



THE CCC INDIAN DIVISION

Aid for depressed Americans, 1933-1942

Calvin W. Gower

THE WINTER of 1932-33 was a season of terrible despair in the United States. Unemployment, striking first and hardest at those on the bottom of the economic scale, reached an all-time record of more than fifteen million. Perhaps a half-million young men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five were jobless. In addition, things were wrong with the land. It yielded hesitantly after generations of wanton waste and ill-usage. Water washed three billion tons of the best soil away from fields and pastures a year, and wind accounted for a like amount, as dust re-

placed grass on the plains. Moreover, of the original 800,000,000 forested acres of the continental United States, a mere 100,000,000 remained.¹

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt became president in March, 1933, he judged the temper of the people and proclaimed, "This nation asks for action and action now. Our primary task is to put people to work." Within a remarkable "Hundred Days," several major new recovery schemes were ready to be implemented: the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) to aid farmers, the National Recovery Administration (NRA) to assist industry, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) to rescue a depressed section of the nation, and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). (The formal title of the CCC, Emergency Conservation Work, never caught the public's fancy, and in 1937 the popular name, Civilian Conservation Corps, or CCC, became official.)²

¹ William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940*, 52 (New York, 1963); Samuel F. Harby, *A Study of Education in the Civilian Conservation Corps Camps of the Second Corps Area*, 13 (Ann Arbor, 1938); John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study*, 4 (Durham, 1967).

² Kenneth Holland and Frank E. Hill, *Youth in the CCC*, 9 (Washington, D.C., 1942); Leuchtenburg, *Roosevelt*, 41-62.

³ James J. McEntee, *Now They Are Men: The Story of the CCC*, 9-10 (Washington, D.C., 1940).

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As first proposed to Congress by Roosevelt, the conservation corps was to be "used in simple work . . . confining itself to forestry, the prevention of soil erosion, flood control and similar projects." It would, Roosevelt continued, "take a vast army of these unemployed out into healthful surroundings . . . [and] eliminate to some extent at least the threat that enforced idleness brings to spiritual and moral stability."³



THE CCC began operation on a note of enthusiasm which characterized its career. At Big Meadows, Skyland Drive, Virginia, New Deal officials gathered on August 12, 1933, to view one of the new camps. Seated at the table (from left): Paul B. Malone, Louis M. Howe, Harold L. Ickes, Robert Fechner, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Henry A. Wallace, and Rexford G. Tugwell.

For Indian Americans, according to Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier, emergency conservation work presented “the greatest opportunity and the greatest challenge confronting the Indian Service and the Indian tribes.” Seven weeks after funds were made available to the Indian Division of the CCC, that branch was employing nearly 15,000 Indians and as a relief measure benefiting no fewer than 100,000 Indians. “No previous undertaking in Indian Service,” Collier concluded, “has so largely been the Indians’ own undertaking.” Conceived to fit into the broad Indian reform movement which gained momentum in the 1920s and reached a climax with the Wheeler-Howard (Indian Reorganization) Act of June, 1934, the CCC-Indian Division was perhaps the first measure to bring material aid to reservations, to encourage self-administration by Indians, and to conserve and even add to the Indians’ considerable land resources. Although the program’s financial help in its nine years of existence was actually rather meager, that aid nevertheless kept many people going through a particularly desperate time.⁴

THE CONSERVATION work corps idea itself was scarcely a new one. Decades earlier, Harvard philoso-

pher William James had advocated the conscription of youth to form a great army “enlisted against nature.” This force, he felt, would have countless benefits both for youth and the land. By 1932, the governments of Bulgaria, the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries, Austria, and, especially, Germany had established conservation camps for the unemployed. In both California and Washington, too, the Forest Service had run subsistence camps for the jobless prior to Franklin D. Roosevelt’s election. But the CCC, as it emerged on a national basis, clearly bore the stamp of the New Deal administration.⁵

Urged on by Roosevelt and his advisers — over opposition such as that raised by Secretary of Agriculture Arthur M. Hyde, who thought the idea of conservation camps to be of an “utterly visionary and chimerical character,” or that of American Federation of Labor President William Green, who saw camps as a step towards “regimentation of labor” under military control — Congress rushed through a bill in March, 1933. Roosevelt signed it on March 31 and then issued an

⁴ John Collier, “To the Indians and the Indian Service,” in *Indians at Work*, [August 15, 1933], p. 1.

⁵ Salmond, *The CCC*, 4–5.

executive order on April 5 that put the plan into action. He named Robert Fechner, a leader of the International Association of Machinists and of the American Federation of Labor, as director of the CCC. A capable administrator to whom belongs much credit for the corps' success, Fechner co-ordinated the efforts of the four executive departments involved, breathed life into the corps, and kept it remarkably free from bureaucratic stagnation. (The Department of Labor selected the enrollees; the Department of War at first just conditioned the men but soon took over the job of running the new CCC camps; the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture planned and supervised the conservation work performed by the enrollees.)⁶

The act that authorized the CCC was brief and did not spell out the details of the operation. Roosevelt and some of his advisers decided early in April, 1933, that the corps would provide employment primarily for single men (often termed "boys") aged eighteen to twenty-five whose families were on relief (although this was not an absolute requirement) and who would agree to allot \$22.00 to \$25.00 of their monthly check of \$30.00 to their families.⁷ In this manner young men would be taken from the ranks of the unemployed and put to work in healthful outdoor surroundings performing worthwhile conservation tasks. In addition, they would provide some income to their families back home.

