attended it in the last four weeks?" "What activities did you participate in while attending school?" and "What musical instruments can you play?" In later years, questions of this type disappeared from the intake forms, shaving off about three pages of paperwork.

The men amused themselves with a variety of activities, including baseball, softball, chess, boxing, and swimming. Basketball, too, was popular. The December 31, 1936, *Benewah County News* contained a flyer featuring "City League Basketball," which mentioned the "Emida CCC's vs. Chatcolet." Archived photographs show Company 229 enrollees piling into the back of a truck to attend the movies, lounging in the camp recreation hall's sitting room, and playing billiards.

Company 229 had its own band, a quartet known as The Rhythm Aces, which featured clarinet, saxophone, piano, and drums. The men also had "camp nights," during which they sang and performed plays. Enrollees occasionally went on field

trips, of a sort. On several occasions the men went to the University of Idaho and Washington State College to view sporting events. Preserved copies of the camp newspaper, *The Willow Creek*, contain an article detailing a camp-sponsored trip of 12 enrollees who visited Washington State College to watch the Cougars take on the neighboring University of Idaho Vandals. These men were treated to tours of each university, visited CCC campsites in Pullman and Moscow, and watched a badminton game at the University of Idaho.

Camp members also got to enjoy the holidays. According to the December 31, 1936, *Benewah County News*, F-188





members celebrated Christmas with a turkey dinner, a camp program, and even a visit from Santa Claus (played by Wilbur Kellinghaus, a camp leader), who distributed gifts. They celebrated New Year's Eve with dances and another turkey dinner, accompanied by a "white New Year," courtesy of Idaho's "famous weather."

### Religion in the Camps

The CCC not only saw to the physical and intellectual needs of its members but also made sure the spiritual needs of the men were attended to. As district chaplain, Captain Jay M. Gleason was responsible for overseeing the religious functions of all the camps in the district. Born in Illinois in 1881, Gleason served as a chaplain in France during

World War I. After the war, he accepted a ministry in Ellensburg but left in 1921 and took up ranching near Yakima. In 1932 he was elected to the State House of Representatives, but his political career was cut short when in 1933 he was called up by the army to serve as chaplain of the Fort George Wright CCC District.

Gleason formulated the religious programs for each of the camps and hired clergy to perform the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish services as needed by the enrollees. Gleason also served as the district's welfare officer, education officer, and public relations officer. He proved to be a sympathetic ear and advocate for many within the district, a fact that is well illustrated in his voluminous correspondence.

