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## Roosevelt's Tree Army. Michigan's Civilian Conservation Corps

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### Roosevelt's Tree Army Michigan's Civilian Conservation Corps

by Roger L. Rosentreter



*Our greatest task is to put people to work. This is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously. It can be accomplished in part by direct recruiting by the Government itself, treating the task as we would treat the emergency of war, but at the same time, through this employment, accomplishing greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganize the use of our national resources.*

—Franklin D. Roosevelt  
4 March 1933

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On 2 May 1933, two hundred young men from Detroit and Hamtramck arrived at an isolated spot in the Hiawatha National Forest, west of Sault Ste. Marie. They set up tents and dubbed the area Camp Raco. Designated Company 667, the Detroiters had been outfitted, inoculated and briefly oriented at Camp Custer in Battle Creek before being shipped to the Upper Peninsula. Within months there were forty-one similar camps across northern Michigan housing nearly eight thousand young men. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) had come to Michigan.

The Civilian Conservation Corps was President Franklin Roosevelt's personal creation. As governor of New York, he had introduced a broad reforestation scheme using ten thousand men who were on public relief to plant trees in 1932. In his July 1932 Democratic Party presidential nomination acceptance speech, he had proposed employing a million men in forest work across the nation.

Five days after his 4 March 1933 inauguration, Roosevelt met with the secretaries of Agriculture, Interior and War to outline his proposed conservation relief measure. On 21 March he submitted the Emergency Conservation Work bill to Congress. The proposed civilian conservation corps would recruit 250,000 unemployed young men to work on federal and state owned land for "the prevention of forest fires, floods, and soil erosion, plant, pest and disease control." In his message to Congress, Roosevelt declared that the CCC would "conserve our precious national resources" and "pay dividends to the present and future generations." "More important," he added, "we can take a vast army of the unemployed out into healthful surroundings. We can eliminate to some extent at least the threat that enforced idleness brings to spiritual and moral stability."

On 22 March the *New York Times* predicted that Roosevelt's plan would not be received "with zealous approval in Congress" nor "appeal strongly to large numbers of the very men whom President Roosevelt hopes to benefit." The *Times* was never more wrong. After little debate and no real opposition, Congress overwhelmingly approved the relief measure. On 31 March 1933, Roosevelt signed the bill into law, and six days later he ordered the formation of the CCC. His goal was to have 250,000 men in the forest in three months.

The Civilian Conservation Corps administration consisted of a director, Robert Fechner, and an advisory board of representatives from the Departments of War, Agriculture, Interior and Labor. With the help of local boards, the Department of Labor selected the CCC enrollees. The War Department housed, clothed and fed the men, and organized and administered the camps. The Departments of Agriculture and Interior planned the work projects, recommended camp locations and supervised the work programs.

One often overlooked aspect of the birth of the CCC was the contribution of Michigan Senator James Couzens. On 23 January 1933 the Republican introduced a bill authorizing the U.S. Army to house, feed and clothe unemployed, single males. Couzens proposed that the army care for up to 300,000 needy men on its military bases. Secretary of War Patrick J. Hurley urged that "the aims of the bill could be better and more economically accomplished by localizing the problem in our cities, where a large majority of these young men are now found," and Couzens' bill was shelved. Nevertheless, the bill introduced the concept of army assistance with relief schemes.



In early 1933, Michigan Senator James Couzens (above) proposed legislation to use army camps to aid unemployed men.

On 17 April 1933 the nation's first CCC camp, Camp Roosevelt, opened in the George Washington National Forest in Virginia. By 1 July 1933 the goal of enlisting a quarter million enrollees, in over 1,300 camps, had been accomplished. At that time, it was the fastest large-scale mobilization of men (including World War I) in U.S. history.

In Michigan several factors speeded CCC organization. The hasty mobilization of the CCC had caught private industry unprepared, and manufacturers were swamped with demands for axes, hoes and shovels. In Michigan, however, the forestry schools at Michigan State College and the University of Michigan lent tools to get the state's first CCC camps going. Many of the CCC enrollees in Michigan were natives of the state and did not have as far to travel as did the enrollees from the urban areas of the East who served in the Far West. Furthermore, in the fall of 1932 the Michigan Department of Conservation (now the Department of Natural Resources) had made a survey to determine what projects might be undertaken if federal funds were allotted for conservation work. Throughout the nine-year existence of the CCC, the Department of Conservation worked closely with the federal agencies in approving and inspecting work projects. The department also managed many state CCC camps. (The others were under the aegis of the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service and the U.S. Biological Survey.)

