



QUARTERLY

NORTHEASTERN NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPANISH RANCH

SPANISH RANCH LETTERS
COMPILED BY EDNA B. PATTERSON

CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS
ELKO COUNTY: 1933-1942
BY DIANA L. NEEF

QUARTERLY INDEX: 1983
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WINTER 1984 (84-1)

ELKO, NEVADA



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Tents served as temporary housing for the CCC men until permanent wooden barracks were erected at the Lamoille Canyon camp.

CCC

Barracks at the Lamoille Canyon CCC camp. The installation was started in 1934 and was closed in 1937. The CCC men built the road up the canyon.



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CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS ELKO COUNTY: 1933-1942 BY DIANA L. NEEF

Today's state of the economy is often compared with that of the Great Depression. There is a constant search for a method to employ the millions looking for jobs. One method being considered is to revive Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930's and 1940's. The National Association of Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni is dedicated to making the "CCC II" a reality.¹

In his New Deal plans the CCC was one of Roosevelt's many experiments to put the country back to work and get it on its feet economically. Roosevelt's scheme to develop a "tree army" was not a unique idea. Many other countries had already employed such a concept; by 1932 the governments of Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Austria and Germany had established conservation camps for their unemployed. The German Labor Service was to become the best known of these and the one most easily compared to the CCC.²

On March 9, 1933 Roosevelt called an emergency session of Congress to hear and authorize his program. He asked the law makers to grant him emergency powers and in return he would have 250,000 men in work camps by the end of July, 1933.³

There was much opposition to the president's proposal. The similarity to the German Labor Service threatened the approach of socialism and delayed the passage of the program in Congress. Also, organized labor felt the corps would take jobs that union members should hold. But, above all, organized labor feared that the CCC would lead to the regimentation of labor because Roosevelt wanted to enlist the aid of the U.S. Army for transportation, training and administrative purposes.

Despite the unfavorable reaction to the project by the opposition, Senate Bill S598 was introduced on March 27, 1933, passed both houses and was signed by the president on March 31.⁴

The program had great public support. Young men across the country flocked to enroll and most states had delegations in Washington to increase their chances of having a camp located in their state.

Nevada, like other states, hoped to participate. On March 30, 1933, the State Relief Committee, in conjunction with the Reno Chamber of Commerce, met with the Nevada delegation to Congress about the possibility of securing one of the "labor concentration camps."

Nevada Senators Key Pittman and Patrick McCarran, with Congressman James Scrugham, prepared a proposal to present to Congress outlining Nevada's need for relief from unemployment. The proposal outlined some of the work needed to be done in the state: reforesting burned-over and cut-over areas on the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada and reforesting other parts of the state where lumbering and forest fire destruction had been extensive.⁵

No specific location for the CCC camps had been discussed, so Elko's Mayor George Russell, Jr. suggested that Elko County seek aid from the reforestation bill. He urged the Elko Chamber of Commerce to convince representatives of the advantages of including a camp in the Ruby Mountains in their proposal. This and other campsites, one in the Charleston Mountains near Las Vegas and one in the Schell Creek Range near Ely, were added to the



EDNA B. PATTERSON COLLECTION

Lined up for inoculations at the CCC camp in Lamoille Canyon.

proposal. Later, camps at Dixie National Forest, Nevada National Forest and another Elko County installation at Gold Creek were added.

Included with the Nevada proposal was a letter by Scrugham recommending organization of a "prospecting army." This group would be sent over the hills of Nevada and other mining states under the same terms of employment as the reforestation army except that the recruits would be placed on a fifty-fifty grubstake basis. The federal government, the grubstaker, was to receive fifty percent of the net returns from any paying prospects developed and the locator would get the remaining half.⁶