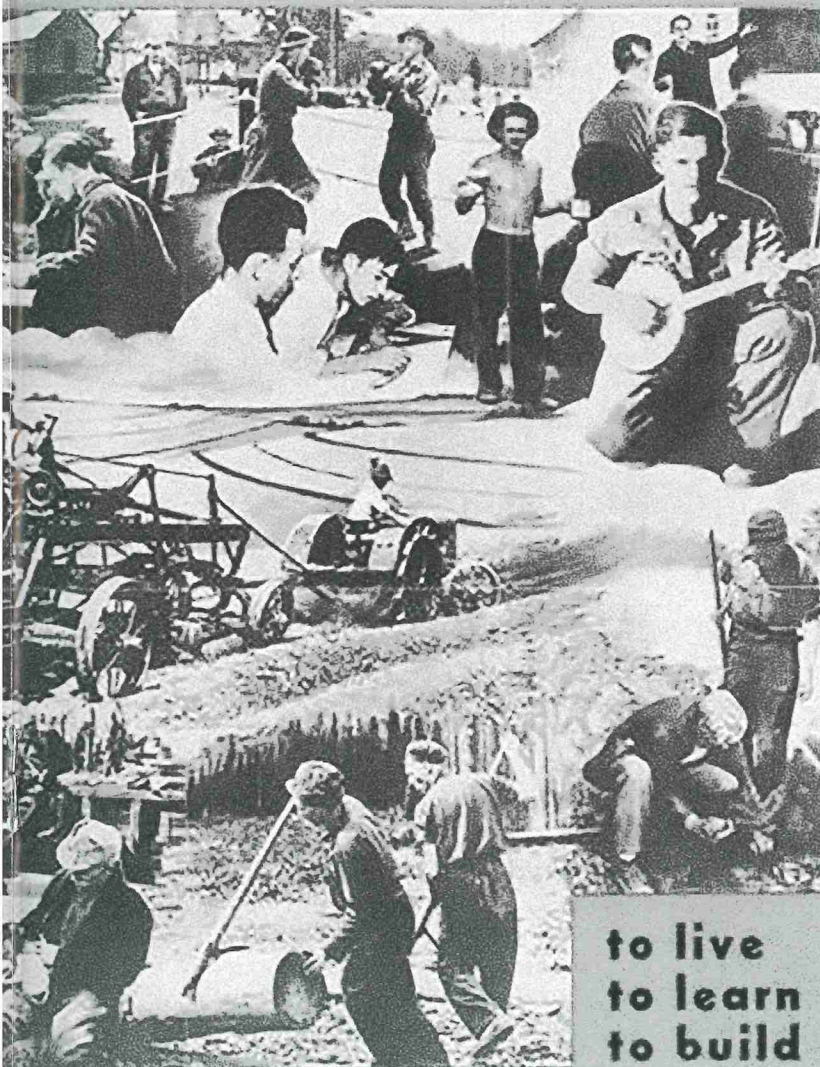
In one case, Gleason advocated on behalf of Michael Hudanish, an enrollee who in January 1936 was accused of stealing farm property in September 1934 in his home state of New Jersey. Gleason wrote the prosecuting attorney, asking that the case be dismissed. He cited the amount of time that had passed between when the alleged theft occurred and when the charges were filed, the minimal monetary worth of the stolen equipment (\$50), and Hudanish's good work in the CCC. The prosecutor's office agreed to drop the charges and wished Hudanish all the best in "avail[ing] himself of the splendid opportunities which [had] been placed [before him] . . . by his service in the CCC."

Gleason remained with the Fort George Wright District until the CCC's dissolution in 1942. As the CCC drew down, Gleason wrote numerous letters of recommendation for district staff. Gleason himself tried to find continuing employment with the Ninth Area District Headquarters but was unsuccessful in his efforts.

The CCC chronicled its history on both the national level—with its newspaper *Happy Days*—and the district level. The Fort George Wright District issued two newspapers: *The Microphone*, circulated within district headquarters, and *The CCC News*, distributed district-wide. Jay Gleason edited its most esteemed publication, the *Fort George Wright CCC District Annual*, which covered district-level history as well as the history and work projects of every camp within the district, complete with rosters and photographs. The inaugural issue covered the 1935–36 winter enrollment period.

Leo's Studio and the Standard Engraving Company, both of Spokane, provided the photography and artwork. The Moscow (Idaho) Publishing Company printed the yearbook and set the price at one dollar. In gratitude for the district's efforts to fight blister rust, several lumber companies provided pine board covers for the annuals, one issue of which is among the Gleason papers housed in the Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections. The annual proved immensely popular, selling

## MAN'S OPPORTUNITY



to live  
to learn  
to build

ur National Resources

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## THE INFORMATION GATHERED ON ENROLLMENT FORMS SERVED AS THE BASIS FOR DETERMINING WHICH EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS WOULD BE TAUGHT IN EACH CAMP.

over 2,300 copies in its first printing, and the 1938–39 issue received praise from J. J. McEntee, assistant director of the CCC, as a “fine piece of photography,” and an “interesting portrayal of both the Army’s and Technical Service’s part in the Corps.” Through the efforts of men like Gleason, the CCC’s history is well chronicled and its legacy preserved.

### Education in the Willow Creek Camp

**G**eorge Spinning served as the educational adviser of Camp F-188. Though he copiously documented the inner workings of the CCC, he left no known records of his own life. What little is known about him has been gathered via historical US Army records and conversations with his living descendants. During World War I, Spinning labored as a private in the 32nd Spruce Squadron, which was part of an army project dedicated to producing high quality timber for use in military aircraft. In addition to his service in the army and the CCC, Spinning was an avid gardener, a school-teacher, and home builder.

