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Article Summary: The author describes his experiences as a member of the Civilian Conservation Corps. The Depression-era program provided families with cash and gave their sons education, training, and work. Corps projects improved both public and private land.

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The Civilian Conservation Corps

in Nebraska

Memoirs of Company 762

By Charles E. Humberger

Introduction

The Civilian Conservation Corps was initiated in the spring of 1933 under the administrative control of the U.S. departments of War, Labor, Agriculture, and Interior. Its implementation and organization were almost immediate. Proposed by President Franklin D.

Roosevelt, the CCC was authorized by Congress on March 31 with the first enrollee registered on April 7, and the task of establishing work camps and administrative offices was soon underway. Originally intended to provide work for unemployed young men and boost local economies, the CCC later expanded its functions to include basic education and job training. Charles E. Humberger, author of the following reminiscences, was one of thousands of young men who escaped "the frustrating and demoralizing idleness" of Depression days by enlisting in the CCC.

Humberger, a native of Jefferson County, Nebraska, was born in 1907 on a farm between Jansen and Plymouth. He attended high school in Plymouth and in Peru, Nebraska, and then

Charles E. Humberger, retired from the National Park Service, now lives in Sonoma, California.

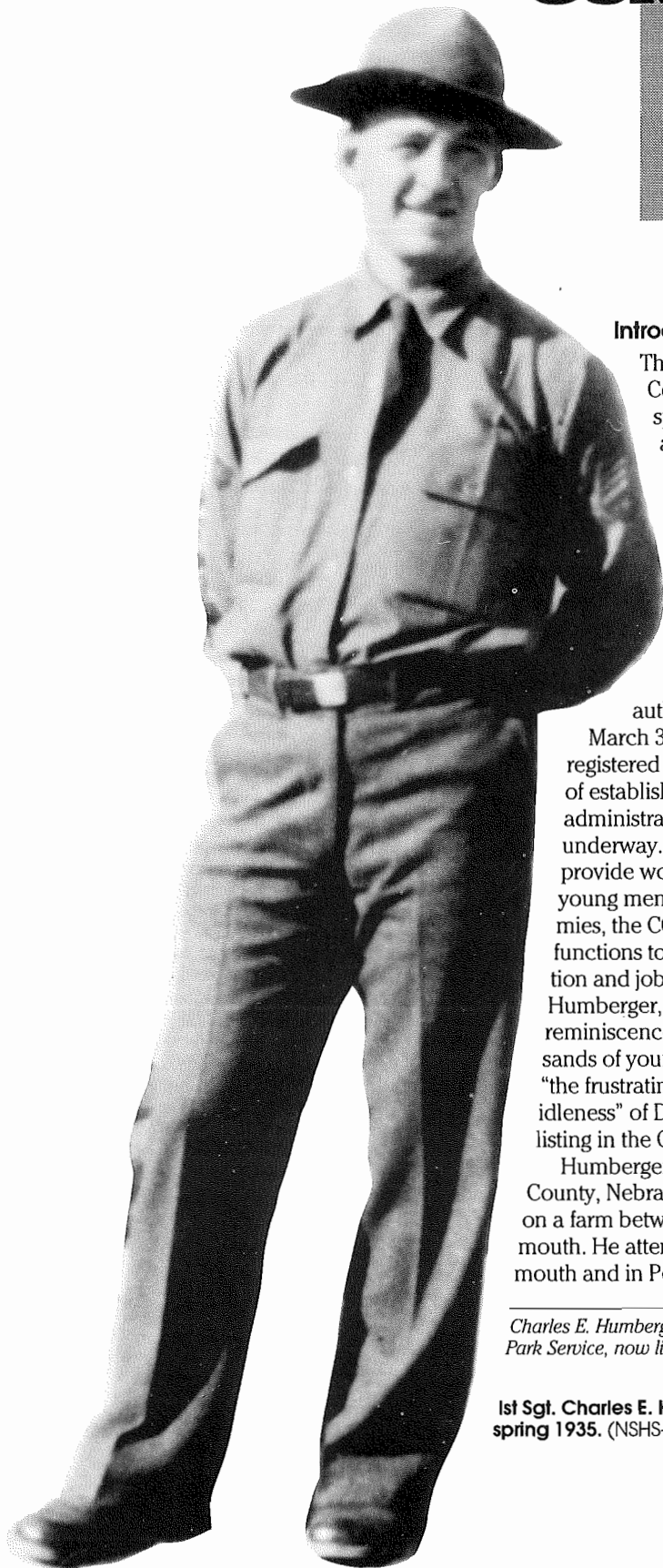
1st Sgt. Charles E. Humberger, Red Cloud, spring 1935. (NSHS-H919.3:3-3)

taught elementary school near his home while coaching the Plymouth High School basketball team through a championship season.

