

ROOTS OF RENEWAL

*The Civilian Conservation Corps
in Delaware*



Front Cover:

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Photo digitally enhanced

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Inside Front Cover:

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ROOTS OF RENEWAL

*The Civilian Conservation Corps
in Delaware*



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Resource ID: 9015-020-001_131p

President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the **Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)** by executive order on April 5, 1933, as part of his “New Deal” initiatives.

NEW DEAL

The program aimed to combat soaring unemployment during the Great Depression by providing hundreds of thousands of young men with work relief and job training on projects related to the conservation and development of natural resources on federal, state, and local lands.

The CCC, also known as FDR’s “Tree Army,” primarily enrolled unskilled, unemployed men between the ages of 18 and 25, many of whom came from families receiving government assistance.



"I propose to create a Civilian Conservation Corps to be used in simple work...More important, however, than the material gains will be the moral and spiritual value of such work."

*- President Franklin D. Roosevelt
1933*

Image courtesy of the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.
Record ID: nmah_1830008

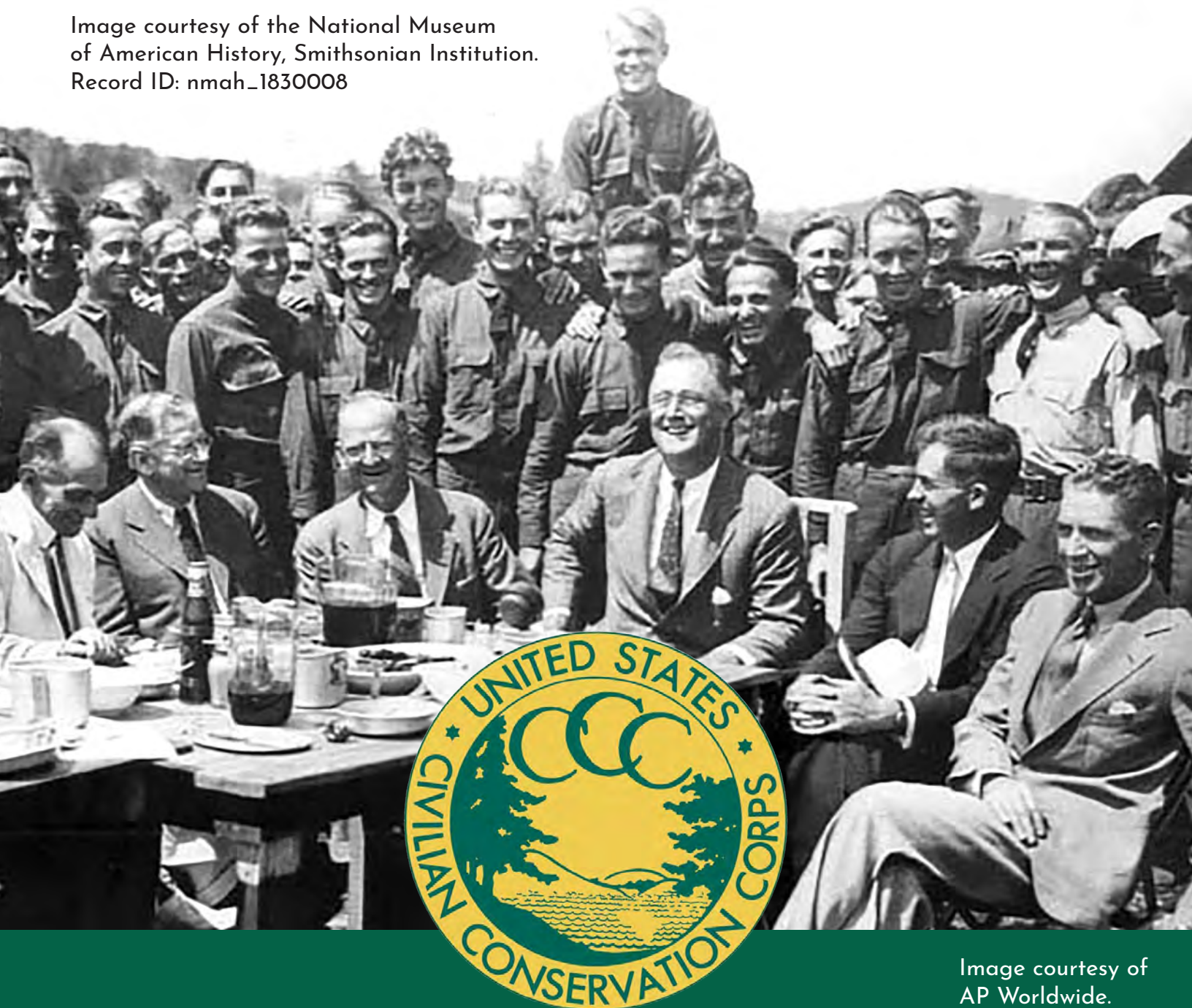


Image courtesy of
AP Worldwide.

CCC enrollees typically lived in wooden barracks, with larger camps featuring a dining hall, recreation building, administrative offices, a schoolhouse, and officers' quarters.

