

## **The Civilian Conservation Corps in Nahma Township**

By: Gary C. Olson, U.S.F.S. (retired) Rapid River, MI, March 25, 2014

The year was 1932. America was under the severe grip of the Great Depression. Millions were unemployed. Businesses were failing. Homes and farms being foreclosed. The Great Dust Bowl was sweeping the plains. No welfare, food stamps, unemployment, etc. It seemed hopeless for many Americans. Upon being elected as President of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt promised to get America moving forward again. Within months of being elected, he, along with approval from Congress, passed the New Deal Act. It would give many Americans promise and hope.

One program under the New Deal was implementation of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Its primary purpose was to improve, restore, and enhance the country's infrastructure—roads trails, recreation areas, etc. The U.S Forest Service lands consisted of millions of acres that had been logged off, burnt off, and generally neglected by previous logging practices. The Forest Service viewed the C.C.C. Program as an excellent way to reforest and improve the overall health and condition of these public lands.

The C.C.C.'s constructed camps to house them. The buildings were bunk houses, mess halls, storage buildings, and maintenance buildings. Many of the original camps had tents for sleeping which were very cold in the U.P. winters. The U.S. Army ran the camps and the Forest Service ran the woods projects. The C.C.C. boys were an average age of 18 and one-half years old. They were paid \$1.00 per day (\$30 per month). However, upon enrolling in the program, each enrollee agreed to have \$25 of their monthly salary sent to their parents. This was mandatory.

I am aware of two C.C.C. camps in Nahma Township. One was called "Camp Cooks"—Company 686. It was located near the intersection of the Fishdam River and County Road 442. There was a second camp in Nahma township called "Camp Mormon Creek"—Company 3624. This camp was located just west of Federal Highway 13 along Forest Road 2231—near Mormon Creek.

The enrollees at these two camps worked on many projects including tree planting, erosion control, trout stream improvement, construction/improvement of roads, and construction of recreation areas such as picnic and campgrounds. Many of these projects required the enrollees to remove large stumps. The most efficient way to remove the stumps was to use explosives such as dynamite. This project was supervised by L.E.M. —Local Experienced Men. The L.E.M. knew how to handle and use dynamite due to their experience in farming.



I was employed by the U.S. Forest Service for a little over 39 years. I spent a great deal of my time in the woods. In the mid 1980's, I came across a peculiar looking building. It is approximately 6 feet wide, 8 feet deep, and 12 feet high. The exterior is sheet steel. The interior is wood. Between the outer and inner walls is solid concrete. No windows. The door is steel on the outside. The door frame is solid 2 by 6's laid on top of one another and bolted together. The roof frame is 2 by 4's laid next to each other and is covered with steel. There are no additional buildings, foundations or other improvements located nearby.

A few years later, I was in a beautiful red pine plantation near the location of Camp Cooks C.C.C. camp. I saw an elderly gentleman by himself not too far away. Naturally, I was concerned about him. I asked him if everything was okay and he said "yes". He explained that he was in the C.C.C.'s and was at Camp Cooks. He said he had planted many of the red pine trees we were looking at. For some reason, the "peculiar looking building" came to mind. I described it to him—steel roof, concrete in the walls, a very sturdy door, etc. His face lit up and he said "Yes, I remember the exact building you are describing". It is where we stored the dynamite, dynamite caps, and fuses. That building supplied both Camp Cooks and Camp Mormon Creek. It was located there so if there was an explosion, nobody would be near it, hopefully. I remember his name as a Mr. Mortensen who was living in Manistique at that time.

I have talked with many of the C.C.C. veterans. All of them said it was an excellent experience and truly enhanced their lives. In the big picture, our National Forests reflect what these hardworking, dedicated C.C.C. accomplished.

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