Personnel records from Companies 2524 and 229 indicate that the majority of enrollees had not completed their grade school education or attended college. Charged with ensuring the enrollees’ well-being, the CCC made education one of its highest priorities.

Possibly due to the extreme winter weather that sometimes came to the Fort George Wright District, it appears that education was ramped up during the fall and winter months. A memo found in George Spinning’s files, which had been addressed to all district educational advisers, provides insight into the Fall–Winter Program, 1937–38, but also clarifies the CCC’s educational efforts in general. The objectives of the education program were to “help each enrollee discover his own aptitudes and abilities”; as far as possible, “fit each enrollee into the type of camp experience from which he will profit most”; cooperate with technical staff to “help assure each enrollee of the greatest educational values inherent to the work he does”; and “organize such educational opportunities as will best develop each enrollee’s employability and civil effectiveness.”

According to this memo, Spinning was to interview each enrollee entering F-188. An “English Usage Test” and other applicable placement tests were applied when advisable. The information gathered on enrollment forms served as the

basis for determining which educational programs would be taught in each camp. Illiteracy was one of the most frequent educational deficiencies faced by CCC members. The district memo defined as illiterate someone who “cannot read a newspaper, write a letter, and perform the fundamental operations in arithmetic.” Those enrolled in literacy classes typically met four times a week until their reading skills proved up to par.

Many other courses were available to camp enrollees. Those in the Fort George Wright District might find themselves enrolling in standard academic classes such as algebra, history, or sociology, and vocational classes such as drafting, truck driving, photography, and journalism. Basic elementary classes were available to those who had yet to complete their grade school education.

High school and college classes were also offered, oftentimes with the opportunity to earn credit. Within the Fort George Wright District, enrollees earned college credit through the University of North Dakota at the cost of 25 cents per credit hour. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) made high school credits (sponsored by the University of Oklahoma) available to enrollees at the cost of one dollar per course plus the cost of books. The WPA and Idaho State Department of Education offered free vocational and general correspondence courses to camp members.

Camp F-188 also had a small library for the use of its members. Washington State College provided extension services to Willow Creek, lending books for two-week periods for the price of postage. If the camp library did not have the book an enrollee was seeking, he could request it through the Idaho State Free Traveling Library, another low-cost service that delivered books to the camps.

Camp members were not the only ones participating in educational programs. Camp staff found themselves engaging in their own form of higher education. Spinning’s letters reveal a trip to Moscow, Idaho, in July 1937 to attend an educational conference at the University of Idaho, followed by a two-day family vacation in Davenport, Washington. That summer Spinning also enrolled himself at Washington State College in a class on educational films, which he attended twice a week.

Another task assigned to Spinning and CCC educational advisers across the country was to prepare their young charges for life after the camps. In addition to learning



Gerald W. Williams Collection, Oregon State University



Courtesy Shirley O'Hare

**TOP:** Captain Jay Mark Gleason served as the Fort George Wright CCC District’s chaplain.

**BOTTOM:** George Spinning was in charge of the education program at Camp F-188.

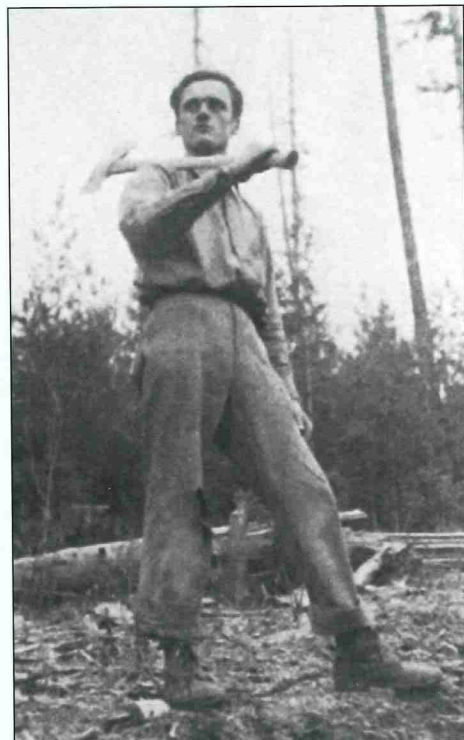


vocational skills, enrollees received instruction on how to draft résumés. Enrollees were advised to include basic information such as their gender, age, contact information, education, and work experience, plus their marital status and family situation.