Smaller or temporary camps often consisted of rows of tents. For many men from urban areas, adjusting to these living conditions could be challenging. The physically demanding work improved their strength and endurance, while educational programs provided valuable skills and knowledge.

Although widely popular, the CCC was never a permanent program. As the Depression eased and employment opportunities grew, the program gradually reduced in scale.



Redden Civilian Conservation Corps Camp
Date: circa 1935
Resource ID: 1325-003-036_01594n

With the draft in 1940, and the onset of World War II, most CCC labor shifted to military construction projects, except for wildland firefighting. While the program was never formally terminated, Congress facilitated the closure of remaining camps in 1942, reallocating equipment and resources. The CCC, however, remained a model for postwar conservation programs across the United States.

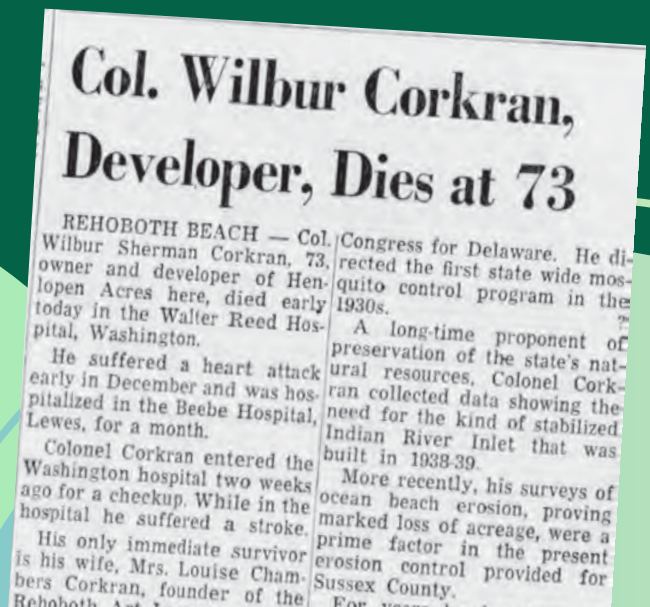
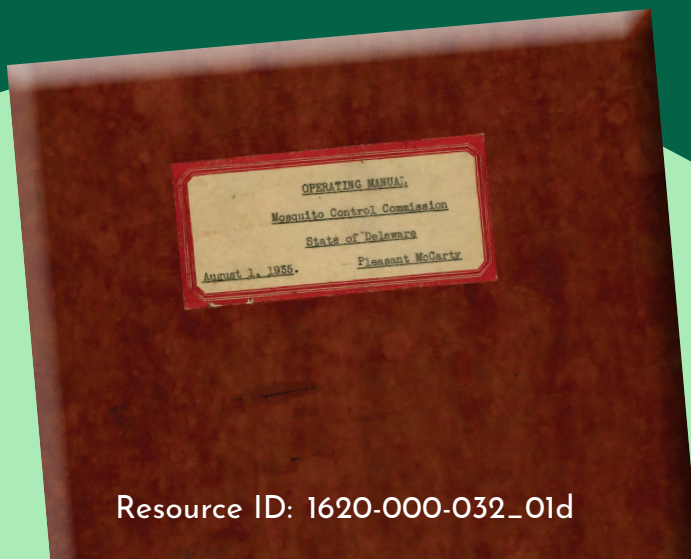
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Resource ID: 9015-020-001_132p



Spotlight: Col. Wilbur S. Corkran

Colonel Wilbur S. Corkran, a civil engineer and developer of Henlopen Acres, oversaw Delaware's Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) operations. A University of Delaware graduate, Corkran had served with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in World War I and continued his service with the Delaware National Guard. He also held the position of State Engineer before Governor Clayton D. Buck appointed him to launch Delaware's first CCC camps and lead the state's new mosquito control projects.