In 1927 Humberger decided to indulge his wanderlust, and followed the grain harvest from Kansas to Canada, working with grain threshing crews. He later harvested potatoes in Idaho and worked in California before returning to Nebraska, where he worked at various times as a machinery salesman, carpenter, auto mechanic, and farm worker. He entered the University of Nebraska but after a year could not afford to continue. Humberger recalls, "[I] continued to work at odd jobs for a couple of years until there was little if any work available, and it was in 1933 that I sought refuge with the CCC."¹

The Memoirs²

I was living on a farm near Fairbury, Nebraska. The Great Depression was upon us, many banks had closed, prolonged drought and dust storms were beginning, and there was no work available. Jobs paying \$1 per day were eagerly sought.³ A classic example concerns a once wealthy, small bank owner, who gladly accepted a job in Lincoln driving a horse-drawn milk delivery wagon to support his family. Most were not so fortunate. There were no farm subsidies, unemployment compensation, health benefits, food stamps, or public welfare assistance. People did not realize how poor they were since no "poverty levels" had been proclaimed by the government. They accepted their destitute plight with a minimum of complaint and hoped and prayed that better times were just around the corner.



Civilian Conservation Corps

I signed on for the Civilian Conservation Corps although I was slightly over the stated age limit.⁴ We were assembled at Beatrice, Nebraska, where we were met by an army major, who provided meals and transportation to Fort Crook near Omaha. I was enrolled on June 6, 1933.

We mustered at the fort, where hastily pitched tents served as shelter, with straw-filled mattress sacks for beds. It was hot, and swarms of flies and mosquitos abounded. It was the first trip away from home for most of the applicants, and many were stricken with fear, apprehension, and homesickness. All were examined by army doctors and given immunization shots. A very few were rejected and returned to their homes.

The army did a superb job in managing this emergency operation and soon had the recruits outfitted with clothing that had been surplus from World War I. As far as fit of the clothing was concerned, there was a choice of too large or too small. When immunization and records were completed, companies of about two hundred men each were formed. Company 762 was commanded by Capt. C. Williams, a veteran officer, who did an outstanding job of training and organization. Assisting was 1st Sgt. Patrick Eagan, a tolerant but efficient soldier. We were indoctrinated with the basics of sanitation, housekeeping, formations, marching, and discipline. Emphasis was placed upon reading the bulletin board daily to acquaint ourselves with orders, assignments, and duties.

This initial introduction to discipline, rules, and regulations was entirely new to the enrollees, and for most it became the turning point in their lives and careers. They would become aware that self-respect and dignity were important elements in living and further enriched when they bestowed full respect for the rights and privileges of their associates.

When functional, the company was assigned to Chadron State Park, Chadron, Nebraska. Travel to Chadron was by rail, and upon arrival at the park a tent camp was established with a field kitchen and mess, supervised by army personnel.⁵

Following more training Hal R. Siel became company leader; Jerry Stoetzel, mess sergeant; Wilbur R. Watmore, company clerk; and Rudolph Schaff, supply sergeant. The basic pay was \$30 per month with a \$25 allotment check sent to the enrollees' families. Assistant leaders drew \$36 and leaders \$45 on the same basis. Field leaders appointed were W. R. Jackson, Toby Bauer, Calvin Sampson,

quickly assembled consisting of Project Superintendent Earl Maxwell, Engineers James Good and D. Clive Short, a forester, and a landscape architect. With the arrival of a fleet of trucks, hand tools, and other essential equipment, work was soon underway. Local, skilled workers, such as plumbers, carpenters, and stonemasons, were recruited as "Local Enlisted [Experienced] Men" (LEM).⁶ They were a valu-



Water line construction and tar paper squad huts at Chadron State Park, 1933. (NSHS-H919.3:1-12)

and [myself] Charles E. Humberger. Capt. Ambrose J. Callaghan was camp doctor and Clinton F. Palmer, educational advisor.

Civilian workers commenced building a latrine-bath house, mess hall, supply-orderly room, officers' quarters, dispensary, recreation hall, and tar paper squad huts. I was placed in charge of utilities and wired the tent quarters and mess hall when it was completed. This assignment was quite favorable, free from any camp details, while a helper and I occupied a small cabin near the pump house.

With the sudden assignment of CCC workers, many of the work agencies were caught by surprise. There was no master plan, project construction details, staff, or organization. Here a supervisory staff was

able asset in the teaching of work skills to the enrollees. Under the work program guest cabins were constructed and improvements made at the swimming pool and picnic and recreation area. Roads and trails were improved and drainage structures built. Brush dams were built to control soil and stream bank erosion, and the water supply system at the headquarters area was improved. They also carried out extensive rodent control and soil erosion programs on private property north of Chadron.

It was a stroke of genius when President Roosevelt placed the camps under the general administration of the army with a distinct separation of responsibilities between the army and work agencies involved. The army had the experience,

supplies, and trained personnel to implement the rapid mobilization and organization that were required. It afforded field experience in administration and organization for the Army Reserve Corps and a ready source of semi-trained manpower upon the outbreak of World War II. I am convinced that the CCC program would have been a failure if this had not been done.

The company leader (first sergeant) was responsible for daily routine operations in the camp. He held morning roll call, sick call, submitted the morning report to the commanding officer, and cooperated with the work administrator to determine their daily manpower requirements. After breakfast there was a work formation, and enrollees were assigned to the leaders and assistant leaders, who then reported for duty with their supervisors.

