

facilities. CCC camps were sited in Veyo, Leeds, Zion and Bryce Nation Parks, St. George, Cedar City and Duck Creek. A month's salary was about \$30.

"Thee CCC boys say of that \$30, half was sent home to help support the family, \$8 was put into a savings account and \$7 went into their pocket," June Foster said.

Young men assigned to camps throughout the region during the gloom of the Great Depression came from all walks of life and from every corner of the nation. Thompson was just eighteen when he enlisted in the CCC and was sent West. The dollar-a-day income he earned helped support his mother and eight siblings at home.

The typical tour of duty in the CCC was six months, except for married men, who could enlist for up to a year. New recruits were indoctrinated in military practices by a handful of army reserve officers, who were also assigned from throughout the country.

Many of the men who participated in the Corps agree that the program not only put America back to work, but it helped the nation prepare for World War II.

Ernie Humphrey, who enlisted just after turning 18, said the experience taught him the value of discipline and hard work. "I suppose if we wouldn't have had the CCCs, we would have had a lot of the problems we have today - a lot of kids getting involved in gangs. There wasn't any work around and nothing for us to do to pass the time. It kept a lot of us out of trouble," he said.

The corpsmen worked hard. Equipment used to dig trenches and lay foundations often amounted to nothing more than picks, shovels and axes. It was back-breaking work and slackers were not tolerated. Reprisal sometimes came by extreme methods.

Frank W. Bringhurst wrote an account of his experience as a new recruit stationed in southern Utah in 1933. Assigned as part of the fence-building crew, Bringhurst tells of the "powder monkey" who blasted rock loose in post holes. He says, "The powder monkey was a 'looney' from an adjacent county. He would take a half stick of dynamite, cap it, light the fuse and let fly in the direction of young corpsmen standing around doing

REMEMBERING THE "C's"

A Local Man's Account



Leeds Resident Lee Warren was among the thousands of young men who went to work in the civilian conservation corps during the great depression. The program that "put America back to work" is responsible for countless roads, trails and general improvements on public lands throughout

by

**HELEN
GARDNER**

"During the 1930s, being born and raised in Price, Utah meant most young men, as they grew up, went to work in the coal mines," remembers Lee Warren, now a Leeds resident.

"My brothers and I began working in the mines when we were about sixteen, but by 1938 the coal mines shut down and there was no work anywhere. I was nineteen, and believe me I looked.

"After many months not finding work, I realized the only way for me to survive and help my family was to join the Civilian Conservation Corps. There was no welfare, no unemployment compensation, no unemployment insurance. We had to work to survive.

"I enlisted (in the CCC) in Price. On the first day, as we reported for duty, they put us all in a big truck and sent us to the Ferron (Utah) camp.

"The commanding officer came out to greet us, then asked if anyone in the crowd could type. Like all young guys, I usually made it a rule never to volunteer for anything, but for some reason, I raised my hand. Immediately I was taken to headquarters office. The rest of the day and for many days after that, I typed fingerprint cards for all those who had just begun their training. I never left the headquarters office. From that day on I typed and did office duty. I was promoted to first sergeant because I could type.

"In my opinion, the CCCs were the best possible training for young men at that time. We not only helped with the conservation of the areas where we were stationed, but we provided assistance to our folks back home.

"Pay was thirty dollars a month. My folks told me several times that the money I sent home was all they had. The government sent them twenty-five dollars of my paycheck. I made the difference between them going without and affording staples, they said.

"We were issued U.S. Army uniforms. Instead of a fighting force, we were a work force. We built roads, trails and dams. Most of the time it was pick and shovel work. When we fought forest fires it was shoveling and back burning. We built dams and flood diversions the same way, with hard physical labor. We even built tunnels, like the one at Zion Canyon. After I had been in Ferron for a while, we moved to Duck Creek, up on Cedar Mountain. There, our company went on doing the same kind of work - roads, clearing

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nothing, shouting a warning to make tracks – which they did.

“His redeeming idiosyncrasy, and cause for being tolerated, was he would invite all to fetch their more or less worn fatigues which he would bundle around fused dynamite. The remnants would then be presented to an incredulous supply sergeant for replacement.”

Thompson, a husky, redheaded fellow admits learning discipline while in the corps. At eighteen, Thompson said he had a hot temper. “Fist fights were common, but not permitted,” he said. “When two men started duking it out, the commanding officer would have them put on the gloves and finish up in the boxing ring.”

There are three fist fights Thompson remembers well – two in the boxing ring and one in downtown Leeds.