As executive officer and engineer, Corkran directed the CCC's mission to eliminate mosquitoes by constructing and clearing drainage ditches across Delaware's waterways. From his headquarters above the Lewes Post Office, he managed a small state-funded staff and earned \$450 a month—later voluntarily reduced as the work slowed in 1938.

By summer 1935, the Delaware Coast News reported that the CCC's efforts had "practically eliminated the salt marsh mosquito," transforming southeastern Delaware into "almost a paradise to both human and animal life." Corkran acknowledged that most recruits—young men aged 18 to 25 and new to manual labor—required time to build strength and skill. Still, their performance was "remarkable." Within 30 months, they dug over 1,700 miles of new ditches and cleaned another 1,200, averaging 24.25 feet per hour on new work and 76.25 feet per hour on maintenance.

Corkran demanded diligence and discipline from his crews. In his Operating Manual: Mosquito Control Commission, State of Delaware, he outlined detailed instructions and charts "to establish a more definite and efficient routine." The manual's 100 chapters covered everything from weather forecasting by moonlight and tying knots to digging proper ditches, navigating muddy roads, managing farmer relations, and minimizing wasted time—a reflection of Corkran's precision, practicality, and leadership.

EMPLOYMENT AND RELIEF DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION



The CCC provided essential jobs for young men in Delaware, offering steady income, food, and housing at a time of widespread unemployment. This support helped many families endure the economic hardships of the 1930s.

Enrollees served for a minimum of six months, earning \$30 per month, along with room and board at CCC camps. Most of their wages—between \$22 and \$25—were sent home to support their families. For the men themselves, the CCC offered regular, nutritious meals, a welcome relief for those from communities hard-hit by the Great Depression. In addition to providing work, educational programs established by the CCC taught 40,000 enrollees how to read and write.

Although Delaware was the last state to establish CCC camps, the purchase of Redden State Park facilitated their arrival.