The supervisors and leaders usually dealt with minor infractions that occurred on the job site. However, if a serious incident took place, it would be referred to the commanding officer for settlement. This procedure seemed to work well with a minimum of friction and misunderstanding. Company 762 was an outstanding unit, since it was comprised mainly of decent young men who came predominantly from rural and small town areas. Collectively their backgrounds were quite similar. A few had not completed grade school, most had completed the eighth grade, some high school, and a few had attended college. Basically they were honest, industrious, and responsible, with a sprinkling of older malcontents and troublemakers who, with a chip on the shoulder, believed that the world was against them. With friendly counseling and after observing the examples of conduct practiced by their associates, most were motivated to change for the better. A very few, after resisting all normal efforts to help and reform them, either deserted or were shipped out.

As in any society, there were personal, petty disagreements. Animosities between young men were usually aggravated by their buddies, who hoped that they could

instigate a fight with boxing gloves. The fracas would be staged with minimum formality with a referee to prevent undue mayhem. The boxing performance of the combatants was not exactly high octane in style and finesse as they tore into each other. It would usually begin with a wild exchange of blows, with glove leather flying in all directions. No doubt it was at this point that one of them wished that he had settled the dispute in a more docile manner. The fray would continue with noisy cheering from the spectators. Usually these bouts ended in a Mexican standoff unless one of them forgot to duck and was felled by a wild haymaker.

A number at first seemed depressed and looked intimidated. They were reluctant to engage in social activities and were shy and withdrawn. As time progressed, subtle changes occurred; they became more responsive and their downcast features took on the appearance of confidence and stability as they adjusted to this new lifestyle. As a unit there were significant changes as they gained weight and their bodies filled with muscle. Improved demeanor and confidence was manifest, and morale was high. They had three nutritious meals a day, clean comfortable quarters, health care, productive work, and knowledge that they were assisting their parents. What with having \$5 monthly for spending money, it was like coming from rags to riches! A classic metamorphosis of body and mind.

By mid-fall the squad huts, mess hall, and other buildings were completed and occupied. All hands were happy to abandon the field kitchen and take their meals in the mess hall. The squad huts were heated by a small, conical-shaped Sibley stove, and with the cracks in the rough-sawn floor and tar paper siding, there was an abundance of fresh air. The little stoves when kindled with pine wood gave off intense heat in the immediate area. The sheet-metal sides and stove pipe would become cherry red, and then without prompt stoking with another charge of fuel [the stove] would quit, and the fire would die out. During a cold winter night with snow on the ground, a trip to the la-

trine (comfort room), about two blocks distant, provided an experience that developed briskness and courage.

A modest canteen offering candy, gum, soda pop, and related items was operated with the profits going into the company fund. The fund was used to purchase newspapers, books, and sporting and recreational gear.

The recreation room provided seating, reading material, writing tables, ping-pong table, and a center for the educational program under the direction of Mr. Clinton F. Palmer. Chess became popular, and a number of the players became quite proficient.

Captain Williams returned to Fort Crook and was replaced by Maj. Howard Alexander. He was replaced by an officer who received the nickname of "Peeping Tom." He was prone to make nightly patrols of the camp and adjacent area where some of the LEMs were housed. He would slip into a vacant building and shine his flashlight about; and what he was seeking remained a mystery. Thinking that he was about due again, one night we wired the doorknob with 110 volts of electricity and stood by to observe. It was a moonlit night, and we waited in anticipation as a ghost-like figure emerged from the shadows and approached the cabin, not realizing that he was in for a big surprise. As he grasped the doorknob, the sparks flew. He let out a yell and did a full gainer into mud and snow. He seemed completely bewildered, his uniform covered with mud from head to foot, as he recovered and made an ignominious retreat to his quarters. That ended his nocturnal sorties.

In his insolent and overbearing manner he had made some highly disparaging statements about the enrollees and military personnel at Fort Robinson. As a consequence, in the early spring of 1934, the entire company signed a petition that I presented to Post Commandant Maj. Edwin E. Hardy at Fort Robinson. The petition requested an investigation and outlined the various charges against the officer. Major Hardy responded immediately and called a meeting where the charges were discussed, with a number of enroll-

