

HISTORY

PUTTING PEOPLE BACK TO WORK

Eighty years ago, Civilian Conservation Corps brought jobs, public projects to Western Slope

In late October of 1933 a new cadre of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Company 825, arrived in the Fruita area to assist in building Rim Rock Drive across Colorado National Monument.

It wasn't the first corps company in Mesa County or even on the monument.

FIRST DRAFT



BOB SILBERNAGEL

Company 824 had been organized in May and started work on the roadway

on the east side of the monument. Other companies had arrived during the summer and had begun work on Grand Mesa and elsewhere. But by October, when the new camp opened, the community had seen how important the corps was during the Great Depression.

"When the full amount of the work of these conservation camps is revealed, there is little doubt they will have paid for themselves many times in dollars," The Daily Sentinel wrote in an editorial on Oct. 24, 1933, "while there will be no way of computing intangible benefits they have wrought to the manhood of the nation."

President Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected in 1932, having campaigned on a platform of putting people back to work. Shortly after he was inaugurated in March 1933 (not in January, as is now the case), he began to make good on his pledge with his New Deal programs, and the Civilian Conservation Corps was one of the first.

It's difficult to imagine any legislation moving through today's gridlocked Congress as rapidly as the corps bill did 80 years ago. The legislation was introduced in early March, was passed by Congress on March 31 and signed by Roosevelt on April 1. The first men were enrolled on April 7. The program provided work for civil-



Photos courtesy MUSEUM OF WESTERN COLORADO/Special to The Daily Sentinel

By the end of 1934, Colorado had employed nearly 25,000 young men in the Civilian Conservation Corps. Members of a camp, above, on Grand Mesa worked on Lands End Road.

ians on public projects, but it was overseen by the U.S. Army. In fact, without the Army's experience in deploying, supplying and assigning large numbers of men in a short period, it could never have gotten off the ground so quickly.

Federal land agencies, especially the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service, worked with the Army to create projects for the corps enrollees, males ages 18 to 25, with older supervisors and instructors. The enrollees made \$30 a month and were required to send \$25 of that to their families, thus boosting economies at home as well as where they worked.

By the end of 1934, Colorado would have nearly 25,000 corps enrollees, while a quarter million would be working nationwide. Initially, all of the camps in Colorado were overseen by the Army from Fort Logan, south of downtown Denver. A report compiled by the corps in Colorado in 1936 listed 72 camps in the state over the first two years, each capable of hosting roughly 200 men. (Men cycled in and out of the camps, so there were more total members over two years than the capacity of all the camps at any given time.)

There were eight permanent camps and the rest were used in summer only.

A modern website called Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy lists 165 total camps that operated in Colorado during the nine-year life of the program. It ended in 1942, shortly after the United States entered World War II.

In 1935, administration of the corps in Colorado was split into two divisions, with every camp west of the Continental Divide under the Grand Junction District.



The first Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Mesa County, Company 824, worked on building Rim Rock Drive across Colorado National Monument.

The work undertaken by the camps was varied. There was Rim Rock Drive, and another group of workers constructed Lands End Road. Companies worked to improve irrigation

ditches in the Grand Valley, including Company 2803, whose camp is pictured on this page. One camp was located in Palisade, on land that is now part of the town's Riverbend Park.

The federal Grazing Division, predecessor of the Bureau of Land Management, used corps crews to build or improve roads, construct stock ponds and make other improvements to public rangelands.

What was life like for the men working in the camps in Colorado? A few clues can be gleaned from both newspaper stories and the accounts in the corps' 1936 report.

For instance, in late October of 1933, The Daily Sentinel reported that a quarantine of the camp on the national monument for diphtheria was expected to be lifted soon.

The 1936 report includes a chapter on Camp 824, the one working on Rim Rock Drive. It tells of the dangerous work of using ladders hung from the cliff tops to reach parts of the new roadway on the Fruita side. It also mentions a troubling day when water for the camp ran out.