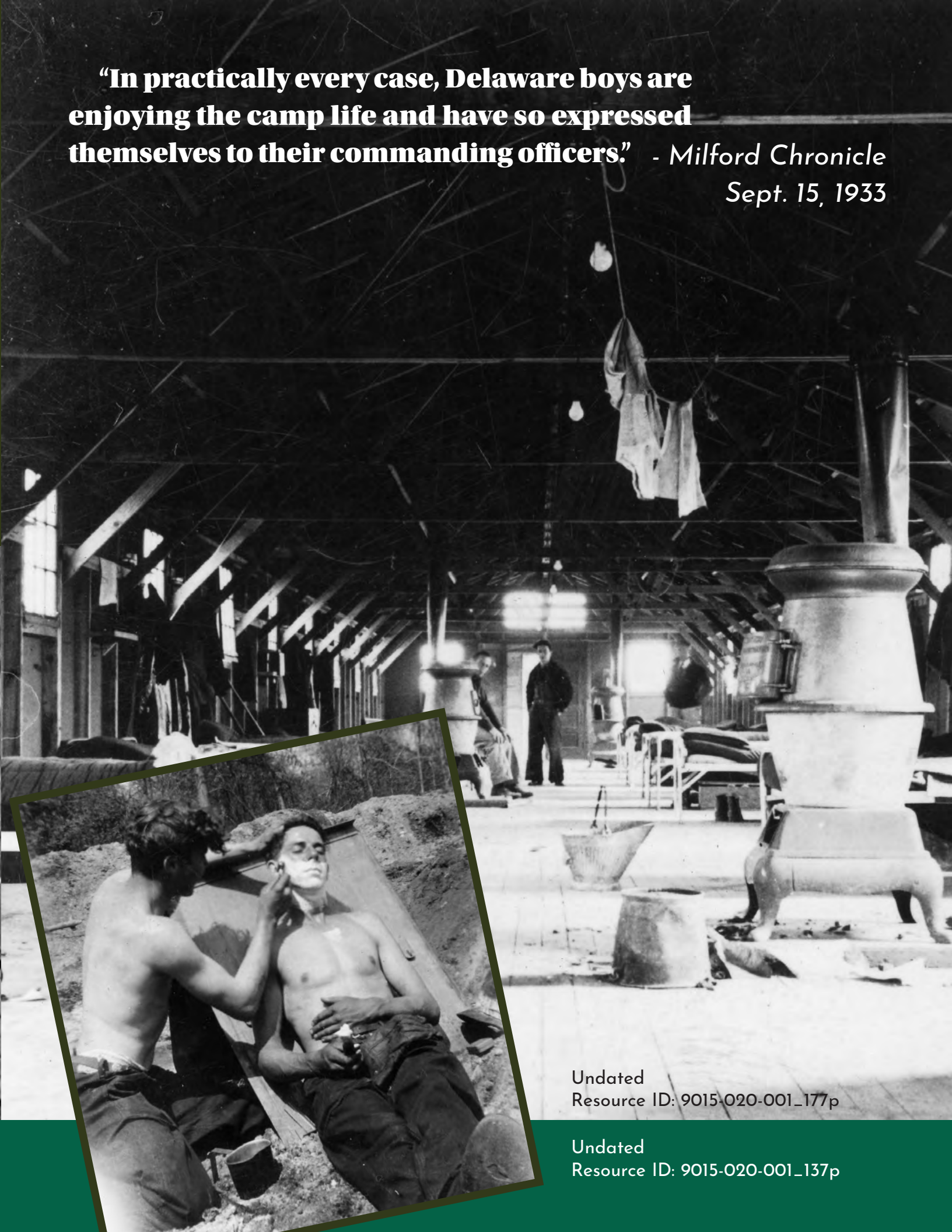
At its peak, as many as 7,000 Delawareans were employed through the CCC nationwide. Camps were set up in Lewes, Magnolia, Leipsic, Georgetown, Slaughter Beach, Frederica, and Wyoming.

Most members of the CCC were young men, but there were also some older recruits. Veterans of World War I, the Spanish-American War, the Philippine Insurrection, and the Boxer Rebellion enrolled.

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“In practically every case, Delaware boys are enjoying the camp life and have so expressed themselves to their commanding officers.” - *Milford Chronicle*
Sept. 15, 1933



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Spotlight: She-She-She Camps

As the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) expanded, one group remained notably excluded: women.

Despite their desperate need for work during the Great Depression, few New Deal leaders prioritized relief programs for women. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, however, was far ahead of her time.



Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

Poster by Sara Cleo

Date: 1939

Image courtesy of the
Library of Congress



Early in the CCC's formation, she proposed employing some of the nation's 200,000 homeless women in forest nurseries—a suggestion she forwarded to Labor Secretary Frances Perkins, the first woman in the Cabinet. The idea went nowhere, and the CCC remained an all-male program.