Reservation Indians, already living in "healthful outdoor surroundings," were not included in the preliminary plans, however, and Charles J. Rhoads, the departing commissioner of Indian affairs who had served under President Herbert C. Hoover, was concerned that their plight would go ignored. He wrote

⁶ Herman J. Muller, "The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942," in *Historical Bulletin*, 28:56 (March, 1950) (first quote); Salmond, *The CCC*, 14 (second quote), 28; Holland and Hill, *Youth*, 7, 27-28; James J. McEntee, "Final Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, April, 1933, through June 30, 1942," 5-9, in the records of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Record Group 35 in the National Archives, Washington, D.C., hereafter cited as: NARG 35.

⁷ Salmond, *The CCC*, 30. The age limit was lowered to 17 later in the 1930s.

⁸ Charles J. Rhoads to Robert Fechner (approved by Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes), April 11, 1933, CCC Correspondence, 500 Series, Houst.-Indian, NARG 35; M. L. Burns, "Report on Proposed Work Camps on Reservations of Consolidated Chippewa Indian Agency, May 25, 1933," I, in the records of the Indian Affairs Bureau, Minneapolis Area Field Office, Record Group 75, in the Federal Records Center, Kansas City, Missouri, hereafter cited as: RG 75; William T. Hagan, *American Indians*, 153-154 (Chicago, 1961); *Indians at Work*, [August 15, 1933], p. 2; Salmond, *The CCC*, 33.

to CCC Director Fechner on April 11, 1933, stating that the depression had been very severe for the Indians, with "hundreds and even thousands in destitute circumstances." From Cass Lake, Minnesota, the superintendent of the Consolidated Chippewa Indian Agency echoed Rhoads' words: "Many of the Indians under this Agency are in desperate circumstances." Reservation Indians, like many Americans, had lived on slim if not inadequate incomes in the 1920s (and before), and in the 1930s found themselves in even worse economic straits. As the general unemployment problem was forcing many jobless urban Indians back to the reservations, grasshoppers and drought were repeatedly destroying the crops on which the already hard-pressed reservations were dependent. With little hesitation, therefore, the CCC leaders agreed to establish CCC activities for about 14,400 Indians.⁸

From the earliest days of the planning of the CCC-Indian Division, it was believed that CCC regulations should be adapted to the Indian situation. Retiring Commissioner Rhoads, a Quaker philanthropist who had been president of the Indian Rights Association at the time he was appointed by Hoover, wrote in April to CCC Director Fechner that he believed the corps would greatly aid the Indians. In line with previous reform efforts, however, he suggested certain modifications in any CCC program for them. Regular CCC enrollees left their homes, sometimes even their home areas, to live and work in camps in national parks or

DISTRIBUTION of CCC work among the Indians by states in September, 1933

State	Number of Agencies	Manpower Quota
Arizona	10	5,500
California	3	350
Colorado	1	100
Idaho	1	200
Iowa	1	20
Minnesota	2	400
Montana	6	1,000
Nevada	3	80
New Mexico	7	2,500
North Carolina	1	100
North Dakota	3	200
Oklahoma	13	440
Oregon	1	600
South Dakota	6	860
Utah	2	200
Washington	4	1,500
Wisconsin	2	300
Wyoming	1	400

forests. Rhoads recommended that the Indians be allowed to work on their own reservations and in activities somewhat different from those of the regular enrollees. He mentioned specifically "water development" and "erosion control." Housing the Indians in special camps would probably not be desirable, either, he believed, because they would prefer to live with their families.⁹

CCC officials agreed in general with Rhoads' suggestions, but they did insist that in some instances efficiency demanded the construction of Indian CCC camps. They quickly proceeded to mark out seven supervisory districts and to place a CCC work supervisor in charge of each. The superintendent of each reservation and a local forestry or irrigation representative were to choose projects for the reservation, and, in a move to encourage tribal autonomy, the tribal council was to take part in the administration of the activity. Roosevelt approved an amount of \$5,875,200 for the Indian CCC work program. It included construction of forest roads, trails, and paths, fire protection measures, erosion control, and water development. By May, 1933, *Happy Days*, the national newspaper published for CCC workers, was able to project that "seventy-two forest work camps will be set up on Indian reservations located in fifteen western and southwestern states."¹⁰

Jay B. Nash, head of the department of physical education at New York University, was appointed director of the CCC Indian program in May, 1933, but served in this capacity only until the following September 15. After a short delay, Daniel E. Murphy succeeded Nash and continued in the position until the early 1940s. Murphy, a twenty-year employee of the Indian Bureau, had been the superintendent of the Osage Agency in Oklahoma. Jay P. Kinney was put in charge of the production program, Ernest R. Burton directed employment in the Indian Service, and Mary-Carter Roberts edited the periodical, *Indians at Work*. All were under the jurisdiction of John Collier, the new commissioner of Indian affairs. As former executive secretary of the American Indian Defense Association, Collier was a very suitable successor to the reform-minded Rhoads.¹¹