The average Michigan CCC enrollee began his CCC experience by applying at a local selection board. "Junior" applicants, who composed 90 percent of the corps had to be single males between seventeen and twenty-three years old, unemployed, in need, U.S. citizens and not attending school. They had to be capable of physical labor, not too short (below 60 inches), not too tall (over 78 inches), nor too light (less than 107 pounds). Other conditions that might disqualify an applicant included varicose veins, venereal disease and a lack of at least "three serviceable natural masticating teeth above and below."

If chosen, a candidate enrolled for six months and agreed to send at least \$22 of his \$30 monthly wage home to his dependants. He underwent a physical examination and vaccinations, took the CCC oath and received his clothing and supplies. His clothing allotment included shoes, socks, underwear, a blue denim worksuit and an old army olive drab uniform for dress purposes. He also received a toilet kit, a towel, a mess kit, a steel cot, a cotton mattress, bedding and a round metal disk with his service number inscribed on it.

Initially, CCC camps were established as tent communities, but as winter approached, permanent structures were usually constructed. In 1936 camps were standardized to include four or five barracks, a mess hall, an officers' quarters, a schoolhouse, a bathhouse and latrine, a doctor's office and dispensary, and various other service buildings. The buildings' exteriors were creosoted or covered with tar paper. The interiors were simple; the floors, wooden. Although the buildings had electricity, they were usually poorly lit. The enrollees added exterior amenities, like gravel-lined walkways and flowers.

A regular army officer or a reserve officer called to active duty commanded the camps. The commander's staff included a junior officer, a medical officer, several members of a technical agency from the Agriculture or Interior departments, sometimes a chaplain and, after 1934, an educational advisor. Work details were commanded by a project superintendent and assisted by area residents known as "local experienced men."

Despite the army's role in administering the CCC, the camps were civilian rather than military in character. There were no military drills, no manuals of arms and no military discipline. An enrollee could be verbally disciplined or given KP duty. If he was AWOL or was caught stealing, he could be fined a maximum of \$3.00 a month or given a dishonorable discharge.

Approximately ten percent of CCC enrollees were unemployed war veterans. Veterans had to meet the same physical conditions as juniors, except for the age limit. They formed separate companies; in Michigan there were at least five veterans' camps. Michigan veterans were also kept on the active list for state employment vacancies. Besides performing various forest duties, veterans in the CCC served communities near their camps as color guards and firing squads at funerals and on other occasions.

An enrollee's day began with reveille at it 6:00 A.M. After calisthenics came breakfast. CCC food was plain, nourishing and served in abundant quantities. CCC Director Fechner described camp food as "wholesome, palatable, and of the variety that sticks to the ribs." After breakfast, enrollees policed the grounds and barracks before roll call and inspection. By 7:45 A.M. the men were on their way to their work projects. Lunch was served in the field and lasted one hour. By 4:00 P.M. the men had returned to camp for an informal recreation period that lasted until dinner, which was served at 5:30. After dinner, enrollees either attended classes or sought entertainment in nearby communities. There were no restrictions about leaving camp in the evening as long as the men were back for lights out at 10:00 P.M.

In June 1935 the *New Republic* dubbed the Civilian Conservation Corps "Roosevelt's Tree Army." Since most of the Michigan CCC camps were in national and state forests, enrollees planted seedlings, fought forest fires, eradicated diseases especially blister rust, which affects white pines-and built roads, trails, towers and firebreaks to aid in the prevention of forest fires. During its first twenty-four months, the Michigan CCC constructed over 3,000 miles of truck trails, spent 54,000 man days fighting fires, assembled 8 lookout towers, built 275 miles of firebreaks and reduced fire hazards on some 40,000 acres. Reforestation also required the establishment of nurseries. By 1936, one million hardwood seedlings were ready for planting.