Congress approved Nevada's request for its numerous camps but Scrugham's proposition for a "prospecting army" was ignored. The lawmakers appointed Cecil W. Creel, secretary of the Nevada Relief Committee, as director of the reforestation work in the state. He would later be instrumental in establishing the many CCC camps in Elko County. Through his appointment, Creel was to select men for the reforestation and flood control work camps. Creel stated, on April 13, 1933, "...men, ages 18 to 25 will be enrolled starting April 24. The first men will come from Reno and Las Vegas and other points receiving relief."⁷

Meanwhile, Elko Chamber of Commerce officials decided that funding to build a road up Lamoille Canyon and another road through Owyhee Canyon leading to Mountain City was worth going after. The Lamoille Canyon road was greatly desired by the people of Elko County who hoped to make the canyon into a weekend recreation area. Likewise, the Mountain City road was pursued by people involved with a booming copper producer, the Rio Tinto Mine, who hoped to gain an all-weather highway. The Mountain City project was later abandoned because of rumors that a railroad was to be built on the same proposed roadbed.

Harry Bartlett, president of the Elko Chamber of Commerce, telegraphed Creel affirming that Elko County was indeed interested in getting a CCC camp. On April 17, the county received confirmation that there would be camps located in the area. They were also told that over four hundred men would be stationed at the camps. This meant, to the local people, that over \$220,000 would be spent in the coming months. It was announced in the **Elko Daily Free Press** that "the men will come from the crowded cities of the East; Elko



Lieutenants Charvez and Rycroft at the Lamoille Canyon CCC camp.

County will only be allowed to contribute ten percent of the men to be enrolled. The work these men will perform under this plan in Nevada will not mean the planting of trees but of road and trail building in the national forests."⁸ By May 19 the preparation of the camps for workers had started and, within a month, actual work had begun.

Elko County had several CCC camps, included were encampments at Tuscarora, Lamoille Canyon, Gold Creek, Angel Lake and the Hubbard Ranch. Another nearby camp was at Cherry Creek in White Pine County.

Jim Meeks of Elko was 19 at the time he joined the CCC. He recalled that he had just graduated from high school and was hoping to continue on to college. After working the entire summer for the Tennessee Valley Authority on a rural electrification program he managed to earn only \$152. Summer was over and so was his job with the TVA and he didn't have enough money to start college. He decided to buy a bus ticket to Oregon and find a job in the lumber mills.⁹

He recalled: "I was waiting to get on the bus and a school friend happened by and asked me why I wasn't in school and I told him I didn't have enough money. But that I was going to Oregon to try and earn some. He told me that I didn't need to waste money on a ticket because his uncle, the local CCC registration officer, could get me out west free. He said I only had to stay six months and I could get out. Six months didn't mean anything to me in those days. I went up and visited this old wart-healer, was about all he was, I doubt if he could even read or write. Well, I asked this boy's uncle if he could send me to Portland and he told me that he could send me anywhere in the world I wanted to go. That just about scared me off. But I decided that joining the 'C's' was a smart thing to do and three months later I found myself in Elko, of all places."¹⁰

"First they sent me to a Louisiana army camp, what they called a conditioning camp. There they taught us how to make our beds and line up for inspection and told us to shine our shoes and if they didn't like it we had to do it again. After two weeks there they sent us through the pipeline to our station. They had asked me to give them my three choices of camps — like the military they sent me somewhere else."¹¹