An exceptional feature of the CCC Indian program was *Indians at Work*. The title page of the first issue of the magazine (probably published on August 15, 1933) carried the subtitle, "An Emergency Conservation News Sheet for Ourselves." In the second issue, however, the editor explained that the magazine would cover not just CCC-Indian Division news but general Indian affairs items as well. Nevertheless, the publication always gave considerable attention to conservation activity (such as pine blister rust control),

and the editor remained directly associated with the Indian Division. Also, as Collier pointed out in a letter to Fechner in September, 1933, the CCC financed the publication of the magazine.¹²

Indians at Work was launched in August, 1933, and, by continuing through May-June, 1945, outlived the CCC itself. At first it was mimeographed, but soon it settled permanently in the multilith process, although one issue (June, 1939) was printed. It appeared semi-monthly until January, 1938, when it became a monthly. *Indians at Work* contained interesting articles, but probably its most notable features were the photographs and drawings of Indians, reservation life, and western scenes. The attractive publication was definitely one of the most informative and appealing of those associated with the CCC.

With a periodical already to its credit, the CCC-Indian Division was well under way by the end of the summer of 1933. As the program developed, the differences between it and the regular CCC activity became even more marked. Indian enrollees did not have to be between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, but they had to be physically fit regardless of their age. Usually they had to agree to allot a "substantial part" of their wages to dependent relatives or allow it to be retained by the Indian agency with the provision that it would go to dependents in installments during winter months. These enrollees usually worked on their own reservations, were not required to sign up for a fixed period (as regular enrollees were), and were "free to return to their homes any time that care of crops or other home duties" necessi-

⁹ Randolph C. Downes, "A Crusade for Indian Reform, 1922-1934," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 32:345 (December, 1945); Rhoads to Fechner, April 11, 1933, CCC Correspondence, NARG 35; Hagan, *American Indians*, 124, 153-155.

¹⁰ *Indians at Work*, [August 15, 1933], p. 3-4; John Collier circular letter to superintendents, May 9, 1933, Fechner to Ickes, May 15, 1933, CCC Regulations, 900 Series, Indian-Press, NARG 35; Salmond, *The CCC*, 33; *Happy Days*, May 20, 1933, p. 7.

¹¹ Collier circular letter to superintendents, May 23, 1933, CCC Regulations, NARG 35; *Indians at Work*, September 15, 1933, p. 6; Collier report to Fechner, December 4, 1933, CCC Public Relations, General File, Ill.-Isle, NARG 35; Hagan, *American Indians*, 155; Downes, in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 32:334.

¹² *Indians at Work*, [September 1, 1933], p. 32; Collier to William Heritage, October 5, 1933, Heritage to Collier, October 28, 1933, RG 75; Collier to Robert Fechner, September 28, 1933, Correspondence with Robert Fechner, 1933-37, in the records of the CCC-Indian Division, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, in the National Archives, hereafter cited as: Correspondence-Fechner, 1933-37, NARG 75.

tated it. If they chose to live in a camp, they received \$30.00 a month, plus food and lodging. If they lived at home, their pay was \$2.10 per day for not more than twenty days in any one month, a possible total of \$42.00 per month. Local Indian agencies selected the enrollees and rotated the men in CCC jobs if the quota for the reservation was smaller than the number who wanted employment. This procedure was geared to give some relief to as many people as possible.¹³ Thus, a considerably more flexible CCC program evolved for the Indians, because their circumstances were different from those of the regular enrollees.

INITIALLY, in Minnesota, only the Consolidated Chippewa Indian Agency and the Red Lake Indian Agency (also Chippewa) participated in the CCC program. (The Consolidated Chippewa included six reservations: Fond du Lac, Grand Portage, Leech Lake, Mille Lacs, Nett Lake-Vermilion Lake, and White Earth.) However, in October, 1933, James W. Balmer, the superintendent at Pipestone Indian School, wrote Collier asking him to admit Minnesota Sioux Indians to the program. Collier quickly agreed, and Sioux at Pipestone, Prairie Island (Red Wing), Upper Sioux (Granite Falls), Lower Sioux (Morton), and Prior Lake (Shakopee) became part of the CCC. Within less than a year after the establishment of the CCC-Indian Division, then, a majority of nonurban Minnesota Indians, Chippewa and Sioux, were receiving some aid from the program.¹⁴

Minneapolis was the headquarters for the Lake States region of the CCC-Indian Division which included Minnesota, Wisconsin, and North Dakota. The region's two principal officials were J. H. Mitchell, camp supervisor for the program, and William Heritage, production co-ordinating officer. Because much of the Indian Division work in the region was on forested

reservations, Heritage, a forester, played an especially important role in the operation. Previously a logging engineer for the Office of Indian Affairs at Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin, he remained with the Indian CCC operation throughout its nine years of existence. Associated with Heritage was Norman W. Scherer, who was appointed assistant forester at Consolidated Chippewa Agency in November, 1934, and transferred to the regional office in Minneapolis in August, 1935. These men worked closely with the individual superintendents at the Indian agencies to develop and operate worthwhile work projects for Indian enrollees in the Minneapolis district.¹⁵