Once it became certain that the CCC would be more than a temporary agency, Michigan officials undertook more complicated projects. Enrollees built two bridges, one 103 feet long over the Muskegon River, and another 170 feet long over the Manistique River. They improved hundreds of miles of Michigan game-fish streams and built log structures called deflectors to maintain pools for trout. During the first three years of the CCC, over 75 million fish were reared in hatcheries and distributed in lakes and rivers.

CCC activities extended to the Michigan state park system. The seemingly endless list of improvements includes a bathhouse at Ludington State Park, a 40-by-80-foot limestone picnic shelter at Indian Lake State Park and a 29-by-43-foot fieldstone caretaker's residence at Wilson State Park, which was equipped with running water, lights and other "modern conveniences."

The Michigan CCC also conducted groundwater surveys on several million acres of Michigan land, prepared five hundred sample rock trays for distribution to Michigan schools and, in cooperation with Michigan State College, prepared twenty farm woodlots to show farmers how to properly thin wooded areas.

The Michigan CCC also engaged in numerous wildlife projects. At Camp Cusino near Shingleton, an extensive moose research project-the only one of its kind in the nation-took place. The CCC moved moose from Isle Royale to the Cusino State Game Refuge where studies determined the animals' food requirements, mating habits and disease resistance. An experimental deer-feeding project was also conducted at Cusino.

Not far from Cusino, the men of Company 3626 established the Seney National Wildlife Refuge in 1935. These members of Camp Germfask, the only U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey camp in Michigan, transformed 95,000 acres of marshland into a domicile for migratory wildfowl. A system of dams, spillways, ditches, dikes and pools was built, and hundreds of acres of millet, celery and wild rice were planted as food for birds. More heavy machinery was operated at Camp Germfask than at any other Michigan CCC camp.

Most Michigan CCC camps were in either national or state forests. The state's only National Park Service camps were on Isle Royale, which had been designated a national park in 1931. On 13 August 1935, an advance party of twenty men from Company 2699, led by Captain Edward S. Thomas, arrived off the island in Siskiwit Bay. Forced to wade ashore, the men cleared a living area for the remainder of the company, which arrived later that month. The 2699th completed Camp Siskiwit and performed general forestry work before returning to the mainland in October. The following spring the company returned to Isle Royale and constructed Camp Rock Harbor at present-day Daisy Farm Landing.

On 23 July, forest fires fed by strong winds broke out on the island. They created so much smoke that vessels along the Keweenaw shoreline were forced to sound their foghorns. As the fires worsened, more men from CCC camps in Michigan and Wisconsin were shipped to the island. In mid-August the conservation editor of the *Grand Rapids Press*, Ben East, who spent three days on the island, reported that the eighteen hundred men fighting the fires were doing a remarkable job against enormous odds. "I'm not in any sense a trained firefighter," East observed, "but I do know

'guts' . . . and the CCC lads on Isle Royale have 'em."

Described by East as "the largest fire army" to ever fight a single blaze in Michigan, the men faced numerous challenges. The island lacked roads, and its rocky terrain made plows and tractors useless in establishing firelines. The men dug one hundred miles of trenches by hand with axes and shovels. There was little available sand, and as East reported, "The soil is leaf mold and humus, lying in a shallow layer over clay and rock. The soil itself burns." While there was an abundance of water, portable pumps were required to drive the water across ridges and swamps to the fires. (Eighty-pound gas tanks were carried inland to keep the pumps running.)

The CCC enrollees fought the fires in twelve-hour shifts. The day shift awoke at 3:30 A.M., ate breakfast and walked several miles inland to relieve those who had fought the fires by lantern light throughout the night. Except for a lunch break, the crew worked until relieved by the night crew at 6:00 P.M. East noted that one crew of three hundred men had continued at this pace for nineteen days without a break. The fire fighters endured food shortages, rotting food stores and poor sanitary conditions that resulted in a mild dysentery epidemic. In spite of these setbacks, they checked the fires, which destroyed 35,000 of the island's 132,000 acres. According to East, without the efforts of the CCC men, "some of the finest scenic spots on the Island would have been laid bare."

One hundred men volunteered to spend the winter of 1936-37 on Isle Royale eliminating fire menaces. With the safety of winter snows, the men burned the slash and half-burned trees from the summer firelines. Although Isle Royale was blocked by ice for up to five months, the enrollees were not "utterly isolated." A ski-equipped airplane was available for monthly trips to the mainland and for emergencies. The CCC remained on Isle Royale until September 1941.

