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# GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

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Volume 25 Issue 3

Groton, Vermont 05046

Summer 2012

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## CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS

### At Groton State Forest 1933—1942

#### **NOTICE MEETING CHANGE**

June 12 at 7 PM in the United Methodist Church, Groton, VT  
Program by Dwight (Bud) Smith  
Montpelier & Wells River RR  
and Barre & Chelsea RR

#### **2012 OFFICERS**

President Richard Brooks  
Vice President Deane Page  
Secretary Josephine French  
Treasurer Joan Haskell (resigned)

#### **APPOINTED STAFF**

Web Site Editor Donald Smith  
Newsletter Editor J. Willard Benzie

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The Great Depression resulted from the near collapse of the nation's economy. Farmers had been sliding into hard times since the end of World War I. By 1929 many were losing their farms. But much of the rest of the nation was oblivious to the impending catastrophe. The Roaring Twenties were good times in many parts of the country.

Then, in October, 1929, the stock market crashed, and it became clear to everyone – hard times were here. Once the stock market crashed, the rest of the economy fell like a deck of cards. Large banks failed. Other banks were weakened as customers withdrew all their money. The disaster in rural areas spread to the cities, where people started to lose their homes. Citizens who had held respectable jobs were forced to go door-to-door,

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begging for food, clothing, or money. By 1932, twenty five percent of the work-force was unemployed.

Desperation overcame the nation. Angry WW I veterans formed an army of protesters who marched to Washington, DC to demand early payment of their wartime service pensions. The veterans' army was not the only threatening activity. Communist groups such as the John Reed Clubs and the Young Communist League increased their memberships. Americans were desperate for change.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was inaugurated President on March 9, 1933 and immediately declared a "bank holiday," which closed all banks in an effort to stabilize the monetary situation. On March 31, Congress passed the Emergency Conservation Work (ECW) bill authorizing establishment of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). On April 5, President Roosevelt signed the executive order naming Robert Fechner Director of ECW, partly because of his connection to organized labor. Labor unions had opposed the program claiming the pay of \$30 a month was too low and would undermine pay scales in the regular workplace. Others opposed the legislation as a misguided attempt to solve social problems by putting the unemployed young into an army, as Mussolini and Hitler had done in Italy and Germany. FDR used the radio to speak directly to the people in their homes in a series of "Fireside Chats" to gain support for the programs.

The purpose of the CCC program was to put unemployed young men to work in useful conservation projects around the country. The plan was swiftly put in motion. Within 3 months, over 275,000 enrollees and supervisors were signed up across the nation and began work on conservation projects planned by foresters, or, as the case might have been, park service rangers, soil conservationists and extension educators.

In the 9 years from 1933 until the CCC program phase-out in January 1942, there were over 3 million enrollees and more than 1,600 camps throughout the country. Many CCC projects included fire-fighting, tree-planting, road-building, development of parks,

forests and erosion control of farm land.

The first call for mobilization of the Civilian Conservation Corps came in the state of Virginia on April 17, 1933 when Camp Roosevelt was established. Soon, there were CCC camps in every state. In Vermont, the earliest camps were activated in June 1933. Vermont was originally allocated four CCC camps, but thanks to the efforts of Perry H. Merrill, State Forester, many more were established. Merrill's earlier foresight in developing long range conservation, flood control, and forest management activities, and his subsequent lobbying of CCC National Director Robert Fechner, substantially increased funding of CCC activities in Vermont. Thirty camps operated in Vermont in 1937, and between 1933 and 1942, a total of 40,868 individuals worked in Vermont CCC camps: about one-quarter were Vermonters (11, 243).