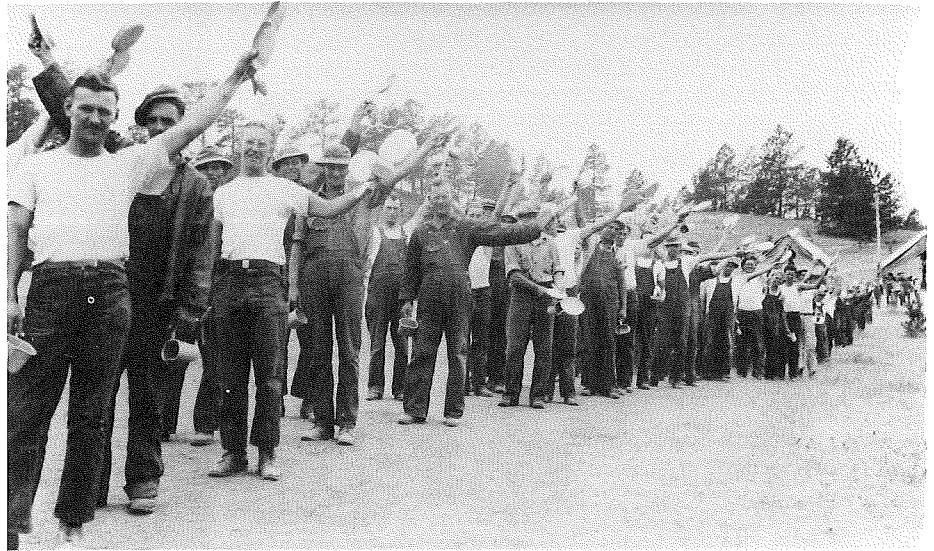
Civilian Conservation Corps

ees testifying. This required some courage, since they feared reprisal and punishment. Thanks to the fairness of Major Hardy, there followed a change in command.

In mid-spring of 1934 the company was moved into the Nebraska Sand Hills at Mumper.⁷ (Mumper consisted of a small store/post office and a residence.) A tent camp was set up near Crescent Lake on the Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge under the auspices of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Refuge Manager William Krummes became the project superintendent. A well and elevated water tank had been provided; and a wood-frame mess hall and latrine-shower buildings were soon completed. A small generator provided limited electrical energy for basic needs. Anyone who has ever experienced using a "straddle ditch" dug into unstable, soft sand will readily understand why a wooden latrine was provided. Ice for the refrigeration of food and related supplies was transported by truck from Alliance and Oshkosh. The two towns were given a nice economic boost since they supplied most of the camp needs.

A stable, clay-based road was constructed through the refuge, along with other minor roads to key points. Boundary fencing was built and wildlife habitat improvements made. Considerable work was accomplished to improve the buildings and facilities at the refuge headquarters.

With the exception of volleyball and horseshoe pitching, there was little offered for recreation. However, Crescent and nearby Island Lakes provided excellent fishing for crappie, bullheads, perch, and blue gills, and there were some grand fish fries in the mess hall. The overpopulation of bullheads in Island Lake was followed by a serious cycle of starvation when the once fat fish were reduced to swimming skeletons. On Saturday evenings enrollees were transported in open cargo trucks to Alliance or Oshkosh, where they would attend movies and dances or seek out other forms of entertainment and amusement. The "roads" in the Sand Hills were poorly defined trails,



Chow line, Chadron State Park, summer 1933. The first three in line are author Charles E. Humberger, Harry Whitehead, and Kenneth Wolcott. (NSHS-H919.3:1-11)

and it was easy to take a wrong branch and become lost. The trip to town and return was about one hundred miles and was rough, tiring, and boring.

Some of us became friends of neighboring ranchers and were privileged to be invited to their homes for a hearty meal and an afternoon of socializing. I captured a coyote pup and made a pet of her. She was a cute, shy little animal and liked to sleep on the foot of my bed. She was perhaps the only coyote that was taught to swim into the lake and retrieve objects that were thrown there. Maybe she would have become an asset in a duckblind if she had not disappeared one day.