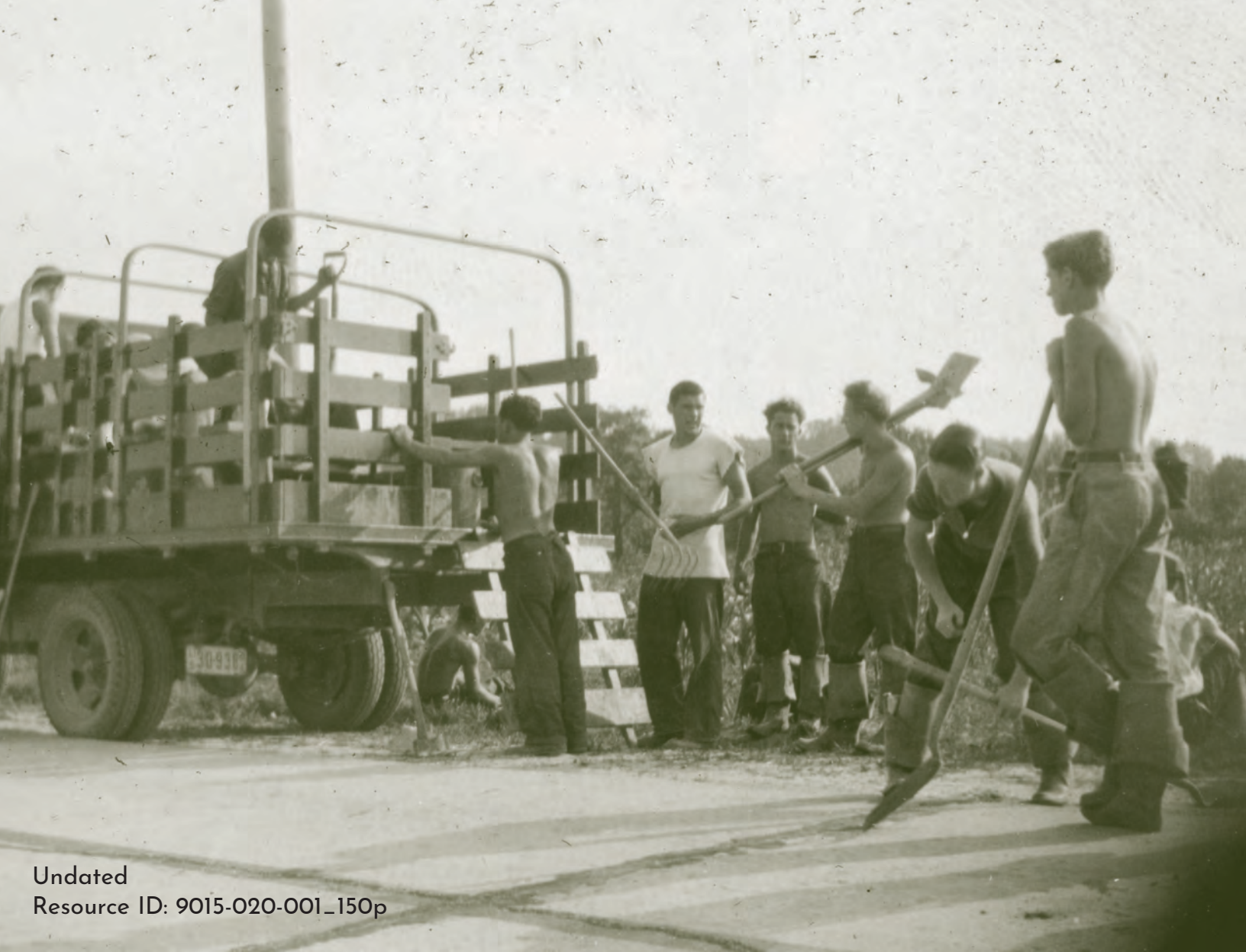
Still, Roosevelt persisted. Between 1934 and 1937, her advocacy helped launch a parallel effort—the so-called “She-She-She” camps—designed to support unemployed women. Modeled loosely on the CCC, these camps were developed with Hilda Smith, an educator and former suffragist who had long championed opportunities for working women.

Unlike the CCC's labor-focused camps, Smith's plan emphasized education, rest, and self-sufficiency. The women's camps offered instruction in clerical work, housekeeping, and other practical skills while providing safe community and relief from isolation. After intense lobbying by Roosevelt and her allies, the first experimental camp—Camp TERA (Temporary Emergency Relief Administration)—opened in June 1933 at Bear Mountain, New York.

Though short-lived, the “She-She-She” camps reflected Roosevelt's progressive vision: that women, too, deserved dignity, purpose, and opportunity in the New Deal's recovery efforts.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS





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Delaware CCC camps focused on conservation and public works, including reforestation, soil erosion control, and construction of trails. Their work left lasting improvements to the state's natural resources and public spaces.

CCC workers in Delaware also helped establish and improve parks that are still in use today, such as Brandywine Creek State Park and other recreational sites.