One particularly successful project was conducted at Rice Lake on White Earth Reservation. A crew of thirty-five men constructed ricing camps there to aid the 1,500 or so Indians who gathered in the fall to harvest wild rice, their main source of income. The men cleared five campsites of approximately ten acres each and furnished them with sanitary facilities, constructed corduroy docks from 500 feet to 1,600 feet long across the swamp which surrounded the lake, and dredged six-foot canals to enable the harvesters to paddle their laden canoes as far inland as possible before transferring the rice to sacks. The total cost for materials and supplies for this project of significant benefit to the Indians amounted to only \$21.95. The workers lived at home, walked to one site, and frequently used their own tools.¹⁶

At Nett Lake, on the other hand, a camp was constructed the first summer to house the CCC-Indian Division workers. It was situated on a knoll in the tamarack swamp surrounding the lake. First army tents and then fourteen pine buildings (made from lumber manufactured at the Red Lake Indian sawmill) formed a town for more than 200 workers. Only one-fourteenth of the men were from Nett Lake; others traveled some 300 miles over existing roads from Grand Portage to the east, 130 miles from Fond du Lac to the southeast, 200 miles from Mille Lacs to the south, and 250 miles from White Earth to the west. Transporting the men between their homes and the camp one to four times a month took considerable time and planning. Like all CCC crews, the men worked roughly a five-day, forty-hour week.¹⁷

At first the Nett Lake crew concentrated on building the camp itself, including a hospital and a large recreation building, before winter set in. Soon, however, the workers moved on to projects like construction of truck trails on the reservation. Such trails were very important to reservation inhabitants who could travel as far in one hour on a trail as they could in one week without one. In addition, roads helped extend government services such as education and health care to

¹³ Collier to George Weidenfeld, Chief Statistician of the CCC, September 8, 1933, Correspondence-Fechner, 1933-37, NARG 75.

¹⁴ Heritage to "Superintendents in District #1 where CCC camps are located," June 27, 1933, Collier to J. W. Balmer, October 25, 1933, Balmer to Collier, March 26, 1940, RG 75.

¹⁵ J. H. Mitchell to Heritage, June 5, 1933, Collier to Heritage, June 5, 1933, J. P. Kinney to W. B. Fry, June 12, 1933, Heritage to Roland Hill, November 21, 1936, Heritage to American Red Cross, June 17, 1942, RG 75.

¹⁶ E. J. Carlson, "Indian Rice Camps White Earth Reservation," in *Indians at Work*, November 15, 1934, p. 16-17, 20.

¹⁷ Charles H. Racey, "A Winter Camp — IECW," in *Indians at Work*, February 15, 1934, p. 19; Carlson, in *Indians at Work*, November 15, 1934, p. 14; E. J. Carlson, "An IECW Camp in a Tamarack Swamp," in *Indians at Work*, April 1, 1935, p. 37-38.

INDIAN ENROLLEES were grouped into work crews such as this one photographed at Nett Lake in 1941 (top). Working with limited equipment they cleared forests and constructed roads including one at Leech Lake Reservation (center). On White Earth Reservation, workers laid a pole walk (bottom) that saved ricers a six-mile trek through the encircling marsh to Rice Lake.



two county boards, the state highway department, and six individual landowners. Because so much land on the reservation was allotted and easements had to be obtained before work could be done, Nett Lake officials had corresponded with allottees and heirs in twenty-eight states and three countries (in addition to driving one automobile into the ground) by the end of the CCC's first two years. Inasmuch as the United States government held considerable allotments in trust at Nett Lake, there were fewer problems in the construction of roads and clearing of fire lanes than on other reservations. Practically none of the land was tribally owned, however, so forest culture work was restricted.¹⁹

In contrast, forest culture work was a major program at Red Lake Reservation where land had never been allotted and thus remained as a tribal holding. Indian Division groups there took over a small tree-nursery project and by 1940 produced four million trees. Nearly two million had been set out at Red Lake, and several hundred thousand others were sent to Con-

¹⁹ Carlson, in *Indians at Work*, April 1, 1935, p. 36, 39, 42.

²⁰ Carlson, in *Indians at Work*, April 1, 1935, p. 38-9. The General Allotment Act, or Dawes Act, of 1887 authorized the allotment of plots of tribal lands to individual Indians and families. "Surplus" tribal lands were to be sold to provide for Indian "civilization." Before the allotment policy was abandoned in the 1930s, two-thirds of the Indian-owned land in the United States had passed to white ownership. Fee-patented and government-owned land comprises 95 per cent of Leech Lake Reservation, 92 per cent of White Earth, and 59 per cent of Nett Lake. League of Women Voters of Minnesota, *Indians in Minnesota*, 6, 14 (St. Paul, 1971).

the Indians, brought them into closer contact with the white economy, and assisted in the location and suppression of forest fires that constantly menaced their valuable timber holdings.¹⁸

Operating problems of the Indian projects of the CCC in Minnesota and elsewhere proved to be complicated. Construction of six miles of telephone lines on Nett Lake Reservation, for instance, necessitated one sitting with the city council and conferences with

solidated Chippewa Agency. Red Lake corps workers also manned a forestry and engineering project that included the mapping of 80,000 acres for use in determining future logging activities, road construction, drainage, fire protection, and areas in need of reforestation. Other projects common to all the reservations included bridges, fire lookout towers, firebreaks, and blister rust control.²⁰