### **Groton State Forest camps**

The Vermont Historical Society in cooperation with Woodsmoke Productions interviewed several people in 1988, who were involved with the CCC program, including State Forester, Perry Merrill, and former Groton resident, Charles Lord, for radio broadcasts of The Green Mountain Chronicles "Fighting the Depression: The C.C.C." Following are excerpts from their interviews:

Enrollees were picked by the Town's overseer of the poor and their names were sent to the Army Headquarters at Fort Ethan Allen where they had to pass a physical examination, if chosen they could enlist for six months. The Army took care of the camps, the food, clothing, and shelter. The Army was administratively in charge of the men, and turned them over to the Forest Service for work projects usually between 8am and 4pm each work day.

Participants were between the ages of 18 and 25 (after 1935, 17 to 28), unmarried, unemployed, out of school, in good health, of good character, and willing to send home \$25 of the \$30-a-month pay. The young men selected by local county welfare organizations

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Excerpts from  
**THE CIVIL WAR**  
(As Recollected by an Ordinary Soldier)  
By  
Seth N. Eastman M.D. (1843-1913)

*In recognition of the sesquicentennial of the Civil War another excerpt from Dr. S. N. Eastman's story is given here. The first two excerpts about his experiences in the Civil War were in the last two newsletters and covered his enlistment at St. Johnsbury, basic training at Montpelier, and deployment to Washington, D. C. where he was taken ill with typhoid fever.*

I was taken sick about the first of February, 1862 with typhoid fever. I was out about 5 miles from camp when taken sick, they sent me into camp alone and I made the distance without help and fell into my tent and didn't know anything more for as much as three weeks. When I came to myself, I was in a building made of small logs with a crack between each log, so that the snow could drift in. It was called the log hospital, and at that time it was filled with men who were very sick. I was unconscious for many days and a hard case to handle as I would fight and try to get out of bed, but my friends, of whom I had a few, stood by me and I got well. They told me, however, that my life was despaired of for many days and orders were given to take me into a place where the dead were being prepared for burial, as I was cold and my limbs were frigid. They forced whiskey into me, however, and saved my life. Mr. Franklin Bixby, now in the Waterbury, Vermont hospital for the insane, was a nurse in the log hospital at that time and told me many times of how nearly I came to dying. Constitutional stamina or good nursing or on the theory that my time had not come to die, I got well and lived to enjoy many years of perfect health since that time, so that remembrances of it now seems like a dream.

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were sent to U.S. War Department induction centers, where they were given medical exams, then organized into companies, clothed, equipped, and conditioned for work in the field. They were then dispatched to camps constructed and maintained by the War Department and organized by one of several divisions of the Department of Agriculture and Interior (U.S Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service).

Each camp was organized as a Company with 200 men. Groton State Forest had two camps - Company 146 at Osmer Pond and 1162 at Rickers Pond. The barracks were inspected every day to be sure they were kept clean. When they had Camp inspection each enrollee had to dress in their Army issued clothing, including ties, and stand for inspection. The Camps were heated with wood, so the enrollees had to put up firewood. The officers and foresters had quarters of their own, separated from the enrollees and "regular" workers (Local Experienced Men, LEMs).

Workers adhered to a structured regimen, with reveille at 6:00 a.m., work from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., with lunch taken on site, and then return to camp. Dinner was served at 5:00 p.m., workers then had until lights-out at 10:00 p.m. to engage in athletic activity, attend classes (each camp included educational advisers from the Office of Education who taught a wide variety of academic and practical subjects and who granted eighth grade and high school diplomas), or read in the camp library. Other activities held in Vermont camps included dances, organizing a newspaper, radio programs, amateur theatre productions, talent nights, snowshoeing, and sports competitions, including ski jumping. Groton Grange sponsored dances and roller skating at the Rock Maple Ballroom, located where the Northeast Log Homes is now, each Saturday night for the boys entertainment and a chance to meet local girls.

The CCC program ran from June 1933 to January 1942. When World War II was declared in December 1941, the construction equipment was sent to the Alaskan Highway. There was great concern to get that road through so we could have inland

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communication with Alaska. The threat of a Japanese landing in the Aleutians and working their way through Alaska into Canada and come that way to the U. S. made this project high priority then. When the CCC program ended many enrollees answered the call for military service in World War II.