Delaware CCC workers

planted
274,000 trees

enhanced
**692 acres
of forest**

and treated
**52,874 acres
for mosquito
control**

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Resource ID: 9015-020-001_139p

Between 1936 and 1937
alone, they:

laid
**1,183 feet of
sewer lines**

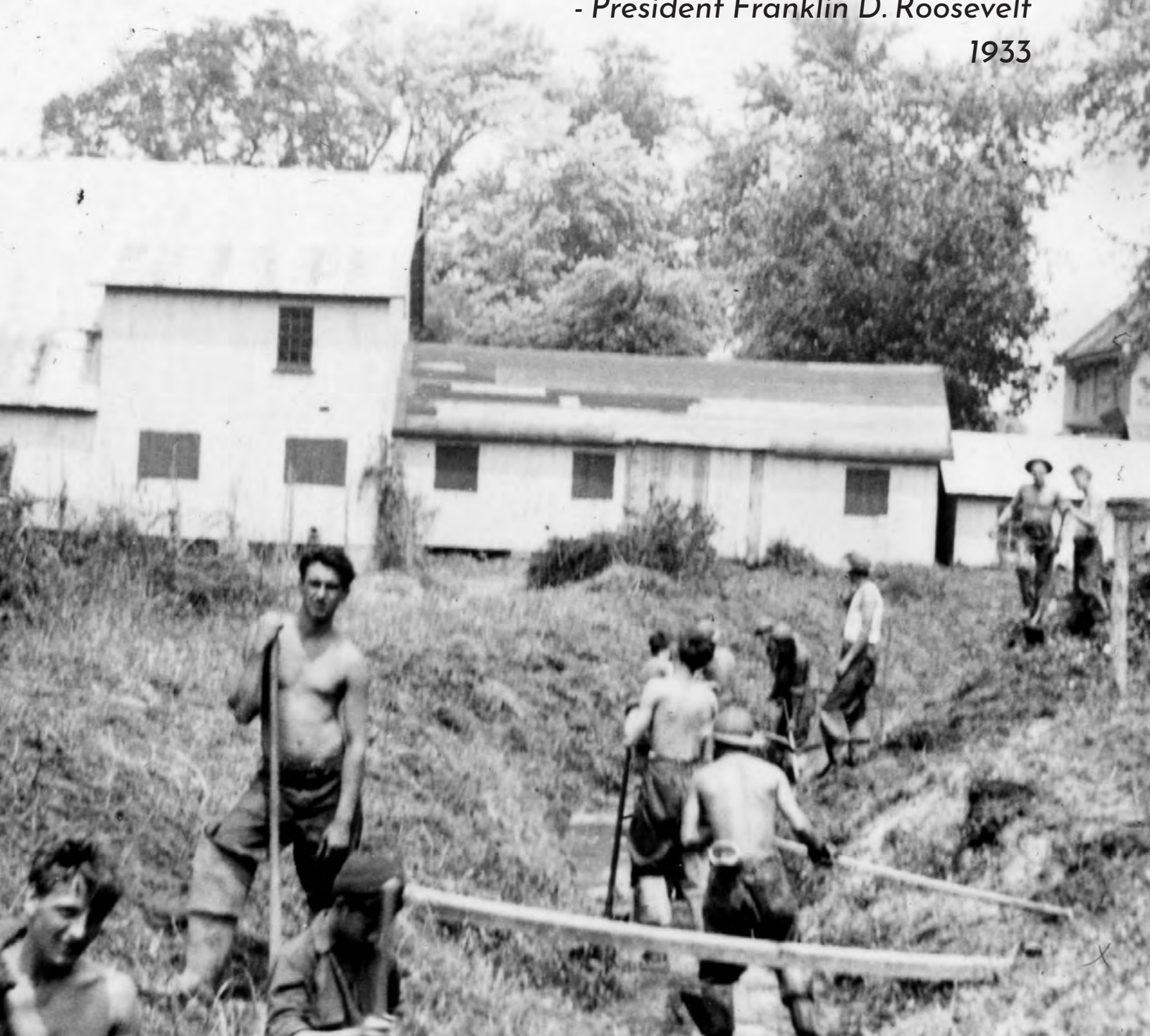
planted
**33 acres of
fields**

and completed
**7,234 man-days
of mosquito
control**



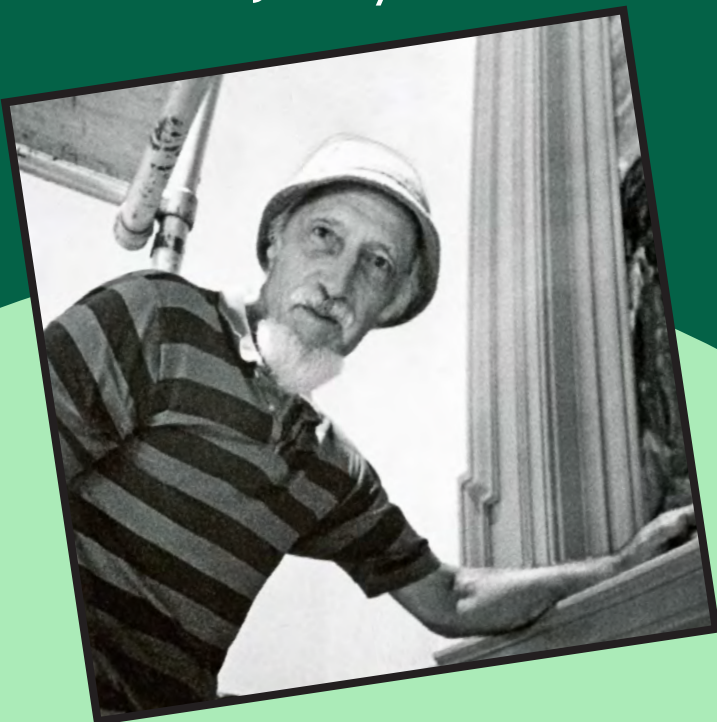
“It is my belief that what is being accomplished will conserve our natural resources, create future national wealth and prove of moral and spiritual value not only to those of you who are taking part, but to the rest of the country as well.”

- President Franklin D. Roosevelt
1933



Spotlight: Artist Jack Lewis

By the spring of 1936, Colonel W. S. Corkran conceived an idea that would become part of Delaware's lasting cultural legacy: to hire an artist to document the life and work of the state's Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Through the 1st Engineers, Corkran spread word of the position to CCC offices in New York and New Jersey.



Jack Lewis
Date: 1986
Resource ID: 9210-000-013-003_442p

The sole applicant was John I. “Jack” Lewis, a recent art graduate from Rutgers University, who joined the Delaware CCC that fall as an “Artist Enrollee.”

Assigned first to Magnolia Camp (#1295), Lewis lived in the barracks, sketching and painting the daily activities of the men. Between 1936 and 1939, he traveled among the mosquito-control camps at Magnolia, Lewes, and Leipsic, capturing the work and spirit of the CCC under Corkran’s direction.

Lewis later recalled that the idea for his position came from Corkran and his wife, Louise Chambers Corkran—both active in the arts. Louise went on to found the Rehoboth Art League in 1938, located on the property where the Corkrans lived.