Two of the most important programs of the CCC-Indian Division in Minnesota were the white pine blister rust control project in the Red Lake area and the development of "forest fire training schools" at Consolidated Chippewa, Red Lake, and Pipestone. Two writers who discussed the blister rust control endeavor declared in 1941: "Cooperation of the Office of Indian Affairs at the Red Lake Indian Agency has been excellent." Efforts had been made to protect 12,311 acres of native white pine and 187 acres of planted white pine. The forest fire training schools became part of the "defense effort" in 1942, but fire fighting had always been a major element in the CCC-Indian Division operations in Minnesota.²¹

CCC PLANS and projects were always limited in range. Like many New Deal programs, the corps was conceived as an "emergency" measure to provide employment, and the Indian Division's future was often uncertain. In August, 1933, Indian Affairs Commissioner Collier asked CCC Director Fechner whether the Indian Division would continue operations through the winter months of 1933-34. Fechner answered in the affirmative, and Collier then reported that his bureau would require an additional \$4,000,000 for a second six months of conservation work. A substantial portion of this allotment was for wages and subsistence: \$2,721,000 for the 14,400 Indian enrollees, \$318,000 for supervisory personnel, and \$340,000 for salaried personnel such as cooks, mechanics, and telephone linemen. To Collier's relief the request was approved. He was notified in October that the administration had authorized the \$4,000,000 asked.²²

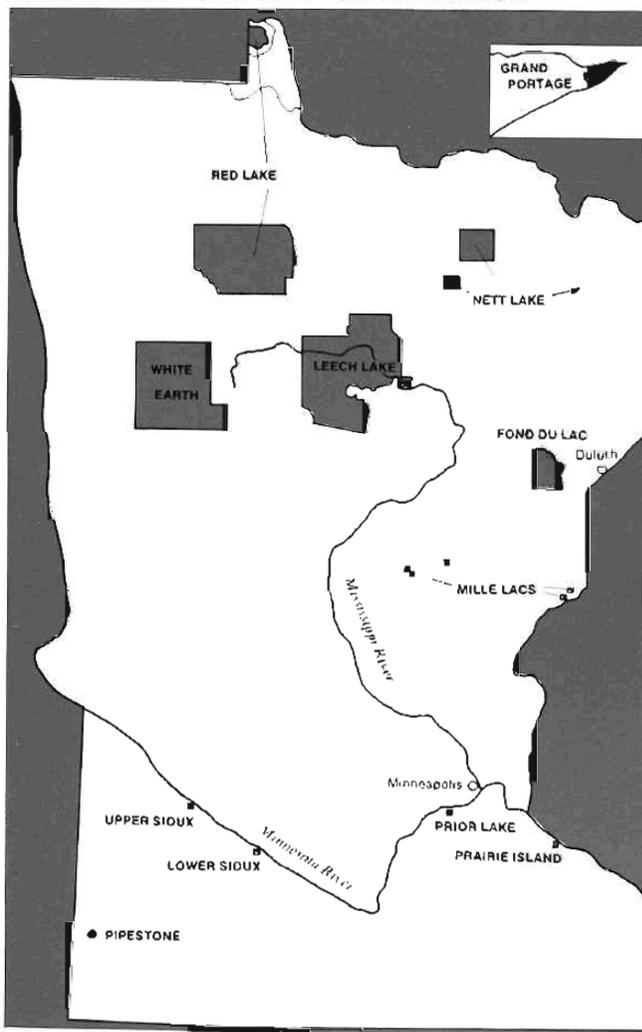
²⁰ "Red Lake Indians in Semi-Technical Positions—IECW," in *Indians at Work*, October 15, 1934, p. 21; "Red Lake Gift Nursery Produces Millions of Trees," in *Indians at Work*, May, 1940, p. 34; "The Indian Emergency Conservation Work Program in Figures," in *Indians at Work*, September 1, 1933, p. 10-11, 13.

²¹ J. N. Licks and L. B. Ritter, "White Pine Blister Rust Control, Red Lake Indian Reservation, 1941," a dittoed brochure in RG 75; Heritage to Collier, May 8, 1942, RG 75.

²² Collier to Fechner, August 17, 21, 28, September 6, 1933, Fechner to Collier, August 22, 30, October 13, 1933, Correspondence-Fechner, 1933-37, NARG 75.

The move to carry the program into the winter months of the first year had its complications. Without adequate heavy clothing Collier's men would be unable to work outside in the colder weather, so he was forced to request Fechner's approval in October to purchase "warm clothing, such as woolen underwear, wool socks, shoes, overshoes where necessary, windbreak coats, mittens, woolen shirts and the like." Under the original plan of April, 1933, the Indians received no clothes from the CCC—presumably it was assumed that many of them would work only sporadically—and Fechner, disturbed by the cost of Collier's proposal (\$200,000 to \$250,000), replied that the "the Indians were compensated in other ways in lieu of the clothing allowance that was made to our regular enrolled men." Collier retorted that the Indians were *not* receiving any extra compensation other than an allowance for food and lodging if they lived at home rather than in camps. Further, since many of them were working regularly for the corps, they deserved

