



Part 6 of the Historical Snapshots Installments

The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Hoosier National Forest – Part II

By: Teena Ligman, Hoosier N.F. Public Affairs Specialist

This article is a continuation of a story on Forest Service Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps. The CCC was established as part of Roosevelt's Emergency Work Act in 1933 to put young men to work during the Great Depression.

CCC "Camp Little America" at Kurtz, Indiana was covered in part I. This column includes information on the other Hoosier National Forest camps.

Bryantsville Camp 1586

The Bryantsville Camp 1586 was also known as the Spice Valley Camp- official directions were "five miles west of the Mitchell telegraph office and railroad stop." At the time, the Forest Service owned very little land and government funds could not be used to lease land for a camp. A suitable site was available on land which belonged to Howard Burton just west of the Spice Valley Church but the land wasn't for sale. The lease price was \$5/month. The Bedford and Mitchell Chambers of Commerce agreed to cover the lease price for the land to encourage another CCC camp to be built in this area. A water supply was the biggest concern but a well was dug that supplied



*Pool room and recreation hall at the Spice Valley Camp
6/15/1937*

good water. Work on the Bryantsville Camp began in October 1935.

In the meantime, CCC Camp 1599 had been set up in July 1935, in tents on Garvey Lane (now John Williams Boulevard) on the west side of Bedford. The number of enrollees in that camp soon swelled to 425. By November 30, 1935, many of the men had moved to the Bryantsville Camp. Others from Camp 1599 were moved to Camp Clark at Henryville. The tent camp in Bedford was abandoned.

Four barracks and nine other buildings were built for the Bryantsville Camp. The cost of construction for a CCC camp was estimated at \$18,000. Local labor and materials were used where possible. It took an average of 8-10 days to complete the construction of a new CCC camp. By Christmas of that year there were 204 enrollees in residence. The enrollees came primarily from Indiana and Kentucky.

Within the first year the camp had planted 400,000 black locust trees from seeds they had collected and worked extensively on erosion control. They also built two fire towers; one near Bryantsville, and another near Shoals. Their assignments were all on national forest lands in the Lost River Unit.

The camp competed with 42 camps in their region and won "Best Camp in Indiana" in November 1936 for their outstanding achievements and beautification efforts around their camp. Camp enrollees organized a string band and a 4-piece harmonica band that was regularly requested to play at local events. The camps also organized



Boxing at the CCC camp. 6/15/1937



Horse she pitching at the Spice Valley Camp 6/15/1937



Religious services at the Spice Valley Camp 6/15/1937

baseball and other sports teams that played other camps on weekends.

On July 2, 1936 the Bryantsville camp was hit by a tornado. The maintenance building and blacksmith shop were destroyed and several barracks shifted on their foundations. Many trees came down in camp. One enrollee working in the maintenance building survived with only cuts and bruises though the building blew down around him.

In September, 1937 the Bryantsville camp was disbanded. The camp buildings were dismantled in May 1938 and loaded onto 18 rail cars and sent to Miles City, Montana.



West Fork Tower road construction 6/15/1937



Mechanical Shops at Spice Valley CCC Camp 6/15/1937



Warehouse at Spice Valley CCC Camp. 6/15/1937

English Camp 2583

This camp was first set up four miles west of Paoli. It was a tent camp. Paul McWilliams, an early Forest Service employee, said the tent camp was there a week before the Ranger even knew it was set up. The men remained in tents at the Paoli camp until the camp was moved closer to English.



Mess tent at the English camp in 1935(above) before the buildings were constructed. Below shows the camp barracks at the English camp. (Courtesy of Crawford County Historical Society)



In 1935, the Hoosier purchased land to establish Camp 2583 near the Crawford– Orange County line from J.N. Barnett who had a store nearby. The land included a large spring which seemed to have more than enough water for a 200-man camp. By the end of July 1935, 206 enrollees had arrived all of whom were enrolled from the Indiana area. According to the camp newsletter these enrollees “ranged in size from a couple of very little ones to a good many huskies.” They continued to live in tents until October while clearing land for the permanent buildings. A well was dug to supplement the spring. Later the camp numbers swelled to 235 enrollees.

Twelve buildings were constructed including a hospital, recreation hall, mess hall, officer’s quarters, bathhouse with heated water, education and administration buildings, and five barracks. Later more buildings were constructed at the camp.

In October of their first year on the way to fight a forest fire near Valeene, a truck carrying 20 men overturned on a steep bank. Two men were killed and eight were seriously injured. Not only was the work sometimes dangerous, but conditions were also hard. That first winter temperatures dropped to 30 degrees below zero with 8-10 inches of snow.

The Forest Service soon discovered that in order to efficiently manage the forest and suppress the countless fires that plagued southern Indiana’s forestland they needed to improve the road systems. The English CCC camp set up a rock crusher and a quarry to supply surfacing materials for many roads in the southern part of the forest. The crew quarried and crushed 13,000 yards of stone for road beds and constructed 3.5 miles of new road.

