

Founding of the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC)

Part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal during the Depression of the 1930s was the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps. The CCC was designed to provide jobs for thousands of unemployed young men and to work towards conservation of our natural resources. The very first CCC camp was right here in Shenandoah County. Called Camp Roosevelt, it was established on April 3, 1933 in the George Washington Forest, nine miles from Edinburg.

The history related here, taken from the website of the Camp Roosevelt CCC Legacy Foundation, tells us of the experience of a young man, George Dant, who served there. He was in the first group of men at the Camp and describes their arrival: "It was late afternoon when approximately 200 men walked to the crest of the mountain just above Camp Roosevelt. Looking down the road, there was nothing but open sky and one single canvas covered army truck in a 10-acre clearing. The local mountain and townspeople were standing around the fringes....They had come from Crisman Hollow, Edinburg, Mt. Jackson and Luray and as far away as New Market. These folks, waiting for something to happen, would be disappointed as the CCC boys straggled in....many of them had never before been in the mountains. The supply convoy had become separated and lost. (A storm arose and there was no shelter)....The mess officer, Sergeant Moose arrived and quickly grasped the situation (He and the cook retreated towards town)....returning after virtually clearing out the towns of hot dogs, hamburgers, salmon and bread."

The history continues, telling us that after a few days, organization began to take place. The arrival of LEMs (Locally Experienced Men) brought stability. These LEMs were the newfound brothers, partners, friends and dads of all the enrollees, who taught, trained, guided and transformed city boys into men of the next generation.

By 1934 the men were sleeping in barracks, not tents. The camp expanded and by 1942 there were 24 buildings, including 6 barracks, a recreation hall, education building, wash house, officer's quarters, infirmary, mess hall and kitchen, Army office, garage and truck shed.

The crews completed a variety of jobs. They built telephone lines, roads and bridges; planted trees, fought forest fires, stocked streams with fish, stocked the mountain with deer and worked on road side improvement. They also constructed Elizabeth Furnace Recreation Area, New Market Gap and Little Fort Recreation Areas. They built or improved Crisman Hollow road and SR 678 that runs through Ft. Valley.

One night a week they dressed in civilian clothes and drove the trucks to Edinburg. If you missed the 11:00 pm return ride, you had to walk the 9 miles back. Camp Roosevelt closed in 1942.

This moment from the past was presented by the Shenandoah County Historical Society.