



Remembering the Civilian Conservation Corps



by Dave Goble

Crawford State Park manager, Girard

It was a desperate nation that President Franklin D. Roosevelt took over in 1932. People needed work and a program he created not only put millions to work, but it is responsible for some of Kansas' most popular outdoor recreation areas.



In this year of the centennial anniversary of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, it's important to remember the thousands of men who helped develop many of the premiere recreational sites in our state. These men were part

of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). To tell their story, we must first remember the times.

The nation bordered on desperation after the great stock market crash of 1929. The lack of soil conservation practices cou-

pled with drought had turned many western states, including Kansas, into a "Dust Bowl," and the Great Depression hit home. In 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president on the promises to end rampant unemployment and halt the economic chaos that gripped the country.

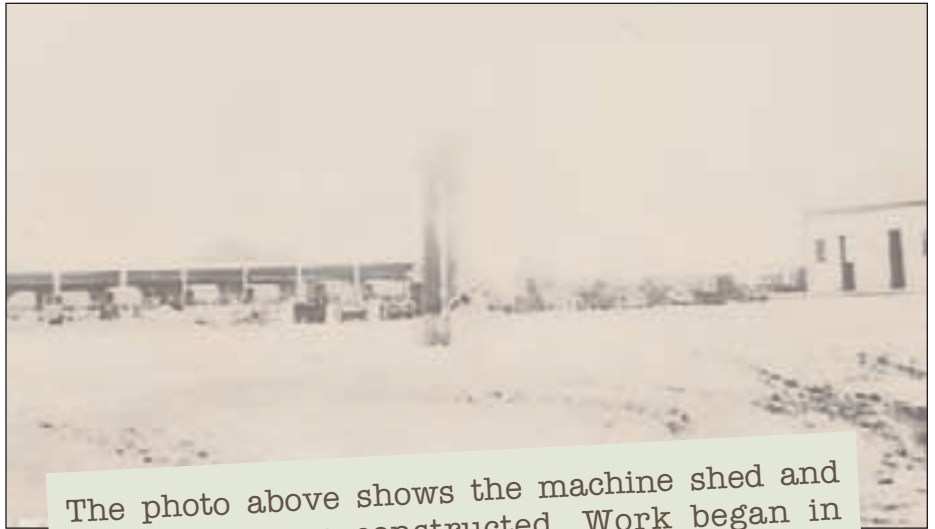
On March 9, 1933, he called the 73rd Congress into emergency session to hear and authorize the programs of his "New Deal." His most popular program, in which more than 3 million men participated, was the CCC. This group was to be a peacetime army, recruited from the ranks of the urban unemployed, and sent to battle the destruction of our natural resources.

It was a great idea, and it enjoyed tremendous public support. Requirements for joining the CCC were simple. Enrollees had to be young, single, healthy, and unemployed. The Corps was organized under the military, which utilized its own officers to initially command and organize the camps and companies. The departments of Interior and Agriculture were then responsible for organizing work at the state level.

In Kansas, the Soil Conservation Service, under the Department of Agriculture, took the lead and coordinated 35 of the state's 53 camp projects. The Kansas Forestry Fish and Game Commission was also a major state partner and contributed site locations for projects, as well as engineering, design work, and onsite inspection. Crawford State Park, then known as Crawford County State Park #2, was one of those projects.

The 788th Company (SCS-10-L) of the CCC was originally formed at Camp Whiteside, Fort Riley, on May 19, 1933. The 788th was made up of Kansas boys, most coming from the eastern part of the state. After conditioning, the company was transferred to Camp Rutledge near Park Rapids, Minn. During this time, the company participated in many firefighting calls and received the nickname "Fire Devils." They returned to Kansas, arriving at Farlington, in Crawford County, on June 6, 1935. The project at Farlington was the construction of an earthen fill dam approximately 1,350 feet long and 65 feet high, requiring fill of 284,000 cubic yards of material. The project also included the construction of an emergency spillway, access road to the area, and the clearing of lake site timber.

The goal of the CCC was to employ as many men as possible, so as much of the work that could be accomplished by hand was done that way. The



The photo above shows the machine shed and shop that were constructed. Work began in 1935 and the project was complete in 1939.

Lake Crawford project was started by digging the puddle cores. A row of men with shovels and picks began digging into the rock bluffs at either end of the dam. Clay to fill the puddle cores was dug from the future lakebed with mule drawn slip buckets and loaded into wagons pulled by teams of mules.

Owen "Cobb" O'Hare, who started as a muleskinner, stated in a 1999 interview, "I started

with a real pretty new team of mules one day. The team had to haul a wagon to move the dirt out of the pit. I thought I knew how to handle them. I did – I worked on a farm. But when the first load of dirt hit that wagon, boy, those mules went wild. It was a-frighting them. I bailed out. When I saw them heading for the puddle trench, I knew my days of muleskinning were over."