**A**lthough Camp F-188 ran with military efficiency, mishaps did happen. In April 1937, disaster struck the education program of Camp F-188. Spinning's letters reveal that a fire broke out sometime late that month and the camp had to be hastily jury-rigged to continue functioning properly. The kitchen was moved to the canteen, and the recreation center served as the mess hall. The camp procured replacement tables from the Fernwood Community Club. Spinning was happy to note that the men worked "willingly on the fire," there had been "no griping," and they had "won the admiration of the entire overhead."

Problems persisted, however, when two days later Camp F-188 found itself host to an unexpected guest. Spinning wrote to Glenn Caulkins, the district's head educational adviser, that the arrival of a "Mr. Walker" came as a great surprise to him. Walker had apparently been hired to instruct the camp's cooking and baking classes, but Spinning had received no warning and therefore had made no provision for his imminent arrival. As a result, Walker found himself without any instructional materials. At about the same time, Spinning requested from district

*Images from the 1937 Fort George Wright District CCC Annual. The volume included a brief history of each camp in the district and photos of some of their activities. TOP, LEFT & RIGHT: Men from Willow Creek Camp cutting snags in St. Joe National Forest. BOTTOM RIGHT: Camp members reading and studying in the recreation hall after dinner. BOTTOM LEFT: The Emida CCC's basketball players posing for a team photo.*



Gerald W. Williams Collection, Oregon State University (all)







headquarters two dozen spiral notebooks and blank certificates. Further highlighting the strict budgets inherent in the CCC, Spinning requested 12 “automatic pencils” and reimbursement for the cost of educational materials charged to the company, which came out to just over \$24.

Despite its tight budget, F-188 put great effort into educating its young members and teaching them skills that would serve them well after they left the CCC. In addition to academic and vocational training, the men received personal enrichment, and their field trips provided them with new experiences.

### End of the CCC Experiment

The great CCC experiment came to a close in 1942 following the United States’ entry into World War II. The skills and knowledge acquired by the CCC enrollees proved invaluable to the war effort. J. J. McEntee, who by now had risen to the post of national director of the CCC, had great faith in the wartime abilities of the CCC men. He proclaimed: “[T]he men of the CCC will be specialists in a dozen [noncombat] fields . . . as vital to the carrying on of conflict as firing a rifle or machine-gun.” And indeed, an estimated 80 percent of the 3 million men who served in the CCC later served in the US military during World War II. Men who had once built roads and bridges in the forests now built them in combat zones; transport truck drivers became troop truck drivers; camp cooks became mess sergeants; CCC men were experienced in first aid. During the CCC’s initial implementation, opponents of the program criticized the CCC as too militaristic, and there was some merit to this claim; the rigid discipline instilled in camps

The rigid daily schedule dictating camp life was countered with a variety of recreational activities, including baseball, basketball, chess, swimming, movie outings, and music, performed sometimes by the men in this c. 1937 photo of the Willow Creek Camp “orchestra.”

proved useful as the CCC men, along with the rest of America’s youth, headed off to war.

Fort George Wright and all other CCC districts, received the order to cease operations on June 30, 1942. President Roosevelt had hoped to keep the CCC alive, but the growing demands of the war brought about its demise. The program left a legacy that has spanned decades, serving as an inspiration for President

John F. Kennedy’s Peace Corps and President Lyndon Johnson’s Job Corps. As exemplified by the Fort George Wright District and the experiences of the men in Camp F-188, the CCC educated and employed a large segment of one generation. Guided by the likes of Jay M. Gleason and George T. Spinning, it served as a rite of passage for these men, many of whom had not completed high school or been away from home before. The CCC, through its conservation efforts, helped protect America’s natural resources and preserve them for future generations. Moreover, through its various programs, it instilled discipline, pride, and hard work in its members. The young men whose motto was “we can take it,” proved, indeed, that they could.

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John. T. Menard, a graduate of Washington State University, received the Gilder Lehrman History Scholar Award in 2015. He has a long-standing interest in the regional history of the Civilian Conservation Corps.