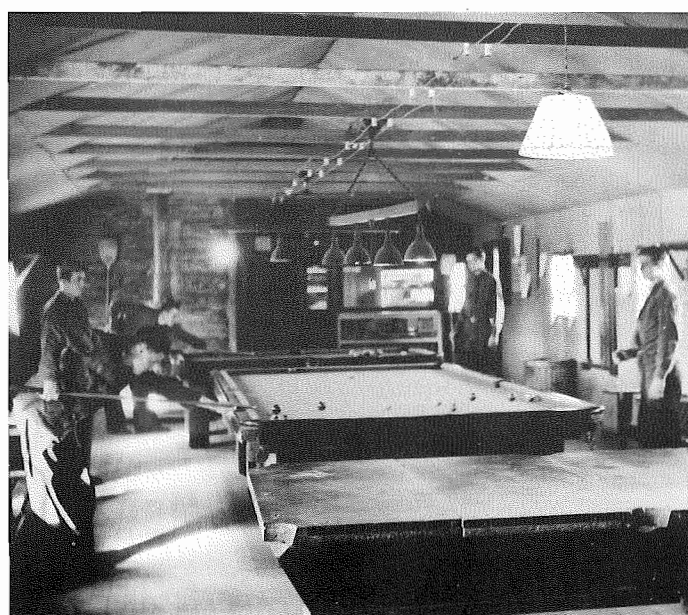
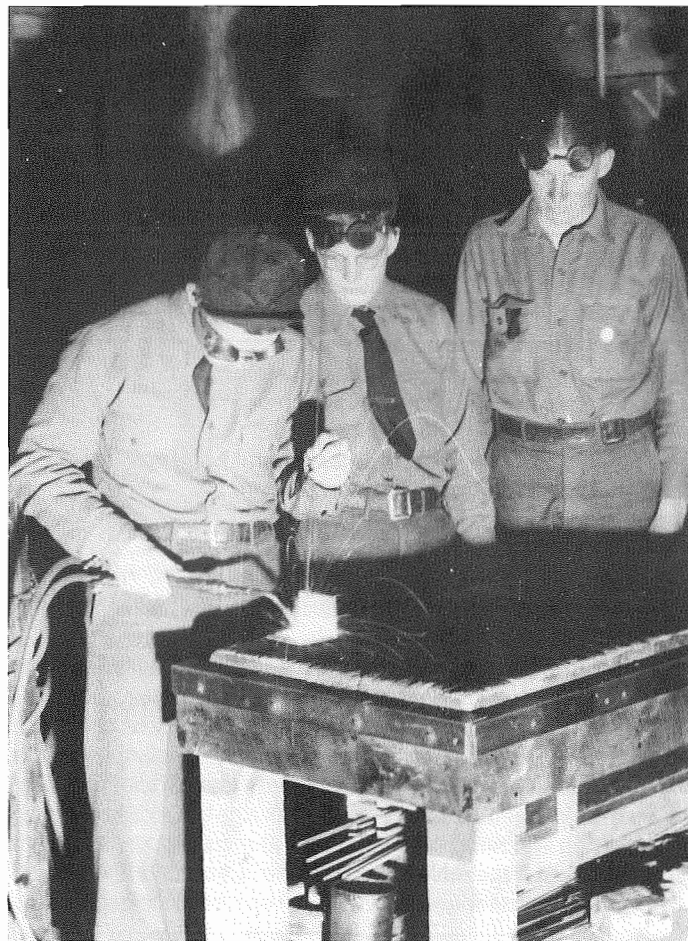
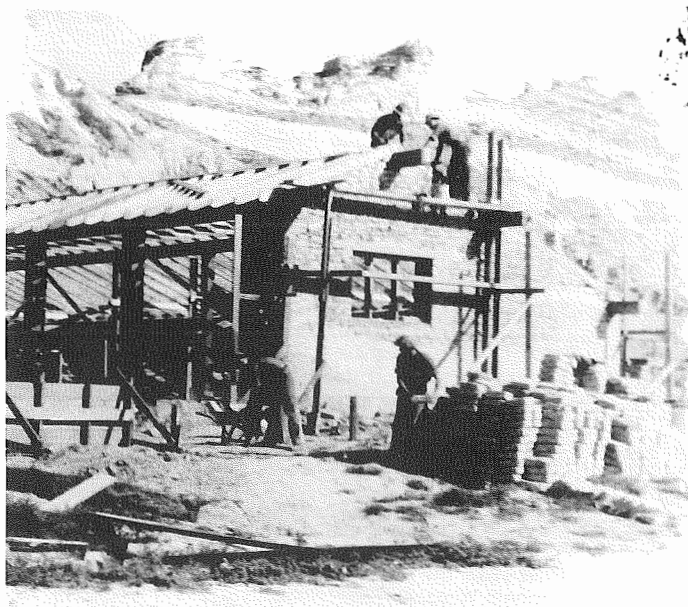
Winter can arrive early in the Sand Hills, and we experienced a mild snowfall before leaving there on or about October 10, 1934. Company 762 was ordered to Red Cloud, Nebraska, where we occupied a camp on the Republican River with good buildings that had been built previously for another outfit. Capt. [C. M.] Andy Anderson was commanding officer with Lt. Charles E. Myrick second in command. Both were fine gentlemen and excellent officers.

The company was warmly received by the Red Cloud community since it would assist the faltering local economy.⁸ The

enrollees would spend about \$800 per month, while significant purchases were made to supply camp and projects' needs and furnish housing for project personnel and other related items. The local baker must have flourished since he supplied bread and baked goods for the mess. This inflow of cash was a short-lived but welcome bonanza that has been largely forgotten.

W. T. Dunn was project superintendent for the U.S. Soil Conservation Service. Work involved erosion control and watershed protection developments. Gullies were protected by riprap, brush, and rock dams; water flows diverted; and numerous small dams and stock ponds completed.

The horrendous windstorms that plagued the "dust bowl" area were at their worst. This fiendish freak of weather behavior is difficult to describe with mere words. These atmospheric disturbances were spawned in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas and forewarned their arrival by blotting out the sun, thus creating an eerie overcast resembling twilight. Lights would be required during the day. Blankets would be secured over windows and openings to retard the entry of dust, and damp towels were placed over our heads



Civilian Conservation Corps



Clockwise, upper left:
Company 762 enrollees boxing, Scotts Bluff National Monument, 1937. (NSHS-H919.3:5-6)

Constructing fill with picks, shovels, and wheelbarrows along a picnic area road at Scotts Bluff National Monument, 1936. (NSHS-H919.3:5-5)

Typing class at Scotts Bluff National Monument, 1937. (NSHS-H919.3:7-1)

Opposite page, clockwise, upper left:
Building construction, Scotts Bluff National Monument. (NSHS-H919.3:6-4)

Company 762 welding class at Scotts Bluff National Monument, 1937. (NSHS-H919.3:7-2)

Company 762 recreation room at Scotts Bluff National Monument, 1937. (NSHS-H919.3:8-4)

Summit road construction, Scotts Bluff National Monument, 1935. (NSHS-H919.3:5-7)



while sleeping. In spite of all precautions, it was common to awaken in the morning and find an inch or more of dust accumulated on the bedding, floors, and other flat surfaces. It drifted and piled like snow during a blizzard and formed banks over fence tops and roads. Automobiles, tractors, and other equipment suffered severe mechanical damage as the fine, dry particles seeped into crankcases and gear boxes. Livestock and animals suffered greatly as the last vestige of vegetation on the barren soil vanished. This phenomenon of nature, coupled with the depression, was the crucible that tested the minds and souls of those who endured and survived it.