Paul Pavey, another CCC member, recalled, "When I came here, the core was just getting started dug pretty well. I was probably one of the youngest in the camp. Men were not allowed to join until the age of 17 and had to leave by the age of 25. I fibbed about my age and left more like a man than when I came in. You worked, and you worked hard."

By May 1936, construction was well under way.

Project News

(Reprinted from the Fire Devil May 28, 1936)

Progress on the project has been excellent. With exception of the rainy period week before last, the movement of earth to the fill on the



To employ as many men as possible, as much of the work that could be done by hand was done that way. Workers earned \$30 per month — \$5 to be kept for spending and \$25 that was to be sent home to their family.

dam has been continuous. During the rainy spell, no time was lost as the men worked on tasks reserved for wet weather.

An additional 12-foot section of the concrete valve tower has been added. Work on the dam has consisted in placing earth in the central section of the dam in order to fill in the area surrounding the valve well. As this fill increased in height, an addition to the tower became necessary. The fill is now level, and it will be carried level as the dam increases in height.

Large rocks for the top of the upstream riprap have been placed, and rock dumped on the slope for the riprap. This also will be carried along as the slope rises.

The puddling of the main trench is completed, except a short distance on east and west ends. The auxiliary trenches have also been puddled except for a small portion of the trench. Selected red clay was used in puddling these trenches.

The double shift is being used on the dirt-moving equipment, creating a steady flow of earth which is causing the dam to take form, and make it noticeable to the eye. Visitors comment on the apparent



Double shifts of workers moved dirt to build the earthen dam, which ended up approximately 1,350 feet long and 65 feet high and required fill of 284,000 cubic yards.

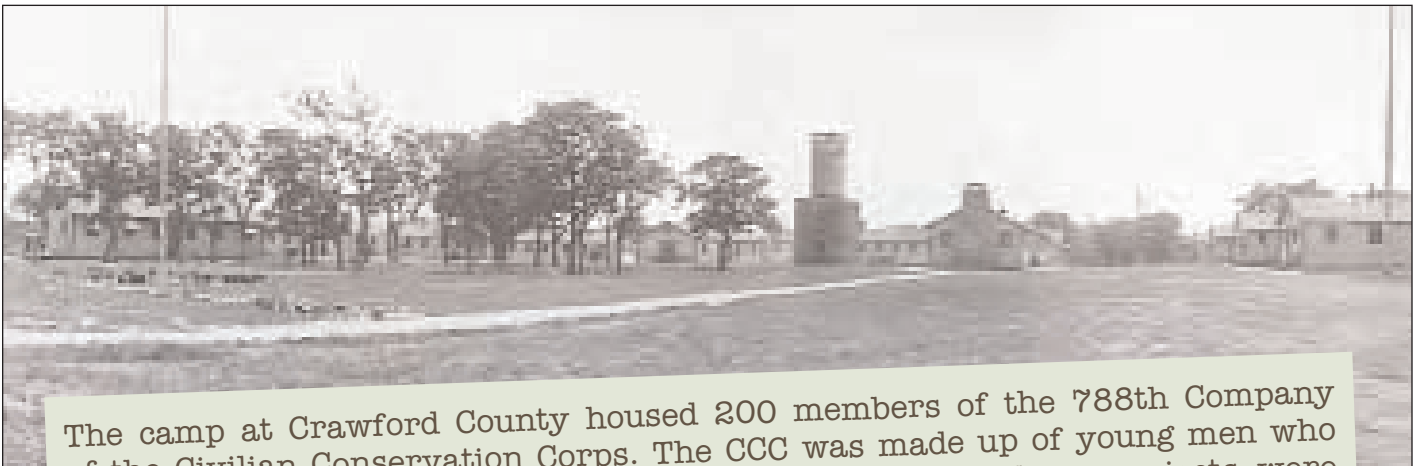
rapid progress.

The shed for housing the trucks and equipment is completed, and all the equipment can be stored during bad weather. Every Friday evening, all machinery is placed in the shed, where it remains until Monday morning. New equipment has been received for the project. An Allis Chalmers 75 HP tractor was transferred from Toronto, 4 new Allis Chalmers 75s were received from the factory, a Caterpillar 50 HP was received from the factory, and a half-yard Trackson shovel was received

from the factory. This shovel is being used to load the puddling clay in the trucks.

Work on the spillway has not been started, as we are awaiting the arrival of a larger gas shovel. Mr. Laird, Associate Technician SCS, inspected the project for several days. Mr. Neville, Engineer from the State Fish and Game Department, also inspected the project.