It was after a hard day's work in the spring of 1939 when Thompson strolled into camp and decided to rest up before chow. “One of the guys in camp didn't take a liking to me and smeared wax shoe polish over my work boots while I was asleep. Then he lit a match to them and started my boots on fire.”

The boots were so badly melted around Thompson's feet that they had to be cut off at the infirmary. Once the burnt leather was painfully removed, two badly-blistered soles were revealed.

“Well, one day I saw the dirty culprit in town,” he said. “I wanted him to know how I felt about him setting my boots on fire and of course, we ended up in a fist fight. But that ended (the conflict). Wouldn't you know, we became very good friends.”

When not on duty, Thompson remembers swimming and riding horses as the height of excitement – unless the liberty truck was making a run to St. George. Then movies and checking out the local females were high on the priority list.

According to the April 1939 edition of *The Midget Tribune*, the official Leeds camp newspaper, corpsman Paul “Muddy” Lane was “doing quite well in the line of romance. He has a girl in Leeds and one in St. George, too. This keeps him pretty busy. You know one night it's Leeds, and the next it's St. George. Good luck, Muddy.”

June Foster said many of the CCC

boys married local girls and settled throughout the region. Others took their Utah brides home with them.

Humphrey, who spent time at camps at Cedar Breaks, Zion National Park, and near Boulder, says time not spent working was filled with all sorts of events. While at the Cedar Breaks camp, he and his cohorts spent their free days exploring the depths of the “breaks.”

“Quite a few times, we tried to find a way all the way to the bottom of Cedar Breaks and into town. We finally did it. We also had a baseball team up there that was pretty good.”

In addition to free time for recreation, the Corps required their men to complete certain educational courses. Besides the three “R,” construction skills, such as concrete and masonry were taught, along with agriculture, history, drafting, typewriting and photography. Literature and photography clubs were established, and senior scouting was heavily emphasized. But the main lesson learned at the camps was how to work.

“I learned to work real hard,” said the 73-year-old Thompson from his Ohio home. “I feel my stint in the corps helped me achieve in life. I served three years in the U.S. Navy during World War II and retired from General Motors in 1976 after 30 years.” He and his wife of 47 years, Marjorie, stay active as CCC alumni with a chapter in Ohio.

Today, physical evidence of the local CCC camps is almost nonexistent and the countless hours spent building and improving amenities in the area are all but taken for granted by the millions of visitors who enjoy them. In the Leeds camp, though, signs of revitalization are taking shape.

Walking through the crumbling rock buildings with leaking rooftops back in 1990, June tells of the conversations she and her husband Bill had engaged in so many times over the years. The couple's disappointment over the decaying buildings, piling high with trash, stirred deep in their souls. So when Bill was elected to the city council earlier that year, he brought attention to the issue.

After hearing Foster's plea and seeing the possibilities, then Leeds Mayor Stanly Roberts agreed to turn the

underbrush, fighting forest fires and making trails. We also built several small dams for holding run-off water. Fifty years later, after I settled in at Leeds, I went searching and found some of the roads and trails we built still being used.

“During the year I was in the CCCs, as winter moved in, Duck Creek Camp was closed and we moved to the Veyo camp. I also spent some time at Leeds.

“A typical day included reveille at daybreak, breakfast, roll call and then our daily assignments. Lunch was always served to the men in the field. Everyone got three square meals a day. At night, after showers and a change of clothes, we stood retreat before the evening meal. Retreat was strictly military. Standing at attention while our flag was lowered was impressive. I was always moved. Watching the flag being lowered as the sun sank touched my heart.

“It was in the CCCs that most of us learned discipline. We learned to take orders. (We were) taught to keep our minds and bodies clean and take care of our own clothing. In the evening we could learn trades if we wished. Photography was popular and so was woodworking. There was always a large shop mechanics class. Art classes were also available.

“Many of the guys learned to read and write. I believe the CCCs took young boys from all over the United States and made men out of them. Everything was convenient and available. We had a library. Every night it was full of men reading or learning to read. Civilian instructors worked with us and they were well qualified.

“The commanding officer, adjunct officer and doctor were reserve army officers. The camps were run like the U.S. Army was run. We had a headquarters company, first sergeant company clerk, a supply sergeant, cc bakers and men on kitchen police (K). We all had to take our turn at KP, one week at a time.

The men who worked for the Forest Service were under the direction of civilians.

“My year at headquarters was great training and in addition, I got to be in the camp. I loved boxing – our team fought a round robin in all seven classes in our division that year and had a winner in each class. There were so

historical site into the community's shining star. Four years later, the results of their labors are beginning to sparkle.