Before leaving the Sand Hills I had been appointed company leader, the equivalent of the army's rank of "first sergeant." This position carried considerable responsibility, because one must become familiar with almost every detail of the administration and operation within the company. A good first sergeant took pride in maintaining discipline and keeping things running smoothly with a minimum of intervention by the commanding officer.

One Saturday morning I was confronted by a situation that I thought required the wisdom of Captain Anderson. An irate mother, accompanied by her buxom, tearful, and obviously pregnant daughter, appeared in the orderly room. She demanded that I summon a certain enrollee to the scene. The sheepish individual arrived, whereupon the young lady pointed her finger at him and exclaimed: "He is one of the fathers of my baby." We had no immediate solution; however, since he had been nominated as the favored candidate for a trip to the altar, they soon became married.

As time progressed, the latent talent and skills of the enrollees began to emerge. One chap was skilled in oil painting and wood sculpturing, while another later moonlighted by playing the Wurlitzer organ at the new theater in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. A couple of them had a knack for sign painting and poster design. It was not uncommon for a boy to have worked with

his father at a trade; and as a consequence, skills in the building trades, cooking, butchering, baking, and other work were exhibited. Here they had the opportunity to practice and develop these attributes and later utilize them upon return to the work force.

The move by rail to Scotts Bluff National Monument, Gering, Nebraska, was accomplished in the early spring of 1935. The monument was under the administration of the National Park Service, with Dr. Harold J. Cook as custodian.⁹ A tent camp was established on the west side of the Gering Canal. A semi-permanent camp was under construction on the east side with many of the buildings constructed with adobe clay blocks. This would be a model layout, with automotive, blacksmith, welding, and woodworking shops.

Mr. George Caruthers, master mechanic, gave hands-on training to his assistants while they kept the fleet of trucks and related equipment in running order. Others were trained in light mechanical work similar to that found in filling stations. Holgar Jacobsen, master blacksmith and welder, with his assistants maintained hand tools and similar gear. He instructed evening classes, and a number of qualified welders found employment at this trade. Holgar was of the old school of craftsmen and a genius at metalworking. His handforged knives and ornamental iron work were superb and much sought after.

Training was given in blueprint reading, woodworking, carpentry, plumbing, and concrete-cement work. After working on the numerous construction projects completed, a number of enrollees became qualified mechanics. Classes in bookkeeping and typing were available in conjunction with the Gering High School, while D. C. [Clive] Short and E. L. Hoyt gave instructions in the use of the surveyor's transit, building layout, and basic surveying.¹⁰

There was an ongoing recreation program, and some excellent basketball and baseball teams were fielded. Traveling army chaplains held occasional religious services, and transportation was available

on Sundays to carry enrollees to the church of their choice in neighboring communities.

Plenty of good food was a key factor in maintaining good morale and productivity. Kenneth Wolcott became mess sergeant while we were in the Sand Hills and served until he was appointed park ranger at the monument in 1937. He had learned meat cutting in his father's store and believed that a prime hindquarter of beef should not be roasted to a cinder or consigned to the stew pot. He would save full beef loins, age them, and then indulge the crew with a Sunday dinner of T-bone and sirloin steaks. Good grazing! He ran a good show, and a number of his cooks found ready employment.

The personnel of the various work agencies were largely conscientious, skilled in their vocations, and were active in the training and counseling program. Salaries for technicians and supervisory foremen averaged about \$150 per month—excellent pay for the time. Politics was the name of the game when appointments were made for these positions. Rivalry was keen, with applicants ranging from political hacks to overqualified professionals. The prime prerequisite, regardless of qualifications, was to have received the blessing of the local Democratic Party county committee chairman. All were urged to contribute to the committee. There were a very few who were not qualified, and if a complete and total foul ball showed up, he would be assigned where he could do the least harm.

Under the auspices of the National Park Service, a sound, well-planned work program was in progress for almost three years. At Mitchell Pass headquarters a new wing and office were added to the museum. A custodian's residence and storage building were constructed along with a rest room, courtyard, and landscaping of grounds. New electrical lines, sewer system, and sewage disposal system were also completed. Mature conifer trees were planted and grounds sodded with native grasses. A new picnic ground with fireplaces, toilets, and road thereto de-