Both seemed well satisfied with progress of the work. It is indeed a pleasing sight to stand on the brow of the hill and watch the activity on



The camp at Crawford County housed 200 members of the 788th Company of the Civilian Conservation Corps. The CCC was made up of young men who were “young, single, healthy and unemployed.” Fifty-three projects were completed in Kansas by the CCC.

the project as the trucks and teams move in and out from the borrow pits, the big tractors pull the elevating grader, the blades, and the packer.

One is impressed with the orderliness and smooth functioning of all the parts of the huge whole, and the manner in which the supervising personnel handle the large project. The morale of the men is fine, and the spirit of cooperation between the army and the soil conservation service is excellent. The spirit with which the men enter into the work is commendable, everyone being willing to do his part. In March, we placed second in the district in the number of men turned over to the project superintendent by the commanding officer, and in April, we placed first for the camps in Kansas.

For the past several months, no accidents have occurred, for the men have been observing the rules and instructions of the safety council. The supervising personnel wish to compliment the men on the spirit at which they go about their work, and the manner in which they conduct themselves while on the project.

Not all in camp was work. Another advantage the CCC offered its enrollees was the chance to further their education. In their spare time, they could enroll in classes such as radio operator and maintenance, surveying, photography, leather works, algebra, typing, shorthand, electricity, soil conservation, leader training, and music.

On the lighter side, boys will be boys. The Farlington Camp was full of life, as illustrated in this excerpt of the camp newspaper:

The Camp Gossip Says

(Excerpts from Thursday May 23, 1937 "Fire Devil")

Because an assistant to the [female] assistant baker is reported to have "got religion" in the process, we think more camp boys should find more girl friends. The other side of this religious matter is the fact that there can be too many girls in church for a fellow to feel comfortable.

There is a new boy who offered payment in advance for services and advice received at the camp hospital. According to the camp bookmaker, a 20-acre corn patch should yield 20 gallons.

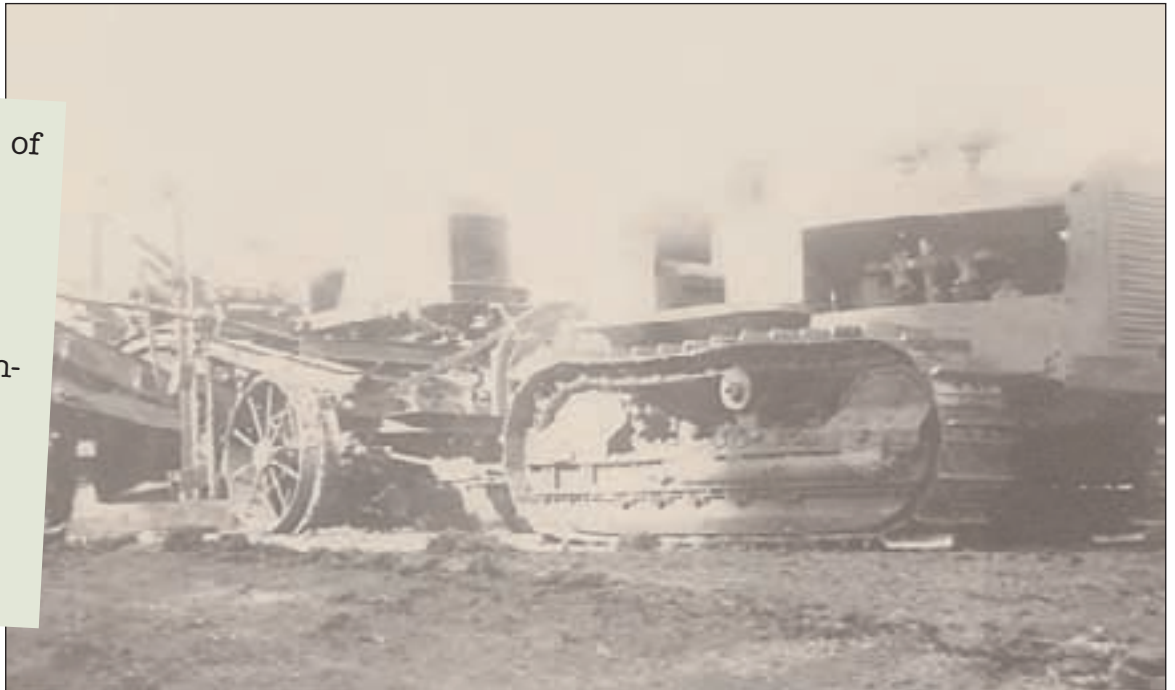
One of the "lighter" arguments on the works had to do with whether light is substance or matter. We refer the matter to Penden, who tried for a record absorption of vitamin D, and practically broiled his back in the process.