Working in the woods and around machinery was dangerous. Wallace J. Blair remembers the death of one of his buddies while they were dynamiting stumps at Camp Johannesburg on Bear Lake. Forest fires also took a toll. In May 1937, three CCC camps were brought in to fight a fire in the Huron National Forest. One foreman, Andrew D. Lindgren, and his men were trapped by the blaze. Lindgren directed his men to safety, but failed to escape himself. He posthumously received the North American Forest Fire Medal for bravery.

The CCC camps balanced work with recreation. Each camp had a canteen where enrollees could buy film, candy, razor blades, soda pop and 3.2 beer. Profits from the canteens were used for such camp extras as billiard tables. Each camp also had a library with an average of 1,000 books and magazines. In 1937 Camp Germfask boasted over 4,000 volumes. Most camps published a camp newspaper. In 1935 the *Mockingbird*, the newspaper at Camp Steuben, was judged the best CCC camp newspaper in the nation.

Many camps fielded teams in basketball, baseball, six-man football, ice hockey and boxing. Near St. Ignace, Company 3631 constructed facilities for tennis, volleyball, horseshoes and track and field. In 1936, Company 3032 at Camp Manistique won the Fort Brady District ice hockey and basketball championships. The baseball team also tied for the championship of the Central League-an independent league "which played high class baseball." Boxing, too, was popular. Black enrollees at Camp Walkerville in Bitely held Friday night fights that often drew crowds of up to 2,000 area residents. And Al Fehler of Company 3601 near Ironwood fought his way to the Golden Gloves Tournament in Chicago. Others from Fehler's camp skied in a local tournament with "several of the best jumpers in the world."

For more subdued recreation, enrollees at Camp Escanaba River had an orchestra that performed twenty-six times on radio station WBEO in Marquette. And in the summer of 1936 the nine-piece Camp St. Martins Drum and Bugle Corps played at St. Ignace, Newberry and the U.P. State Fair in Escanaba. At the fair the corps won \$25.00 and an invitation to the Michigan State Fair in Detroit. However, work projects forced it to decline this honor.

Trips into nearby towns for Saturday night dances were such an integral part of CCC recreation that ballroom dancing was taught at the camps. (Half of the enrollees entered the camps unable to dance.) Enrollee Bernard Bridges recalled that many of the men at Camp Big Bay, near Marquette, spent Saturday nights at the tavern in Hungry Hollow. There, nickel-a-glass beer sometimes heightened antagonism between local lumbermen and enrollees trying to impress the settlement's dozen eligible women.

Since enrollees had no cars, they went to and from town by truck. According to Ralph Newman, "the most memorable thing about the trips was the awful cold and darkness sitting in the backs of the trucks without heat." If an enrollee missed the truck, he had to walk or hitch a ride. Author Charles Symon tells of two Upper Peninsula enrollees who missed the truck back to camp and were still missing the next morning. A project superintendent and an officer found them stranded in a jack pine where they had "escaped from wolves." Just then a loon cried out from a nearby pond. One enrollee jumped into the officer's car, and the other began to climb the tree again.

Believing that CCC enrollees could become "better and more employable citizens" through training and education, President Roosevelt called for a nationwide, Washington-directed CCC education program in late 1933 to replace local camp efforts. The new program added an educational advisor, usually an unemployed male teacher, to each camp. The advisor, the company commander and the camp's technical service people tried to offer a comprehensive educational program. Classes, held at night to avoid interfering with work projects, included academic, vocational and job training, as well as health, first aid and lifesaving. Attendance was voluntary.

The educational advisors faced many problems. Materials were inadequate, and some camp commanders were uncooperative. Students ranged from men with no formal schooling to those holding university degrees. One Michigan educational advisor recalled reading to illiterates and teaching foreign languages and welding "among other things."

In 1937 the CCC began requiring that enrollees spend ten hours a week taking academic or vocational training classes. Vocational subjects ranged from automotive mechanics and carpentry to drafting and cooking. Proficiency certificates were awarded upon completion of a course. Michigan officials reported that the average CCC camp provided work experience and supplemental training in "at least 30 different civilian payroll jobs."