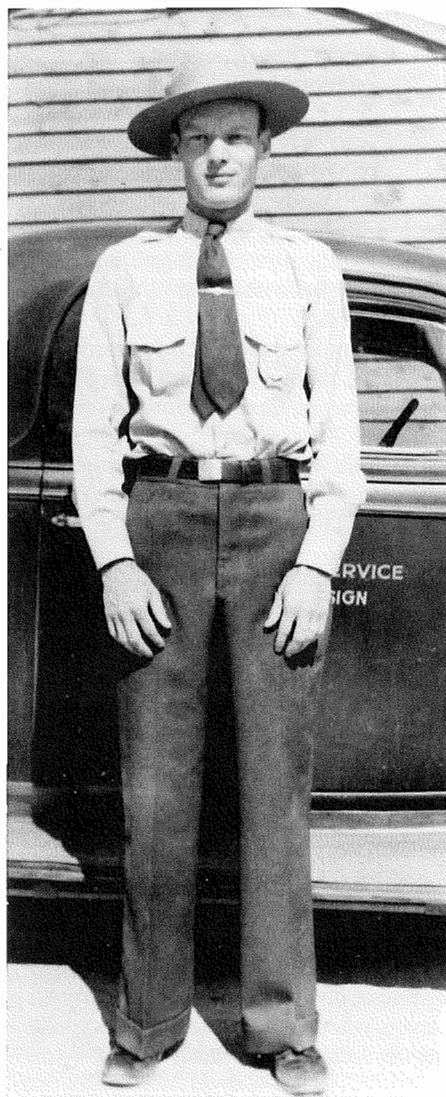
Civilian Conservation Corps

manded many hours of labor since only picks, shovels, wheelbarrows, and a few dump trucks were used. . . . I believe that the entire monument area was fenced. Thousands of hours of labor were expended on the construction of the summit road. A vista point, with a view of the Platte Valley, was connected with trails to the parking area. The road along the Gering Canal was improved and cattle guards installed. Since the headquarters area was without a reliable water supply, a new transit water supply line was necessary. It was a difficult, time-consuming, and back-breaking undertaking. It crossed deep gullies and difficult terrain, was about two miles in length, and buried below the frost line—all [constructed] with picks and shovels.

Improvements were made to a rifle range that was used by the local National Guard unit. A clubhouse and foot bridge were built at the golf course and considerable work done to improve the fairways and greens. The golf course was used by a Gering, Nebraska, group. These were rather strange facilities to be in a national monument. Both were inherited when the monument was created and have since been removed.

The museum opened under the direction of Ranger-Historian Merrill J. Mattes. He would later become custodian and a renowned historian and writer specializing in western history, the Platte River, and the Oregon Trail.¹¹ Several enrollees assisted him in the museum operation and interpretive program. A side camp was established at the Agate Springs fossil quarry on the Niobrara River north of Scotts Bluff.¹² The excavation work there was under the supervision of paleontologist Paul McGrew. The fossilized remains of a number of prehistoric animals were recovered and brought to the museum for future display.

An amusing incident occurred on the job site one cold, windy, winter day. Work crews were supplied with wooden tool boxes about the size of a huge coffin. The foreman in charge, a florid-faced, portly gent, upon arrival would turn the work over to the workmen and crawl into the



Park ranger-historian Merrill Mattes, Scotts Bluff National Monument, 1936.
(NSHS-H919.3:4-7)

tool box for warmth and recuperation. When the crew [members] left to drive to camp for their noon meal, they secured the padlock on the box and left with the boss still sacked out. Since he was missing at the dining table, a rare event for him, his associates feared some harm had befallen him and dispatched a search party. To their delight and his chagrin they found him, kicking and cursing in his cell. His tenure was of short duration following the incident.

In early summer of 1935 orders came through to appoint two qualified enrollees to the positions of supervisory foremen. I was privileged and delighted to receive one of the positions. A few days later a wire was received stating that I had been terminated—fired. We learned that the fellow who had been locked in the tool box had resurfaced with a new, powerful political sponsor and was responsible for my termination. A number of good friends with political clout rallied to my assistance, and I was immediately reinstated. The effort to dry-gulch me had failed.

At Scotts Bluff National Monument the work projects were administered by Project Superintendent Cliff Turner, Civil Engineer E. L. Hoyt, Supervisory Foreman D. Clive Short, Guy Carlson, and me. Later Harland G. Hutchins was appointed superintendent of both Scotts Bluff and the Wildcat Hills State Park camps, with Guy Carlson as his assistant at Scotts Bluff. Several others also served there, but after almost sixty years, I cannot recall their names.¹³

Since its formation in 1933, there had been a steady flow of enrollees out of and into Company 762. Quite a few found employment; others became homesick for their families or perhaps a girlfriend, while others, tired of the camp life, quit, thinking they might find greener pastures elsewhere.

An ongoing safety program was carried out, and the accident record was excellent with only one casualty when an enrollee fell to his death at Scotts Bluff. There was occasional malingering; however, the general physical and mental health of the group seemed to be quite normal. Minor illnesses and injuries were treated by the camp doctor and his corpsmen. Dental work was referred to local dentists. No one is remembered as being "stressed out" or requiring psychological treatment. Homosexuality was almost unheard of then; and if there were any of this persuasion present, they remained in the closet. . . . Beer was sold at the canteen, and, for many, it may have been their first introduction to legal alcoholic beverages. This privilege was not abused except

when someone would occasionally become overenthusiastic and imbibe a bit too freely. There was not enough cash available except for an occasional draught. It is refreshing to note that there were no cases of drug abuse reported. . . .