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the same treatment as the white enrollees who obtained clothing from the government. Fechner finally accepted this argument and approved the funding request after Collier had secured prior approval from Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes.²³

Another complication that developed in the CCC-Indian Division's first year concerned illegal liquor traffic. (Sale of liquor to underage enrollees, of course, created difficulties for the administrators of regular CCC camps as well.) An act of July, 1892 (amended in 1938), forbade the introduction of intoxicants into Indian country and the sale of intoxicants to any Indian who had an allotment, title to which was restricted or held in trust by the federal government, or to any Indian who was a ward or under guardianship of the United States. These liquor laws still applied to Indians even after they became citizens. (It was not until 1953 that these laws were admitted to be discriminatory, and Indian liquor laws prohibiting liquor transactions were made applicable only where prohibited by state law, tribal ordinance, or both.)

With concern, then, Collier informed Fechner: "The establishment of Emergency Conservation projects has greatly increased the problem of suppressing the liquor traffic among Indians." A number of illegal dealers were operating in Arizona and New Mexico, and also in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and other states. Causes of this development, Collier asserted, were the concentration of the Indians in camps, the opening up of roads within the reservations, and the CCC cash wages paid to formerly unemployed Indians. To combat the illegal operators, the Indian Service requested permission for the "employment of possemen and the purchase of liquor to be used as evidence." Collier asked Fechner's consent to use corps funds to pay for the special expenses incurred in this effort to curb this traffic. Fechner balked at such expenditures, apparently thinking that using CCC money to buy liquor and paying Indians to purchase it — all in order to prevent Indians from buying liquor with CCC funds — was somewhat bizarre. Nevertheless, in February, 1934, he approved this extraordinary request from the Indian Service.²⁴

Minor problems notwithstanding, Fechner notified Collier in March, 1934, that the CCC and the Indian Division would be continued for a second year. In his report on the corps' first-year activities, Fechner noted briefly that between sixty-seven and seventy-five Indian camps had been in operation in the 1933-34 period. Although about 14,800 were eligible for the corps, the largest average monthly number of Indians actually enrolled had been only 11,567 — during October, 1933. Nonetheless, after a trip through the West and Northwest in the summer of 1934, Fechner exuber-



INDIAN DIVISION crews constructing a truck trail at Upper Sioux Community near Granite Falls

antly reported to Collier: "I saw some wonderful water conservation work done by them [the Indians], soil erosion, cultural work in the forests, building of fire trails, etc., and their camps compare favorably in every way with those of the white boys." Collier returned the compliment, declaring: "The cooperation and help which we have had from you has been one of the most encouraging and energy-releasing experiences of the past year and a half."²⁵

By the end of the corps' first two years, between 26,000 and 27,000 Indians had been employed in the CCC. Although in November, 1933, Indians held less than half of the 964 salaried and managerial positions — 404 as against 560 filled by whites — within a year they held 752 of 1,268 such jobs, considerably more than half. In addition, the education program in the camps had made some headway, although the Indian Division leaders for a time had stressed recreation rather than education in the "off-hours." In April, 1935, for example, Collier sent out a circular letter, previously approved by Fechner, stating: "Night classes should be held wherever possible. . . Courses in

²³ Collier to Fechner, October 4, 17, November 23, 1933, Fechner to Collier, October 11, 21, 1933, William Zimmerman, Jr., to Harold Ickes, November 8, 1933, Correspondence-Fechner, 1933-37, NARG 75.

²⁴ U.S. Solicitor for the Department of the Interior, *Federal Indian Law*, 386, 387, 382 (Washington, D.C., 1958); Collier to Fechner, December 4, 1933, Charles H. Taylor, Assistant Director, CCC to Collier, February 12, 1934, Correspondence-Fechner, 1933-37, NARG 75; Zimmerman to Fechner, September 12, 1933, Fechner to Zimmerman, September 20, 1933, Collier to Fechner, September 27, 1933, CCC Correspondence, NARG 35.

²⁵ *Second Report of the Director of Emergency Conservation Work*, April 5, 1933-March 31, 1934, p. 2, 5, 26 (Washington, D.C., 1934); Fechner to Collier, March 1, September 8, 1934, Collier to Fechner, September 18, 1934, Correspondence-Fechner, 1933-37, NARG 75.

conservation are most appropriate." Apparently, then, the Indians' education program varied somewhat from that of the regular enrollees which emphasized academic courses as well as vocational classes, but reports from the field demonstrated that on some reservations the education programs included more academic subjects. For instance, among the twelve subjects offered in July, 1935, at Consolidated Chippewa Agency were history, English, commercial art, bookkeeping, and forestry, while at Red Lake subjects included current events, public speaking, forestry, and first aid. At the Nett Lake camp, eight public schoolteachers were secured to teach general science, mechanics, choral singing, commercial art, beginning English, dramatics, shorthand, and tap dancing (the latter, according to one report, was particularly popular).²⁶