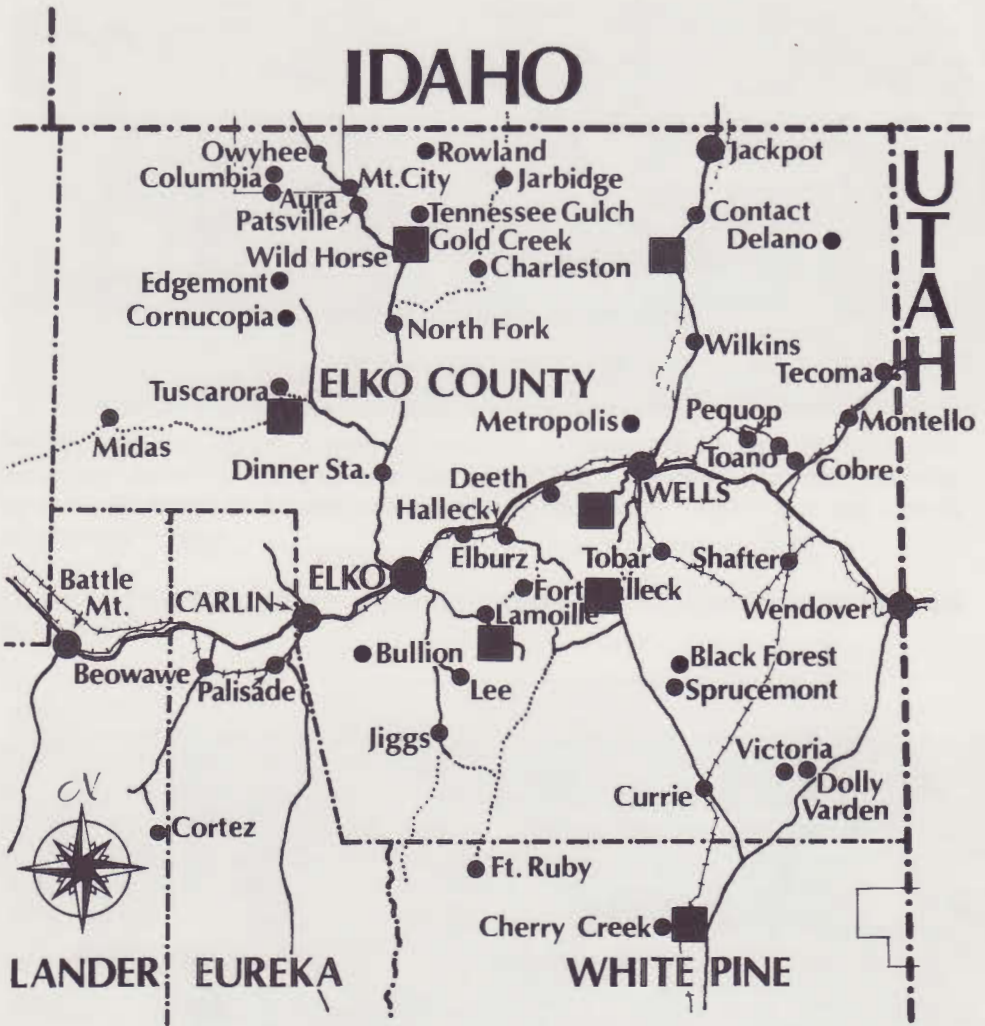
"I arrived in Elko in January, 1940 and the next day they sent me to a place 26 miles south



4429th Company, Civilian Conservation Corps, at Tuscarora on June 12, 1938. First Lieutenant Robert J. Moore commanded with Robert F. Jameson as project superintendent, Dr. Everill W. Fowlks, camp surgeon, and Aland Forgeon was the camp's educational adviser.

Tents of the 4429th Company, Civilian Conservation Corps, Camp DG-83 at Tuscarora in June, 1939.





■ CCC CAMPS IN NORTHEASTERN NEVADA

NORTHEASTERN

NEVADA

of Wells. It was cold. Being a southern boy I had never seen 13 degrees above zero, much less the 13 below temperature on the day I got to the Warm Springs CCC camp. Other than being scared half to death, I managed to survive.¹²

Meeks told of his experiences at Warm Springs. His major field work was helping resurvey the area.