After the CCC ended, Lewis served in the U.S. Army Engineer Corps during World War II, then returned to Sussex County as an art teacher and noted watercolorist. His work can be found in Delaware’s Legislative Hall, public collections across the Delmarva Peninsula, and the Rehoboth Art League’s Permanent Collection. His distinguished career earned him the Governor’s Award for the Arts in 1981 and the Order of the First State in 2010.

SEGREGATION AND AFRICAN AMERICAN PARTICIPATION

Like the CCC nationwide, Delaware's camps were segregated. Black men were included but often assigned to separate camps or projects.

Despite these restrictions, Black workers made significant contributions to conservation efforts and acquired skills that benefitted them long after their CCC service.



African American Civilian Conservation Corps Company 3269

Date: 1940

1325-003-036_1091p

Delaware's first all-Black company, 3269-C, was established in Leipsic in 1938.

Tasked with creating a wildlife refuge for ducks and migratory birds, the company developed the Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge.

Through harsh working conditions and setbacks, the company completed the project in four years and included hundreds of men.





Workers cleared wooded swamps and built dikes to create Raymond and Shearness Pools and a causeway to separate Shearness and Finis Pools, creating three freshwater impoundments. They planted over fifty thousand trees and built a headquarters building, a boathouse and marine railway, an observation tower, and houses for the manager and a patrolman. They also ran ditches for mosquito control and conducted various wildlife surveys.



Bombay Hook

Date: 1970

Resource ID: 9015-010-000_T6-063p



Date: 1940

Resource ID: 1325-003-036_1091p

Company 3269-C was disbanded in 1942, as many members went on to serve in World War II following the discontinuation of CCC funding.