Michigan was a leader in developing CCC educational programs. Through an arrangement with the Michigan superintendent of public instruction, in March 1935, seventy-four CCC enrollees from eighteen camps across the Lower Peninsula received their eighth-grade diplomas at commencement exercises at Alpena, East Tawas, Manton and Baldwin. By June 1940, nine hundred eighth-grade diplomas had been issued in the program, which was one of the first of its kind in the United States.

Michigan CCC members could also take high-school and college-freshmen correspondence courses through the University of Michigan. By late 1936 correspondence study centers with supervisors were operating in at least twenty-seven Lower Peninsula CCC camps. The men paid fifty cents for each course plus the cost of textbooks. As of November 1936, over one thousand CCC enrollees in both the Upper and Lower peninsulas had participated in high-school correspondence classes, and at least 144 were taking college courses in the Lower Peninsula.

Nationally, 90 percent of all CCC enrollees took classes. Over 100,000 men were taught to read and write. Over 25,000 received eighth-grade diplomas, and 5,000 earned high-school diplomas. During its later years, the CCC annually produced 45,000 truck drivers, 7,500 bridge builders and 1,500 welders. Still, the educational program of the CCC was not an unqualified success. Historian John Salmond has noted that "academic courses, while doubtless interesting in themselves, were of limited practical value to youths who would almost certainly lead non-academic lives." Salmond also questioned "whether instruction in digging ditches and building dams was fitting the enrollees for life in an increasingly urbanized society."

There were other problems in the CCC. Racial discrimination in recruiting enrollees was prohibited. But this did not keep the CCC, with the acquiescence of President Roosevelt, from minimizing black participation when confronted with white hostility. In 1934, Director Fechner ordered that strict segregation be maintained in all companies; and after receiving protests over the location of black CCC camps near various communities, he curtailed black enrollment in 1935. He complained in late 1934, "There is hardly a locality in this country that looks favorably, or even with indifference, on the location of a Negro CCC camp in their vicinity." Nationally, almost 200,000 of the 2.5 million CCC enrollees were black.

Blacks composed only 3.5 percent of Michigan's population in the early 1930s, and some early state CCC camps were integrated. But CCC annuals for 1937 show no integrated companies.

Michigan's first all black CCC company, the 670th, was created in late April 1933. The company, located at Camp Mack Lake near Mio, worked on forestry projects in the Huron National Forest. In 1935 the 670th relocated to Camp Bitely near Freesoil. Three other black companies—the 2693th, 2694th and 2695th—were created in 1935. At Camp Axim, the 2695th helped build the Caberfae Ski Area.

In April 1933 the CCC program was extended to American Indians. Michigan's lone Indian CCC camp, [Marquette](#), operated in western Chippewa County, north of Eckerman. Dedicated on 25 April 1935, Camp Marquette served Indians from Michigan and several other Great Lakes states. The Indians were not governed by the same administrative rules as other CCC enrollees, and there was no age limit for them. Indians at Camp Marquette did a variety of jobs, including road construction, timber stand improvement and tree planting. One worker allegedly remarked, "The white man stole our land in the first place, cut off the timber, and now they are making us plant it again."

In his 4 January 1935 message to Congress, President Roosevelt proposed the extension and enlargement of the CCC. With overwhelming congressional approval, the CCC grew to over 500,000 by September 1935. During the

summer of 1935, there were 103 camps in Michigan, and by November, enrollment had peaked at almost 17,000.

In 1936, with an election looming, President Roosevelt sought to reduce federal expenditures. He called for a reduction of the CCC to 300,000 by 1 July 1936. Also subject to reelection, congressmen opposed closing camps in their districts. They approved additional funding and slowed the president's efforts to reduce the corps. Nonetheless, the CCC never again exceeded its 1935 enrollment.

President Roosevelt's 1936 bid to reduce the CCC revealed the extensive popularity of the corps. In *The Democratic Roosevelt*, Rexford Tugwell claims that the CCC "became too popular for criticism." Even 1936 presidential nominee Alfred M. Landon endorsed the CCC and promised to continue it if elected. The *Detroit News* admitted that though the CCC was expensive, "the prompt and unmistakable dividends it has paid, both in valuable work accomplished in the nation's forests and in the physical and moral benefits accruing to the young men who have enlisted," made it "a real investment in the National well-being." In July 1936, one poll found that 82 percent of Americans supported the CCC. Three years later, another poll listed the corps as the New Deal's third greatest accomplishment.