Perry Merrill, in his book, *Roosevelt's Forest Army* (1981), reports that labors undertaken by CCC workers put Vermont's recreational development ahead by fifty years and vastly improved the state forests. Indeed, a review of CCC accomplishments shows an impressive record of achievement:

- Within state and municipal forests, CCC crews planted more than a million trees, thinned or removed diseased and undesirable trees, pruned existing plantations to produce higher grade lumber, and undertook insect and disease control to protect against defoliation of sugar maples and other valuable trees.
  
- The devastation of the 1927 flood, focused flood-control activities on dam construction on the Winooski River and its principal tributaries. CCC crews worked with the Army Corps of Engineers and World War I veterans to build three dams, the largest being the 2,000 foot earthen-filled Waterbury Dam. It required more than 2 million cubic yards of earth, 5 million yards of selected gravel, and the labor of more than 3,000 men to complete. On a slightly smaller scale, the Wrightsville and East Barre dams, each 1,500 feet long with 100-foot spillways, utilized in excess of 1.5 million cubic yards of earth fill and rock, 5,000 cubic yards of concrete, and 2,500 tons of steel.
  
- Among most impressive projects was the CCC's construction of the first ski trails on the mountain in Mt. Mansfield State Forest. Charles Lord, a civil engineer overseeing a twenty-five-man work crew from the Moscow camp, carved out several trails, among them: the Ski Master, the Overland, the Perry Merrill, the Lord, the S-53, and the Nose Dive. At the base of Nose Drive, the CCC crew constructed a large parking area to accommodate several hundred cars and, in 1940,

state officials signed a lease with the Mt. Mansfield Company to build a ski lift up Mt. Mansfield.

- A total of 105 miles of truck trails and roads were constructed, including a ten-mile stretch connecting US Route 2 in Marshfield with US Route 302 at Groton State Forest - now Vermont Route 232, and several recreational roads, including the McCullough Turnpike—now Vermont Route 17.

- In Poultney, Vermont's only Soil Conservation Service Camps helped develop the Poultney-Mettawee Conservation District, engaging in tree planting, soil conservation and stream bank protection by lining the river banks with rip rap composed of native slate.

- Throughout Vermont, CCC crews planted shrubs to produce berries in open places providing food for small game birds and animals.

- To help prevent forest fires, they constructed 10 lookout towers (seven steel and three wooden) in addition to several lookout cabins.

John Jurras was hired to be the Education Advisor at CCC Camp 146 in Groton State Forest, from 1934 to 1937. He taught classes in reading and bookkeeping. He was also leader of the Camp basketball team. The Vermont Historical Society has his scrapbook which contains a newspaper clipping diary of life at CCC Camp 146 in Marshfield, Vermont, during the years 1934-1936. Also contained in the collection is a biography of John Jurras, as well as photographs, including two of the school room at CCC Camp 146. A 3 1/2" computer disk contains scans of the photographs in .jpg format.

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**Pictures from the Past**



CCC Enrollees at Groton State Forest



Typical CCC enrollees getting ready for a work day



Mt. Knox Tourist Home and gas station



Rocky Point RR stop at Groton Pond

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When the time for the Army came to commence operations to put down the rebellion, then existing in eleven of the states of this union, the rebel army was encamped at Manassas Jct., Virginia under the command of the celebrated General G. T. Beauregard, as General R. E. Lee had not been discovered as yet. General Beauregard was in charge of all Confederate armies.