In addition to educational opportunities, Minnesota Indians received a financial boost from the CCC operation in its first two years. By March 31, 1935, CCC expenditures at Consolidated Chippewa Agency were \$329,654; at Red Lake Agency, \$327,708; and at Pipestone School and associated communities, \$14,831. With these allocations of funds the Indians had constructed 65.6 miles of truck trails at Consolidated Chippewa and 81.75 miles at Red Lake. At Consolidated Chippewa they had completed forest stand improvement work on 659 acres; at Red Lake Agency, the same type of labor on 4,258 acres.²⁷

Although Indian Division projects were well-executed and relations between the Indian Service and the CCC leaders usually were cordial, occasionally Fechner considered Indian Division project requests too far astray from basic CCC purposes and vetoed recommendations from Collier, his assistant, William Zimmerman, Jr., or Daniel Murphy, the director of the CCC Indian program. In September, 1935, for example, Collier wrote Fechner and outlined a plan jointly conceived by the superintendent of Consoli-

dated Chippewa Agency and the Minnesota Historical Society to restore the stockade that once had stood at Grand Portage fur post at the northeastern tip of Minnesota. Grand Portage, in the late 1700s and very early 1800s, was the great inland depot of the vast North West Fur Company empire. The restoration, wrote Collier, would cost about \$6,200 and would consist of enclosing approximately one acre of land with a log wall 8 feet high and constructing a log structure, 16 feet by 20 feet, within the enclosure. Collier asked for, and received, Fechner's approval to use CCC funds for the project.²⁸

Less than six months later Zimmerman of the Indian Division wrote Fechner: "We are now informed that plans . . . contemplate the total expenditure of \$30,700 on the stockade and other historical restoration at Grand Portage." Zimmerman then requested Fechner's approval of this estimated expenditure which was much higher than the first figure. This time the CCC director balked and asked that the project be canceled. In July, 1936, however, Fechner visited Grand Portage, and the Indian Affairs leaders got the impression that he might be willing, after seeing the site, to spend some additional funds to complete construction of the stockade. Therefore, Zimmerman tried again in October, asking Fechner to agree to the expenditure of \$10,000 to finish the stockade. Fechner, however, quickly dashed the hopes of the supporters of the project by refusing to approve this additional amount, although he later approved a smaller allocation for the work.²⁹ Indian Service leaders supported the project because it would employ Indians and also improve the area by construction on an important historic site; Fechner most likely vetoed it because

SCATTERING and covering pine seed at the Red Lake tree nursery in 1939



²⁶ Fechner to Ickes, May 8, 1935, Correspondence-Fechner, 1933-37, NARG 75; *Indians at Work*, June 15, 1935, p. 17-19, [August 15, 1933], p. 9-10, November 1, 1934, p. 15; Collier circular letter to superintendents, April 15, 1935, CCC Correspondence, NARG 35; Mitchell to Collier, July 12, 1935, Records Concerning Enrollee Program, Minneapolis District No. 1, NARG 75.

²⁷ Reports in general correspondence and miscellaneous, 1936, 1937, RG 75.

²⁸ Collier to Fechner, September 30, 1935, Correspondence-Fechner, 1933-37, NARG 75.

²⁹ Zimmerman to Fechner, October 2, 1936, Fechner to Collier, October 3, 1936, Correspondence-Fechner, 1933-37, NARG 75; Zimmerman to Fechner, March 11, 1936, Fechner to Collier, March 24, 1936, Correspondence-Fechner, 1936-41, NARG 75; Daniel E. Murphy to F. J. Scott, May 9, 1940, RG 75.

he found it unjustified to spend from \$16,000 to \$30,000 for a project originally estimated at \$6,200, especially when it was not primarily a conservation task.

While Collier and Zimmerman were exchanging letters with Fechner about Grand Portage, Indian Division head Murphy also made a proposal that Fechner declined to support. Murphy requested the purchase of material with which to fence in grazing areas on North Dakota's Fort Totten Indian Agency (in the Minneapolis district). The CCC director opposed this proposal too, because it was "hard to reconcile with the primary purpose of the Act of March 21, 1933, namely, the relief of unemployment." Fechner continued, "I have been impressed before with this seeming conflict in viewpoint . . . as to where the line should be drawn . . . with respect to projects which are mainly for the benefit of the Indians and not for the major purpose of relieving unemployment." On other occasions requests for funds to restore Indian burial grounds at Star Island and Grand Marais were turned down.³⁰ Understandably, then, Fechner was more concerned with the employment and conservation goals of the CCC program as a whole, while Indian Service leaders, more immediately sensitive to the plight of the Indians, sought a wider range of direct benefits from the activities of the corps.

Despite policy differences, the CCC-Indian Division flourished throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s. In 1936, Collier could report that the CCC had been active on seventy-eight reservations in twenty-three states. CCC work, he continued, had improved the health and morale of the Indians, as well as increased the value of their land. When Fechner made an unsuccessful attempt the following year to secure passage of a bill making the CCC a permanent fixture of the American scene, he included provisions for Indians. And on the fourth anniversary of the CCC, Collier sent Fechner a letter thanking him for "the sympathetic consideration and wholehearted cooperation given by you in connection with ECW [Emergency Conservation Work] on Indian reservations."³¹