Michigan communities fought to keep their camps. In September 1937, Iron River businessmen sent twenty-nine separate telegrams, as well as a petition, to Washington officials to protest the closing of a nearby camp. During the winter of 1938, the Menominee Chamber of Commerce pleaded with President Roosevelt to keep an area camp open.

Each camp spent an estimated \$5,000 per month in the local market to buy food stuffs and supplies. Moreover, camp members frequently aided communities during emergencies. Enrollees logged hundreds of man-days searching for missing persons, and the men at Camp Pori near Mass City helped local law enforcement officials apprehend a murderer. Camp Higgins Lake enrollees fought two fires, saving area farm buildings and homes. Paul Gilmet, who served at Camp Wellston, aided the camp doctor delivering a baby; and on 31 July 1936, enrollee Earl Mitchell of Iron Mountain saved a drowning woman in Crooked Lake near Watersmeet. After one of the worst snow storms of the 1935-36 winter, black enrollees at Camp Walkerville "worked hand in hand" with area residents opening roads and hauling foodstuffs and medical supplies to the needy.

The benefits of the CCC extended well beyond the camps' immediate localities. By the end of its first eighteen months, the Michigan CCC was sending \$112,000 monthly to 4,500 families. Moreover, as one mother explained to CCC Director Fechner, the corps was praiseworthy because "the boys are safe there. They are young and inexperienced and need someone reliable to teach them and I think the discipline and strictness are what they need now in their teenage period."

Because enrollees learned basic work skills, industrial safety, good work attitudes and physical conditioning, businessmen also supported the corps. Appearing before a U.S. Senate subcommittee in June 1941, C. Don McKin, executive vice-president of the National Standard Parts Association in Detroit, declared, "We have come to feel that the Corps is one of the finest agencies that has come out of the Administration. It has a purpose and refreshingly, from a businessman's standpoint, it has been managed on a business basis and has the fundamentals which inspire the confidence of the businessmen."

Surprisingly, the corps was not popular among some Michigan congressmen. In 1937, President Roosevelt sought both to renew the CCC for two more years and to make it a permanent agency. Congress opposed the notion of CCC permanency, primarily because the administration failed to adequately address the problems of a long-term budget and improved organization. One of the more vocal opponents of even extending the corps was Michigan Congressman Fred Crawford. On 11 May, Crawford charged that the CCC took young men out of the rural communities and surrounding areas and transported them "to some camp in the woods to participate in a face-lifting operation on Mother Earth, not necessarily essential at this time when toilers are needed to help produce wheat and staples for the food basket of the Nation." The Saginaw Republican added that the corps cost too much and contributed to the national debt. He concluded, "I would rather have a boy of mine ... grow up in private industry and agriculture than in any C.C.C. camp. . . . I believe the proper place is on American farms and in American industries under private control." Republican Congressman Earl C. Michner of Adrian agreed, observing that it was "practically impossible for farmers to find a former CCC enrollee to work on a farm." Michner attributed this to the fact that the farm work was "too hard" and the hours "too long" for the former enrollees. The House voted to renew the CCC by a margin of 389 to 7.

During the summer of 1939, Congress extended the life of the CCC until 1 July 1943. In Michigan, 46 camps operated with approximately 7,400 enrollees. Nationally, corps enrollment stood at 300,000 enrollees and 1,500 camps. One Michigan CCC project then nearing completion was the Muskegon River Dam, a five hundred-foot-long structure described as the "largest and one of the most important Michigan State CCC projects." Over one hundred tons of steel were used to build the dam, which flooded 2,500 acres to create a breeding place for wild waterfowl.

By the end of 1939, the death of Director Fechner, a decline in morale among CCC supporting agencies, uncertainty due to the outbreak of war in Europe and proposed budget cuts foreshadowed trouble for the CCC. Enrollee desertion had increased, and as the economy improved, better quality candidates were no longer available or interested in the CCC. In response to the worsening international situation, noncombative military training was made a mandatory part of CCC education in 1940.