The hospital I was in had to be broken up and some of the sick were sent to Washington and some to Georgetown. I was not able to walk and ambulances were sent from Washington to take the sick to a safer place. The ambulances were all of a very old fashioned type and were three stories or three decks high, one above the other, so that each would carry three sick men. The spaces for the invalids were upholstered with leather and each space held one invalid and it was about as large as a coffin. I could not sit up and outside I was put in head first and the door was locked on the outside, so there was no such thing as a thought of getting out. There was a square hole on the side about four inches long and wide to let in air. It was in the night and I could look out into the forward wheel of the carriage. The thing started to move over very rough roads, mostly made of corduroy, as the mud was deep, and it was the worst jolting I ever had, my head would be driven forward against the front and with such force that stars would sparkle freely, then I would roll from side to side and at times it would seem as though all was lost in a wreck. Then it would right up again and go ahead. Thus I rode until almost daylight when the ambulance entered some city. I did not know what place it was but I knew it was a city as we were on a cobblestone highway. At last we stopped in the yard of a grand house and I found out it was Georgetown, Maryland. The doors were unlocked and we were lifted out. I was so lame I could hardly move from my bruises and my weakness, but was helped by some policemen who were standing around who were very kind and who

helped us into the house. I was put to bed in a very nice parlor with a carpet on the floor and a feather bed, and I fell asleep, being very tired and slept several hours. When I awoke, things looked so nice I almost thought I was in another world. A lady brought me my breakfast on a tray. It consisted of steak, potatoes, bread and butter, doughnuts and coffee, just what I wanted, for I had a great appetite and had almost nothing to eat in the army hospital and my appetite was simply voracious. Nothing was said about how much I should eat and I ate all I wanted, and it did me good. And now, just let me say that of all the views and sights I ever saw before or since, nothing ever suited me any better than the sight of this first breakfast in civilization. I had not seen such a thing in almost a year, and I felt like a new being. This same lady brought water, soap and towels and clean shirts, drawers, and footings, and we had the first bath we'd had in many long months.

I stayed in this place about two weeks and was not allowed to go out on the streets. Policemen stood at the front door. They were good and sociable, but would not let us out under any pretext whatever. I was gaining strength very fast and did not like this idea of being a prisoner. I was fed well and had a good bed to sleep in and all that, yet became very discontented and wanted to get away but had to stay in and not see the city. The other men with us were older and contented, but I was very restless and wanted to get back to the army again, as I was afraid there would be a great battle and I should not see it. This made me very uneasy, but I was yet too weak to think of returning to my company, so I was sent to a general hospital at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It took almost one day to make the journey. The hospital was on 5th Georgetown, and there was not a face in the house I had ever seen before. This made me very lonesome. The windows were painted on the outside with white paint which let in light but we could not see out, and this was

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also guarded with policemen, so could not go out to see the city. I did, however, get out once or twice while I stayed there about a month. The first horse-car I ever saw was here. It was a curio to me.

The food was good and the lodgings first class, single beds and blankets, and nurses, yet I was not contented and demanded to be sent to my company, and made so much noise about it that they let me go when hardly able to walk. I embraced the first opportunity I had, which came about May 1st, and went to the front along with others who had recovered from their diseases.

I found my company at Alexandria, Virginia, camped in an open field. They were all very glad to see us, especially my friend, Albert Batchelder. We camped and slept together all the time after that until he was taken sick and went to the hospital and died nearly a year afterwards. I felt very badly when he died. I was left alone. He knew more than I did, and had been to school more, and was farther along toward manhood than I was, and he was a great help to me as long as we were together, but he died December 24, 1862. I soon got another mate and got along just the same.

The Army of the Potomac, at the time I joined them, was preparing for the great peninsula campaign and we started in a few days. We were marched to Washington, D. C. and put on board transports and sailed down the historic Potomac River and out into the Atlantic to Chesapeake Bay and landed at Fortress Monroe. We saw wrecks of two battleships, the Congress and the Cumberland, that had been disabled and sunk by that terrible ironclad rebel boat, the Merrimac, but the battle was over and the Merrimac was gone by the time we arrived, so we missed the spectacle. The Merrimac retreated up the York River and threw many large shells at us as we disembarked before the great fort called the Fortress Monroe, some of which did not explode and our

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boys picked them up and examined them. They did not look very harmful, but our officers made us throw them into the water. We camped at a place called Newport News, on the York River. The weather was hot and we went in swimming and fished for oysters with our feet and got as many as we wanted. We ate them and liked them very much, as well as another shellfish called quahogs. These were not so good to eat, however.