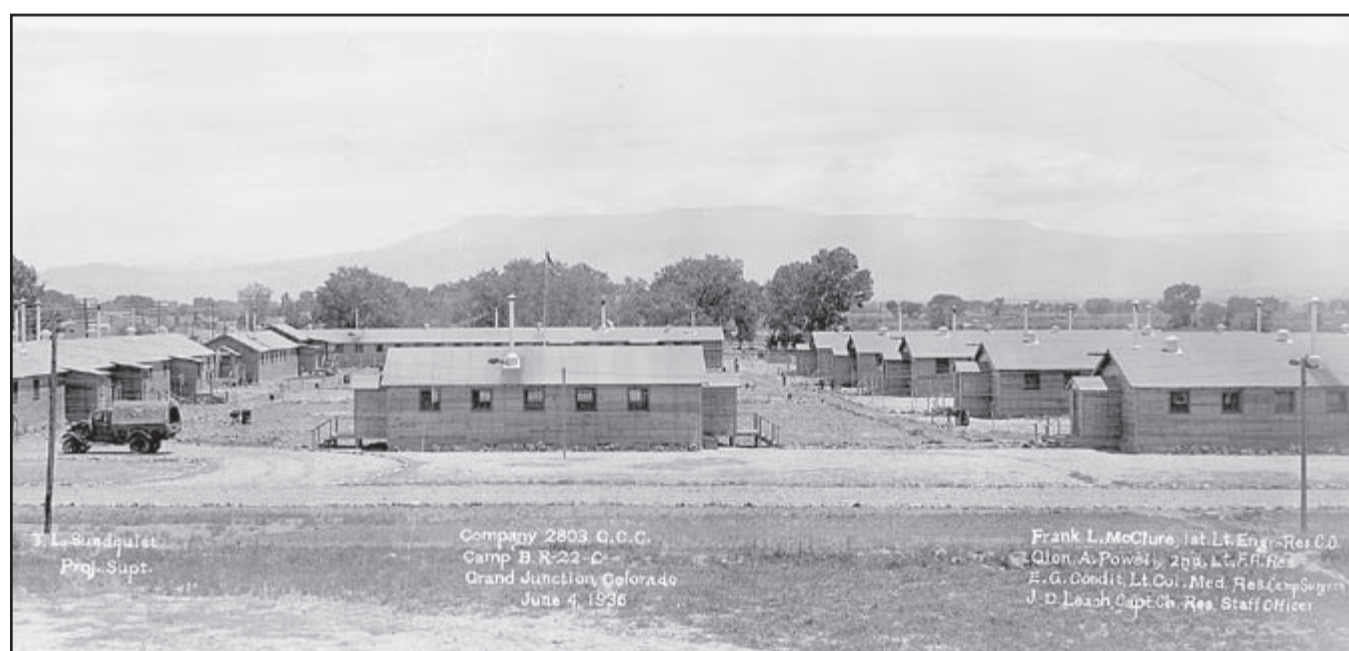
And, in an attempt at humor, the report also talks about the camp's

"Spanish American War" that first summer, but it offers no details. Presumably, it refers to friction between Anglo corps members and the many Hispanics who were enrolled. There were also African Americans, as a photo on this page shows.

One description of Colorado corps enrollees from the 1936 report paints a picture of how important the program was during the Depression.

"Enrollees came into the camps of the District under-nourished and under-weight, disappointed, disheartened, of low morale, disgusted with the world in which they found themselves," the report said. "In the Civilian Conservation Corps they were clothed and fed; given worth while work to do; were enabled to assist their loved ones financially; were counceled and guided ... They learned to work and to laugh and to play and thus regained their self respect ... They returned to their homes better prepared to assume their duties as citizens of the United States."

Thanks to Michael Menard at the Museum of Western Colorado for his assistance.



Grand Mesa can be seen from this camp in Grand Junction, which was located at the east end of Lincoln Park.

Woman creates dolls from historic figures

By JOEY MILLWOOD
Times-News of Hendersonville

HENDERSONVILLE, N.C. — Violet Bowman knows a little something about history. More specifically, she's a trivia buff when it comes to presidents and first ladies.

The 79-year-old retired from General Electric 17 years ago and merged the two things she loves — dolls and history — into one hobby.

Over the years, Bowman has designed and created dresses for dolls that transform the plastic figurines into historical people, including 19 different first ladies.

There's the Martha Washington in a green dress with a matching hat and gloves. Barbara Bush has shiny grey hair that Bowman made specifically for

the wife of George H.W. Bush. There's even Nancy Reagan in a long, red gown.

"I love the history of the first ladies," Bowman said. "I love all of their accomplishments. They all had a big part in forming our nation and our government."

Bowman draws inspiration from photographs, paintings and museums. For what she does, there's no creative template.

"I don't have a pattern for them," she said. "I just make them."

And it's not just the first ladies that intrigue the Mills River resident. She has hundreds of dolls, and the cast is filled with characters from "Gone with the Wind" and a group of 20s-styled flappers as well as Cleopatra and Marie

Antoinette.

The dresses, Bowman said, will take months to make in some instances. Marie Antoinette wears an intricately designed gold dress. Another is made of pearls galore that Bowman strung together one by one.

She also will break down jewelry to create tiny earrings, and designs the dolls' hair to look like the person.

Her neighbor and friend, Charlotte Works, was amazed when she first came into Bowman's home and saw the dolls. Bowman even looked at a picture of Works' grandmother and created a doll for her walking buddy.

"I could not believe that she had this kind of talent," Works said. "I think they're museum quality."

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