Funding for the CCC continued substantially undiminished in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The organization had gained favor early with the American people and without question was one of the most popular New Deal measures. Total payments by the CCC-Indian Division for the fiscal year ending June, 1938, amounted to \$7,747,320 and for the fiscal year ending June, 1940, totaled \$6,990,208. During its first six years, around 77,000 Indians had obtained work in the Indian Division. Accomplishments included developing 6,200 springs or small reservoirs, digging 1,350 wells, constructing 1,064 impounding dams and large reservoirs, and building 896 vehicle bridges, 51 stock

bridges, 7,000 miles of truck trails, 2,500 miles of fire-breaks, and 6,300 miles of telephone lines.³²

IN 1939 COLLIER assessed the contribution of the CCC-Indian Division to Indian life in the United States: "Indian CCC . . . is bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of the Indians' new achievement. There is no part of Indian country, there are few functions of Indian life, where it has not made an indispensable contribution. Truly, Indian CCC has been a creative force." In Minnesota, total Indian Division expenditures from 1933 to June 30, 1942, were an estimated \$1,694,355 at Consolidated Chippewa, \$1,158,133 at Red Lake, and \$164,488 at Pipestone (out of a nine-year statewide CCC expenditure total of \$84,901,852). Although the Indian Division total seems small for such a long period, the funds did provide a modicum of sorely needed assistance to the families of 2,536 Minnesota Indians. In acknowledgment of that fact, the superintendent at Pipestone wrote in January, 1943: "In the rehabilitation of our Indian people, C.C.C. played a major part."³³

However worthy, the CCC did not survive long after the United States entered World War II. Even before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor late in 1941, CCC operations were handicapped by policies of the Supply Priorities and Allocation Board which prohibited the use of steel, aluminum, and other metals for nondefense purposes, and thus repair parts for cars, trucks, and heavy equipment—much less new vehicles—became impossible to secure. Although agency superintendents submitted requests in the spring of 1942 for the coming fiscal year, the organization was being liquidated by July. With its demands for young men in the armed forces, in defense factories, and on farms, the war dealt the deathblow to the CCC. At any rate, the agency probably would not have been

³⁰ Fechner to Murphy, March 3, 1936, Correspondence-Fechner, 1936-41, NARG 75 (quote); *Minnesota Chippewa Bulletin*, July 24, 1941, p. 3.

³¹ Collier to Fechner, March 4, 1936, March 20, 1937, Fechner to Collier, March 22, 1937, Correspondence-Fechner, 1936-41, NARG 75.

³² "Poor Young Men," in *Time*, February 6, 1939, p. 10-11; *Newsweek*, December 30, 1940, p. 31; *Annual Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps*, 1938, p. 95, 1940, p. 86 (Washington, D.C.); "C.C.C. Activities for Indians," in *Monthly Labor Review*, 49:94-95 (July, 1939).

³³ *Indians at Work*, April, 1939, p. 2; McEntee, "Final Report," 108, NARG 35; Heritage to Collier, May 5, 20, June 1, 1942, CCC-Indian Division Work Programs for 1942-43, Consolidated Chippewa Agency, April 18, 1942, Red Lake Agency, May 16, 1942, Pipestone School and Agency, May 15, 1942, J. W. Balmer to Colonel M. V. Patton, January 19, 1943, RG 75.



GRAND PORTAGE stockade excavation in 1936 (above) and reconstruction in 1940 (left)

funded any more even if war had not come, because some congressmen had insisted throughout the life of the corps that it was only an emergency organization established to combat the effects of the depression and should in no way be considered permanent.³⁴

Regardless, the demise of the CCC was a severe setback to the American Indian. In June, 1942, Collier declared: "The ending of CCC . . . is a heavy, heavy blow to Indian Service, to the Indians, and to social policy in the United States. It is just that: a heavy and undeserved blow." Accordingly, a few months later morale in the Indian Service was reported lowered, in part because of the ending of the Indian CCC.³⁵

Why the demoralization? CCC payments, although small, did give poverty-stricken Indian employees and their families a financial boost when they probably needed it most. In addition, the CCC-Indian Division was strongly supported by the Indian Service, for the

³⁴ *Minnesota Chippewa Bulletin*, November 24, 1941, p. 9.

³⁵ John Collier, "The Spirit of CCC Will Last Forever," in *Indians at Work*, May-June, 1942, p. 35, July-September, 1942, p. 1.

reason that the CCC did not force the Indians to adjust to the white man's way of living but instead — following the recommendations of Indian Service leaders — deliberately altered the organization, administration, and program to harmonize with the ways of reservation life. This approach co-ordinated with the "New Deal" for the Indians established in the Wheeler-Howard (Indian Reorganization) Act of 1934 which emphasized the importance of tribal associations and encouraged self-government. By providing financial assistance to working Indians to improve their most tangible asset — their land — the CCC had been a valuable program for American Indians.

THE EMBLEM on page 3, suggested as an insignia for the IECW, appeared on the cover of *Indians at Work*, September 15, 1933. The photographs on page 8 (middle, bottom) are also from *Indians at Work*, November 15, 1934, p. 45 and 18. The chart on page 5 is from John Collier to George Weidenfeld, September 9, 1933, Correspondence-Fechner, 1933-37, NARG 75. The group picture on page 4 is courtesy of the National Archives, and the photographs on page 8 (top), 10, and 11 are from the Federal Records Center, Kansas City. The photographs on page 13 are from the society's collection.





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