"I have to admit there were plenty of times I thought to myself, 'what have I gotten into?'" June says. But now that the finishing touches are being put on the smallest of four remaining buildings, it is all starting to seem real for the Fosters.

Restoration did not start on the first building – a gas station – until 1993. Before the fallen plaster could be replaced, the Fosters learned there were plenty of hoops to first jump through.

Protecting the site from future deterioration meant gaining acceptance on the National Registry of Historical Sites. June said that task was accomplished last year.

Of the twenty-six CCC camp sites established in Utah, the Leeds camp and the Mayfield camp in Sanpete County are the only ones which remain, June said. Others have simply fallen prey to the years. Unlike the red sandstone Leeds camp buildings, most CCC facilities were constructed of wood. "That's one reason why these buildings are still standing after all these years," June said. "It is also why they are

special."

Dale Bartholomew stayed in the Leeds camp during its construction phase from start to finish as one of the twenty-eight men sent there to build it. He was the only carpenter stationed there and says, of the original crew, "I am the only one I can think of still around to tell about it."

The Orem resident recalls several barracks housing about 50 men each, a latrine and bath house situated on about three acres. Current plans for restoration include only the four remaining buildings and the stone paths and patios surrounding them.

Almost as overwhelming as the physical work involved in the project was finding as many of the original 250 camp members as possible. After tracking down as many survivors as she could through last-known addresses, family members and friends, and the national CCC headquarters in St. Louis, Mo., she said she was emotionally touched by their interest in the project.

"There are so many people who have stepped up to help in any way they could," she said. "Some of the boys with skills in wood working and rock masonry have stepped forward to help

with the renovation. Others, even those who don't have a lot of money, have sent what they could. We have received envelopes with just one dollar, with notes attached saying they wish they could do more. I try to answer every letter and let them know every dollar counts."

Each year the Fosters apply for federal and state grants to help make the project a reality. So far, about \$5,100 in aid has been secured. June says just like in 1933, money is still the biggest obstacle to overcome. She estimates another \$47,000 is still needed to complete the project. The biggest chunk is the \$28,000 needed to purchase the three-acre property now under private ownership.

In time, the refurbished building will be joined by a CCC museum, gift shop, and senior scouting hall.

June says there are some items, such as a skeleton-key door knob, that are needed to complete the authentic scene building, and volunteers are always welcome.

Anyone interested in the project to restore the CCC camp at Leeds can write the Fosters at P.O. Box 07, Leeds, UT 84746.

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really good boxers in our camp.

"Between my office work and boxing, it was a good year for me. But after I got out, the skills I used in the C's were but a memory – World War II started and changed all of our lives. I joined the Navy.

I had stayed in the reserve after I got out of the Navy. When the Korean action came along, I was sent there for some fighting. You can bet I was glad when it was over and I could get back home.

"Through the years, I've kept up with several men who became my friends from my days in the CCCs. One man ultimately became a chef at Hotel Utah in Salt Lake City. One was a professor and taught at Southern Utah University. One is still a doctor in California, and several became teachers. Four of us are Pearl Harbor survivors.

"The training I received and the financial help to me and my family made my time in the CCCs a great time in my life."

Blanche Bowler of St. George remembers one seemingly insignificant quirk of fate that changed some local history and the economy during the CCC years.

It was the issuing of outdated World War I army uniforms to the men in the CCC. These were the cause of many of the young men becoming acquainted with the families and young ladies around the camps.

The men heartily disliked the peg-legged wool army pants issued as part of their uniform. Someone figured if a triangle of material

was inserted at the bottom of each pant leg, it made the army-issue trousers look more like the fashionable sailors' bell-bottoms. Soon, a thriving cottage industry was going on in many of the small towns where the camps were located. The charge for the insert was a quarter for each pair of pants. During the 1930s, twenty-five cents was almost a day's wage.

With CCC camps in Veyo, Gunlock, Leeds, St. George, Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks, and Duck Creek, in addition to financial and educational gain, many of the men found something else – romance. It was inevitable that the scenario of "boy meets girl, falls in love and marries girl" be enacted many times over.

The romances which culminated in marriages, forced many of the newly-wed men to leave their brides to go to war in 1941. Men who came to Utah from as far away as Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas and Ohio, after the war, returned to their Utah brides with new customs, ideas and new ways of looking at the world.

The depression which brought the CCC camps and young men to southwest Utah is now but a memory, yet the social changes wrought by their presence here live on.

Lee Warren remembered his days here and retired to Leeds – a place that has remained alive in his heart. Similar stories could be told of thousands of other men who grew to love the land where they served in the CCC and chose either to remain here or to eventually return. All of them will tell you the CCC program changed their lives – mostly for the better.