By 1938 the economic outlook began to brighten, jobs were becoming available to qualified workers, and the worst of the Depression was ending. Enrollees took advantage of this and began finding other employment. It is gratifying to note the achievements of those who returned to the work force and became solid businessmen, professionals, and public leaders who enjoyed quality lives.

In the spring of 1938 Company 762 was deactivated, and enrollees wishing to remain with the corps transferred to other units. I received an appointment as park ranger at Scotts Bluff National Monument and enjoyed a rewarding career with the National Park Service, with time out for military service during World War II, and retired in 1965 after thirty years of service.¹⁴

The CCC venture was an unprecedented and highly successful experiment in relief and social welfare. It provided cash to the families and removed thousands of young men from an existence of frustrating and demoralizing idleness, provided training for army reserve officers, and boosted the economy in many local communities. Supervisory, administrative, and technical positions provided employment for many unemployed men and women. It also acted as a "headstart" program for the army during World War II, with thousands of semi-trained men ready for military service.

Participants received corollary benefits from their introduction into a new environment found in our forests, park lands, and related areas. As they implemented conservation, restoration, and protective measures, they gained a new appreciation for the resources and wonders of nature that were manifest there. This was the be-

ginning of a new and ongoing conservation and environmental protection era.

Undergoing changes in lifestyle, living in varied cultural surroundings, and associating with educated and trained technicians opened new horizons and opportunities. With study, application, and experience, many enrollees and supervisors found employment with the work agencies and enjoyed challenging and responsible careers. . . .

Thousands of acres of private and public lands continue to benefit from the conservation work. Campgrounds, recreational facilities, sturdy stone bridges, roads, trails, museums, historic structures and grounds, and a myriad of other facilities are still in service. Some of the log, stone, and masonry structures are now regarded as classics in architectural design and beauty. It is impossible to place a dollar value on the side benefits of this relief program; however, it would soar into many millions of dollars.

While the study of history and application of the wisdom learned from its lessons seem to have been placed on the back burner today, I believe that the Civilian Conservation Corps will one day be recognized as one of the most outstanding and dramatic domestic achievements of our government. In my eighty-seventh year I look back with pride on the organization and what it accomplished in conserving our natural heritage and revitalizing our human resources.

Notes

¹ Letter from author, Sonoma, Calif., to Nebraska State Historical Society, July 19, 1994.

² This writing was partially prompted by my membership in the National Association of Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni, headquartered in St. Louis. The organization has a museum and publishes a monthly *Journal* to promote the preservation of CCC history and encourage the establishment of similar programs.

³ This was the starting pay in 1933 for CCC enrollees. Other CCC members recall that even such a

small sum was an attraction. Tom Buecker, "The Best Time of My Life," *The CCC at Fort Robinson, 1933-1935*, *NEBRASKALAND* (July 1993): 43.

⁴ The original call for 250,000 CCC enrollees specified that they must be 18-25 years of age, unmarried, unemployed, and from families on relief.

⁵ The company was transferred to Chadron on June 14, 1933. *Official Annual, Nebraska-South Dakota District CCC Seventh Corps Area* (1937), 62. The Chadron and Valentine camps were administered from Fort Robinson, headquarters for the Nebraska District of the CCC as well as for the subdistrict of northwestern Nebraska. Buecker, "Best Time," 44.

⁶ On Apr. 22, 1933, enrollment of 24,000 "Local Experienced Men," or "L.E.M." was authorized at the national level.

⁷ The date was June 4, 1934. *Annual*, 63.

⁸ The *Commercial Advertiser* (Red Cloud), Oct. 15, 1934, noted, "The [CCC] officers state there were about twenty-five visitors at the camp yesterday [Oct. 14, 1934], which is about the total number of visitors they had the entire time they were located in the sand hills."

⁹ The National Park Service later substituted the title "superintendent" for that of "custodian." Dr. Cook served as custodian from June 15, 1934 to July 15, 1935. Earl R. Harris, *History of Scotts Bluff National Monument* (Gering: Oregon Trail Museum Association, 1962), 30-34. Cook, a rancher and paleontologist, was the son of James H. Cook, who founded the Agate Springs Ranch in present Sioux County. See R. Jay Roberts, "The History of Agate Springs," *Nebraska History* 47 (1966).

¹⁰ Eventually twenty-two classes were offered to members of Co. 762. The most popular were vocational. *Annual*, 172.

¹¹ Mattes is the author of *The Great Platte River Road*, first published by the Nebraska State Historical Society in 1969, and of *Platte River Road Narratives*, published by the University of Illinois Press in 1988, as well as other books and many journal articles.

¹² The Agate Springs fossil quarry near Agate Springs Ranch was acquired by ranch owner Harold J. Cook in 1914, who had earlier helped dig at the site with Dr. Erwin Barbour of the University of Nebraska. The site is now Agate Fossil Beds National Monument. See note nine.

¹³ A list of officers and regular enrollees of CCC Co. 762 in 1937 is found in *Annual*, 62-63, 172.

¹⁴ Humberger served briefly as acting custodian at Scotts Bluff National Monument (1938-39). Harris, *History of Scotts Bluff National Monument*, 48.