On July 1, 1936 forty enrollees were sent to the William Tell CCC Camp in Tell City due to a drought and shortage of water. When the drought continued, the decision was made to temporarily move the CCC Company stationed at English to Tell City. The spring which supplied water to the camp was down to one-third of its flow and water had been hauled for over a month from other sources in the county. On August 1, all but 40 of the remaining enrollees in the camp were moved to Tell City. The plan was that the camp would be reopened by October 1, 1935 but when the



Enrollees at the English side camp with their staff.

drought had not abated even the blacksmith shop was moved to Tell City. By November 12, 1936 the decision was made to permanently move the English camp to Tell City and have the English camp remain as a side camp.

In November 1940, 75 men from the Tell City Camp arrived at the English CCC Camp to tear it down. The lumber was cleaned and stored under a shed for further use. Later some of the lumber was used to build a five room house for the Oscar Parks family at Deuchars that included the Deuchars Post Office. Another home for a Perry County family in need was also built with the used lumber.

Some quick facts on Company 2853 (English and Tell City camps) –

- From July to December 1935, the company collected **five tons of seeds** from 15 species of trees to send to the Forest Service nursery at Vallonia.
- Fourteen buildings and three lookout towers constructed.
- Seventy-five miles of telephone line from Paoli to English with a branch lines to Spears Tower, Orange County Tower, West Fork Tower, Marchand Tower, Buzzard Roost Tower, the rock quarry, and the two CCC camps, and then on to Tell City was built with poles creosoted at the English Camp. The job took 2,884 man days.
- The average enrollee gained 12 pounds during his stay at the camp.
- Two thousand posts were cut and creosoted.
- Hundreds of acres of erosion control work.
- Constructed six wildlife ponds.
- Suppressed many forest fires and conducted search and rescue for lost people.

- Constructed the German Ridge Recreation Area, the 3.5 acre German Ridge Lake, and put in the water system.

Tell City Camp 1597/2583

The William Tell CCC Camp was located in the 1400 block of Ninth and 10th Streets near where the William Tell Senior Citizen and Dennis Kress Park are located today. It was first organized in August 1935 as Company 1597 at Henryville, Indiana. The camp moved to Tell City and spent the first several months in tents. According to the camp newsletter many enrollees went ‘over the hill’ or deserted during that time because the weather was rainy and miserable. The barracks were completed in December. The camp was soon struck with sickness and in January 1936 there were 61 cases of scarlet fever and mumps. The barracks were quarantined until the diseases were under control.

The camp’s work was mostly improving soil erosion and damming gullies. They also planted a lot of black locust seedlings. Several enrollees helped with the 1935 census and conducted counts and interviews in the rural areas. In April, 1936 Camp 1597 was moved to Madison, Indiana to take over for a Veterans Camp (comprised of WW I veteran enrollees) that had moved on. There Camp 1597 became a State-operated camp and helped construct Clifty Falls State Park. However their camp buildings were left vacant. Later, it proved the perfect place for the English camp enrollees to relocate to when the water crisis at the English camp arose.

Though the site proved adequate, one of their first improvement projects was to add sidewalks around the buildings. The men brought in gravel from the quarry and crusher at Leopold. The site was so muddy that the story was, enrollees from the previous Company 1597 had reported having to wear stilts to keep the mud out of their pockets!

Later during the floods of January 1937 the camp was literally standing in water. The men

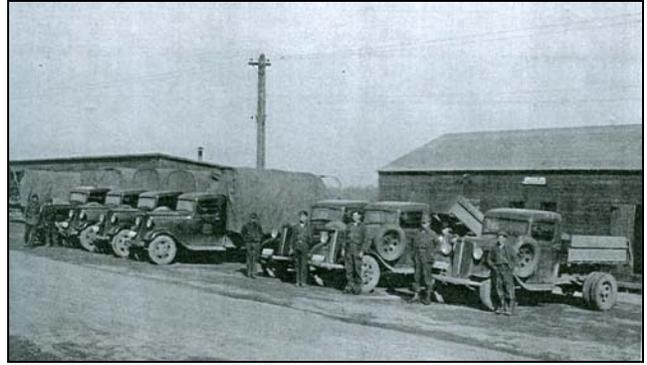


Photo of the William Tell CCC Camp.



CCC enrollees operate the rock crusher at the quarry at Leopold. (Photo courtesy of the Crawford County Historical Society.)

obtained a boat and appointed a skipper to take passengers to and from the barracks, paddling with brooms. Although some of the buildings were under water and had to be vacated, most of the barracks and the mess hall were on high footers and remained dry with the boat ferry a useful method of transportation.



Tell City CCC camp vehicles.

Tell City resident Omer Bryant, 89, worked at the Tell City CCC Camp and remembers planting trees with crews lined up with planting hoes. Each carried up to 100 trees. He remembers they always put the fastest man in the lead and everyone else had to keep up, planting trees every 6 feet as they moved across the field.