Hundreds of thousands of visitors have enjoyed the wide expanses of tidal salt marsh and natural beauty of the freshwater pools that support wildlife - none of which would be possible without the backbreaking work of the men of CCC Company 3269-C.

Bombay Hook

Date: 1953

Resource ID: 1325-003-036_651p



A YOUNG MAN'S OPPORTUNITY

Poster by Albert M. Bender

Date: 1935

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

FOR WORK PLAY STUDY & HEALTH



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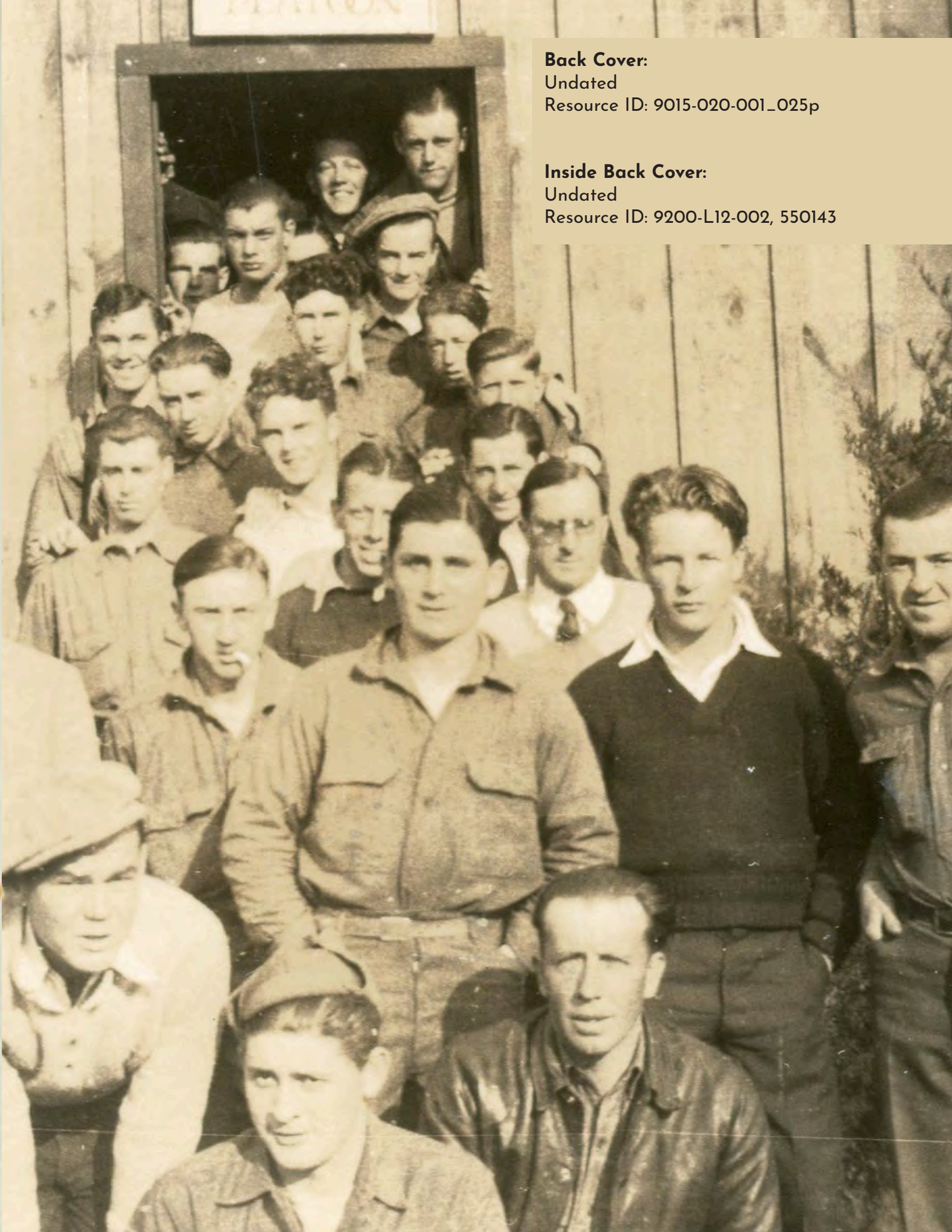
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**C.C.C.
CO. 3222**

**WYOMING
DELAWARE**