We started from this place in a few days, towards Yorktown, and came to a full stop at a place called Lee's Mills. Here the rebels were posted in full force across our path. The artillery was brought up and there was a duel of artillery for several hours. Here I saw the first man killed. Some of the artillery men were killed by the fire of the enemy. The men were mangled and, as they were carried by on the stretchers, we had our first glimpse of real war. Now my feelings can better be imagined than described, as I was a tender little boy not yet nineteen years old. I was ashamed to cry so did not, but could not help thinking of the peaceful home up in Vermont that was so far away. We were here as much as three weeks during the time the ill-fated battle of Lee's Mills was fought. I did not get into real action, yet the right wing of the 6th Vermont was engaged and lost many officers and men.

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### IN MEMORIAM

Member Robert B. Gruber 1914-2012

Before moving to Vermont in 1959, Bob studied at Cornell University and in Groton he started his career with Eastern A.I. where he worked breeding cows until his retirement in 1981.



## **GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS**

Visit GHS Web page at Historical Society on <http://www.grotonvt.com/>

**Membership is payable in January for the Calendar Year**  
**Annual dues are \$10 for individuals and \$15 for families**  
**Lifetime Membership dues are \$100**

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The last year your dues were paid is shown with your mailing address. Those who last paid for 2010 will be dropped from the mailing list at the end of this year if dues are not paid. Please let GHS know if there is an error.

All members who provide an email address will get an advance copy of the newsletter. If you want to opt out of getting a printed copy, please send a request to [jwbenzie@mchsi.com](mailto:jwbenzie@mchsi.com) This will save GHS the cost of printing and mailing.

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The June 12 meeting will be held in the Methodist Church at 7pm with a program on the Montpelier and Wells River RR 1873-1945 and its successor the Barre and Chelsea RR 1945-1956 presented by Dwight (Bud) Smith, a former Groton resident and member of the Society and Railroad enthusiast who owned and operated the North Conway Scenic Railroad for many years.

GHS is planning to hold an evening meeting with a program every other month to accommodate members who cannot attend morning meetings. The morning meetings will include work sessions to organize and maintain the many collections of historical artifacts, books, photos, reports, records and files. Because of limited space, everything cannot be displayed effectively, so some things will need proper storage until they can be exhibited at a later date.

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You are invited to the next event from the Small Museums Online Community ([www.smallmuseumcommunity.org](http://www.smallmuseumcommunity.org))!

Thursday, June 7, 2:00 to 3:00 pm (login at 1:45 p.m.)

*Deaccessioning: It's Not A Four-Letter Word*

Has anyone from your organization ever suggested that you should just throw away some of the collection to make room for new stuff? While almost every museum has some items that really shouldn't be there, deaccessioning (the process of disposing of, selling or trading objects from a museum collection) should not be undertaken lightly. Learn about the process of deaccessioning, from making the initial decision to choosing the method of disposal, and everything in between. This Small Museum Online Community Event features Anne Ackerson from the Museum Association of New York and Kathleen Byrne from the National Parks Service.

Learning Times will host this online event. If you've never participated in a Learning Times Event/Webinar, please go to <http://aaslhcommunity.org/tech-check/> right now to test your computer and ensure you can connect.

If you have any questions about the event, please contact Kathy Lang, AASLH Small Museums Committee member and SMOC Mayor for Events, at [Kathy\\_Lang@nps.gov](mailto:Kathy_Lang@nps.gov). To learn more about the Small Museums Online Community, check out this 5-minute, virtual tour: <http://www.screenr.com/bPN8>.

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