Bryant drove a truck and bull dozer while working at the camp as an enrollee for 21 months in 1938-39. He said at that time an enrollee could only stay with the CCC for two years. Bryant was coming up on the end of his two year enrollment and got a chance to get a job at 25 cents an hour so he left a couple months early. Later he served in the Navy in both theaters during World War II.

Bryant's family lived in Rome, so he was able to ride his bicycle back and forth to visit his family – a 17 mile round trip. He said most of the boys at his camp came from north of the Ohio River. In November of 1937 the camp reported having eleven sets of brothers enrolled at the camp. About the same time the camp numbers swelled to 222 enrollees.

Bryant said there was a lot of friction between the CCC boys and the local boys over girls. "We could always dig up a dime to take one of the local girls to the movie. Local boys couldn't always get a dime, and they resented us."

He said, "We honored the flag at evening retreat and kept our boots shined and everything arranged properly." He estimates 99 percent of the boys from the CCC camp ended up later serving in World War II. He believes the transition from civilian life to military was made easier by their days in the CCC.

Bryant recalls that there were always some men in camp who couldn't read or write, he remembers writing letters to their girlfriends, to help them keep in touch. He said maybe the best thing about the CCC for him was, "I was just a country hick, but I learned to get along with all kinds of people." He reminisces that his days in the CCC were, "the most enjoyable time of my life. I was young, we had good food and were well taken care of. We worked hard but we always had plenty to eat and a warm place to sleep."

Bryant said his favorite projects were working out at the German Ridge recreation area and building roads. He said, "It is rewarding for me to go back today and see the things we built." He noted the

buildings at German Ridge were actually reconstructed from old homes that were taken down and moved. "In those days the government was buying up land for \$3-10/acre, and there were several places over at Goosetown that had nice buildings, so we took those down and put them back up at German Ridge." He said other buildings were moved to other recreation areas that are gone now.

He also remembers helping put in the phone line between Tell City and Bedford. The importance of the phone lines was primarily to report forest fires. The five towers in the Patoka and Lafayette Units had a vision coverage of 576,000 acres of forests. If a lookout spotted a fire, the CCC could have 130 men at the scene of any fire within two hours. The phone lines ran along the railroad right-of-way and they followed that line all the way to Coxton, Indiana. Then they cut cross county to Bedford. He said he and four other men would climb the poles and put up the lines. It was hard work, and very hot that summer. When they climbed the poles they'd get creosote on them and it would burn.

Fire-fighting was always a major effort for the men of the CCC Camps. The camp newsletters included daily logs of activities that read 8 fires, 6 fires, 4 fires, 7 fires... day after day of fire runs for the camp which had small groups of men loading up in trucks and heading out to different parts of their districts to fight fire. Many of the runs inevitably proved to be false alarms.

In January 1937 the Ohio River flooded and the CCC camps were sent to help. The entire town of Leavenworth was evacuated in three days by 30 CCC men from the English side camp and their trucks. Temperatures were below freezing and the roads were covered with sleet and snow. The Tell City CCC camp was simultaneously working to evacuate whole families and their possessions from flooded areas along the rivers. They moved entire stores with all their merchandise to high ground.

For 21 days during the flood of 1937, the Forest Service phone line was the only way for Tell City to communicate with other cities. The line had to be raised to keep it above water in the Ohio River bottoms, and maintenance was done by rowboat! Once the emergency passed there were many weeks of flood cleanup and water purification work that the camp helped with.

In 1940 the decision was made to look for a new camp site. The first choice was the Marchand Tower site but they drilled to 555 feet without finding water for a well. The next choice was just east of Leopold. When adequate water was not found there either, the camp remained in Tell City for another year before finding a site near Sulphur in July, 1941. The camp moved in September to the Sulphur area "to place the camp near the center of the work area." The water supply for the Sulphur camp was a large spring. It was said to be the only good water source between English and Tell City that could supply a 200 man camp.

Once the road was completed, 22 new buildings were completed for the Sulphur camp. A new panel construction was used with five foot wide panels bolted to 6 x 6 wooden treated posts. After the William Tell Camp in Tell City was abandoned the buildings remained. Some of the buildings were moved to the town of Grandview, a town located a few miles down-river from Tell City. That summer the Grandview Elementary School had burned and the CCC buildings were used for 125 students to attend school. In 1943, many of the buildings were moved to the Burns City Naval Depot (now called Crane Naval Weapons Support Center) to be used as storage. The other buildings became the property of the City of

Tell City and the VFW. Bryant remembers the old barracks left in Tell City being used as housing for many years. "After the war when housing was so short, lots of veterans and their families lived in those buildings." The remaining Tell City CCC camp buildings were still standing in the late 1950s when they were torn down.

The CCC Camp at Sulphur operated until the CCC Program was disbanded in 1942.

Information from Paul McWilliams was taken from an interview done in 1977 by Indiana University's Center for the Study of History and Memory.