"In past days they just tied something around a wagon wheel and each time it went over they counted it. The CCC actually chained and measured exact distances and tried to find corners. It was quite a chore but they still use that survey today. Out west the work wasn't as hard as in the southern camps. Nevada had a lot of camps but many were summer camps. In some places they would set up a few tents and a kitchen and go to work."¹³

After a short time in field work, Meeks was promoted into office work. He was one of only three out of 300 men who had finished high school so they were the first to receive promotions. His job included holding inspections and handing out pay every month — pay added up to \$30 a month and \$25 of that was sent home. Meeks said his parents, who lived on a farm, always sent his \$25 back to him. During his last eight months in the CCC he was a first sergeant.¹⁴

He recalled, "You were really in the army, the only thing was that instead of out marching and learning to fight wars, you were trying to improve the country from a conservation standpoint."¹⁵

After discharge from the CCC, Meeks moved to Wells to marry a local girl and start a laundry. Eventually he moved his business to Elko where it is still thriving today.

Meeks said, "Thirty of us CCC boys married girls from Wells. Many of the CCC guys are still around; there are some in Elko and Wells today, there's a casino owner in Carson City and there are a lot of the old boys at Hawthorne."¹⁶

When World War II started Meeks went into the U.S. Army.

He said, "You could always tell who had been in the CCC — they already knew how to make beds, shine shoes and stand inspection. There wasn't a lot of difference being in the CCC and the army."¹⁷

The CCC declined in the years of 1940 to 1942. Like so many worthwhile government agencies, the CCC fell victim to Capitol Hill power struggles. First, Congress cut the funding, then, ironically, President Roosevelt pared down the number of men and camps in an effort to balance the budget and gain votes in the upcoming election. The final blow came when Pearl Harbor was bombed and the nation was plunged into war. The CCC simply could not compete with the military for manpower and all the camps were gone within a period of six months.

Many people will never forget what the Civilian Conservation Corps did for a troubled nation and its young men and that is all the justification the CCC needs.

FOOTNOTES:

- 1 John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942*. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1967), p.5
- 2 Fred E. Leake, *Roosevelt's Tree Army: A Brief History of the Civilian Conservation Corps*. (Manassa, Virginia: National Association on Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni, 1980), p.1
- 3 Leake, p.1
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 "Nevada Labor Camp is Sought Under New Bill," *Elko Daily Free Press*, March 30, 1933, p.1
- 6 "Reforestation Aid for Nevada Sought by Representatives," *Elko Daily Free Press*, April 6, 1933, p.1
- 7 "Creel in Charge of Reforestation," *Elko Daily Free Press*, April 14, 1933, p.1
- 8 "Elko County Allotted 400 Men Under Reforestation Aid Plan," *Elko Daily Free Press*, April 17, 1933, p.1
- 9 Jim Meeks, owner of Vogue Laundry, Elko, Nevada; interview on April 14, 1983

- 10 Ibid.
 11 Ibid.
 12 Ibid.
 13 Ibid.
 14 Ibid.
 15 Ibid.
 16 Ibid.
 17 Ibid.

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- Elko Daily Free Press:** "Creel in Charge of Reforestation," April 14, 1933; "Elko County Allotted 400 Men Under Reforestation Aid Plan," April 17, 1933; "Nevada Labor Camp is Sought Under New Bill," March 30, 1933; "Reforestation Aid for Nevada Sought by Representatives," April 6, 1933
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- Meeks, Jim. Owner of Vogue Laundry, Elko, Nevada. Interview on April 14, 1983.
- McClusky, Jack. Editor, publisher, **Mineral County Independent News**, Hawthorne, Nevada. Interview.
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THOMAS LEE CLARK, FOX FOTO, ELKO

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Diana L. Neef's article about the Civilian Conservation Corps was an assignment in her English Composition class at Northern Nevada Community College in Elko. It is her first published work.

She was born March 5, 1965 in Las Vegas but was raised in Elko. She is a 1983 graduate of Elko High School. Her parents are Nancy and Jerry Neef. Diana is a freshman at Utah State University, Logan, where she is majoring in landscape architecture. While in school she earned a band scholarship and the Knapp Scholarship. She likes sewing, band, traveling, photography and golf.

The staff of the quarterly and the society board of directors thank the author for the opportunity to publish and showcase work performed in the field of original research at the local college.