At the beginning of 1941, the CCC had 300,000 enrollees. Ten months later it had only 160,000. In Michigan the 46 camps and 9,400 enrollees of 1941 shrank to 14 camps and 2,600 enrollees by mid-1942. In May 1942, the *Detroit Free Press* reported that 51 percent of the public favored the abolition of the corps. National polls yielded similar results.

Nevertheless, President Roosevelt fought to retain the CCC. In May he asked for \$50 million to keep 150 camps open. On the House floor Michigan Representative Albert J. Angel led the forces favoring abolition. Declaring that the CCC had done "a great deal of good," in spite of "a great deal of waste and extravagance," the Muskegon Republican proclaimed that the corps was no longer necessary. Congressman Clare Hoffman of Allegan, a vocal New Deal opponent, added, "We did not have the power to send aid, not even food and medicinal supplies to the men in Bataan . . . yet we have money to carry on this C.C.C."

On 5 June 1942 the House defeated the CCC appropriation. After a House/Senate conference, Congress provided \$8 million to liquidate the CCC. The Civilian Conservation Corps was dead.

The accomplishments of the Civilian Conservation Corps are astounding. In the nation's first massive effort to restore its natural resources, the corps employed over three million men. These men planted 2.3 billion trees, spent 6.4 million man-days fighting forest fires and eradicated diseases and pests on 21 million acres of land.

Michigan's 102,814 CCC participants—eighth highest among all states—occupied an average of fifty-seven camps annually. Only five states had a higher average. More impressively, Michigan enrollees planted 484 million trees—more than twice as many as any other state. They spent 140,000 man-days fighting forest fires, planted 156 million fish and constructed 7,000 miles of truck trails, 504 bridges and 222 buildings. They revitalized the Michigan State Park system, established Isle Royale National Park and built campgrounds in Michigan's national forests. Total CCC expenditures in Michigan reached \$95 million, and enrollees sent over \$20 million to their dependants.

The nation's defense potential was also aided by the corps. By 1942 many young CCC men had learned how to take orders, the rudiments of sanitation, first aid and personal cleanliness, and other skills that were directly transferable in time of war.

Described by John Salmond as a "conservator of human beings," the Civilian Conservation Corps improved the morale, health and education of millions of young men. Former enrollees offer many positive memoirs. William T. Lawson of Traverse City met his wife while stationed at Camp Kalkaska; Oliver Edwards came "face-to-face" with his first black bear while at Camp Kentucky; and Grand Rapids enrollee Sigmund Palaseic, who joined the CCC because he was "starving," ate his first meals in disbelief that "there was that much food in the world." Less tangible was the sense of pride in their country instilled in the enrollees. As one enrollee observed, "As an Americanizing influence, the CCC is perhaps without equal."

Michigan's CCC camps have disappeared, but the legacy of the corps—the forests, parks and conservation efforts—remains. As President Roosevelt told the enrollees in an April 1936 radio address, "The promptness with which you seized the opportunity to engage in honest work, the willingness with which you have performed your daily tasks and the fine spirit you have shown in winning the respect of the communities in which your camps have been located, merits the admiration of the entire country."

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Primary sources used in preparing this article include the *Congressional Record*; Fort Brady District and Camp Custer District *Annals* (1937); Michigan Department of Conservation *Biennial Reports*; "Objectives and Results of the CCC Program," (1938); and the *Annual Reports* of the director of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Secondary sources include *We Can Do It: A History of the CCC in Michigan, 1933-42* (1983), by Charles A. Symon; *The Civilian Conservation Corps: A New Deal Study* (1967), by John A. Salmond; *Roosevelt's Forest Army: A History of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942* (1981), by Perry H. Merrill; "Civilian Conservation Corps: Letter from the Director of the Legislative Reference Service," *Senate Documents*, no. 216, 77th Congress, 2nd, session; *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, edited by Samuel I. Rosenman; and information sheets collected from CCC veterans by the Michigan Historical Museum.

See the photographs that accompany this article:

- Artifacts
    - [Patch: Fort Brady District](#)
    - [Patch: Camp Custer District](#)
    - [Pillow cover: "Souvenir of U.S.A. Civilian Conservation Corps"](#)
  - Camp Scenes
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    - [Construction projects](#) at Indian Lake and Ludington state parks; a bridge over the Manistique River
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