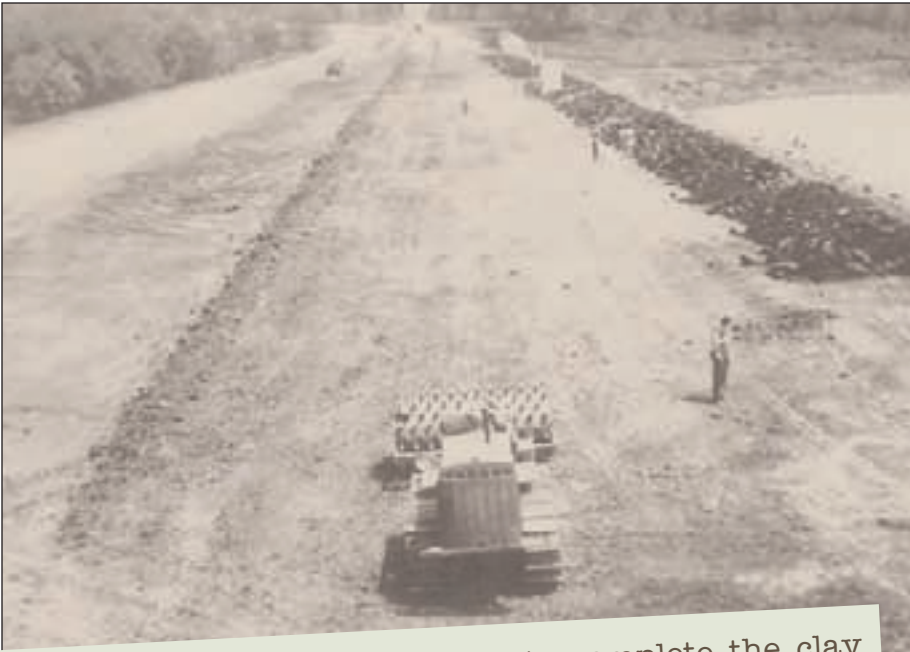
A certain boy in No. 6 seems to have trouble in making his dates. As it happened, one night he made a date with two girls, and it turned out that he named the same evening to both. We do not know what the outcome will be, but we are with you boy.

A boy called "Dutch" claims that Springfield Mo. is the prettiest town in eastern Kansas. We always said it will get you sooner or later.

After a lengthy argument resulting from a bet on the weather, it was finally agreed that five drops on a brick would constitute a rain.

While most of the heavy equipment came from the factory, the local economy benefitted enormously by supply the camp with services and supplies.





It took four years for the crew to complete the clay core dam, which created the 150-acre Crawford State Fishing Lake. Crawford State Park was constructed along the lake's shoreline and offers 74 water/electric utility sites and 425 primitive sites.

The camp social life was not bad either. The boys were treated with trips into town for dances and movies. Many of the young men came to southeast Kansas to work and stayed for life. C.W. Scammel, of Girard, spent two years at the camp and never left the area. "I went up the hill a mile and south and married this little gal, and I couldn't get out of it then," he recounted in 1999.

The CCC camp was also an economic benefit to the local community. Not only was money coming into town from CCC member's salaries, but it also came into the community from the services and supplies needed to keep the camp running. Of the CCC member's \$30 monthly salary, \$5 was to be kept for spending money and \$25 was to

be sent home to his family.

The camp helped build the town of Girard, according to local historian John Spurling. Spurling said, "The men at the camp needed places to buy food, entertainment, repair shoes, and more. Their needs made it possible for a little fruit stand owner to become a grocer; the elevator in Farlington had its boom days selling grain and hay for the mules. Many families earned extra money selling services like washing to the men."

The Farlington project was completed in 1939. It was then managed by the Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission as a state lake. In 1965, the facility was turned over to the Kansas Park and Resource Authority, which developed the present day facilities of Crawford State Park. This obviously was not the

only CCC project that would become a Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks facility, but is a typical example of the role the Corps played in the early development of recreational facilities in Kansas.

In 1999, a reunion was held for those who participated in the construction of Crawford State Park. Inspired by this event, the park will host one of the Department of Wildlife and Parks' Centennial Anniversary Events on June 4, 2005. To honor the men of the Civilian Conservation Corps who participated in all of the projects throughout Kansas, a six foot bronze statue commissioned by the Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni Foundation will be dedicated at the Farlington Camp site. This memorial will be surrounded by a self-guided interpretive trail that wanders through the campsite. The trail features several exhibits and artifacts from the camp telling the story of the CCC and the men who served. This statue is provided through donations and sales of commemorative pavers that will form a walkway along the base of the statue.

As we pass through this 2005 year of centennial celebrations, we must call to mind all who came before us with the vision to develop the many outstanding and diverse recreational opportunities available in Kansas. While doing so, we must take time to remember the CCC. ♡

***Note – To purchase a paver or if you know a CCC Alumnus who would like to attend the dedication event, please contact the Crawford State Park office at (620) 362-3671.*