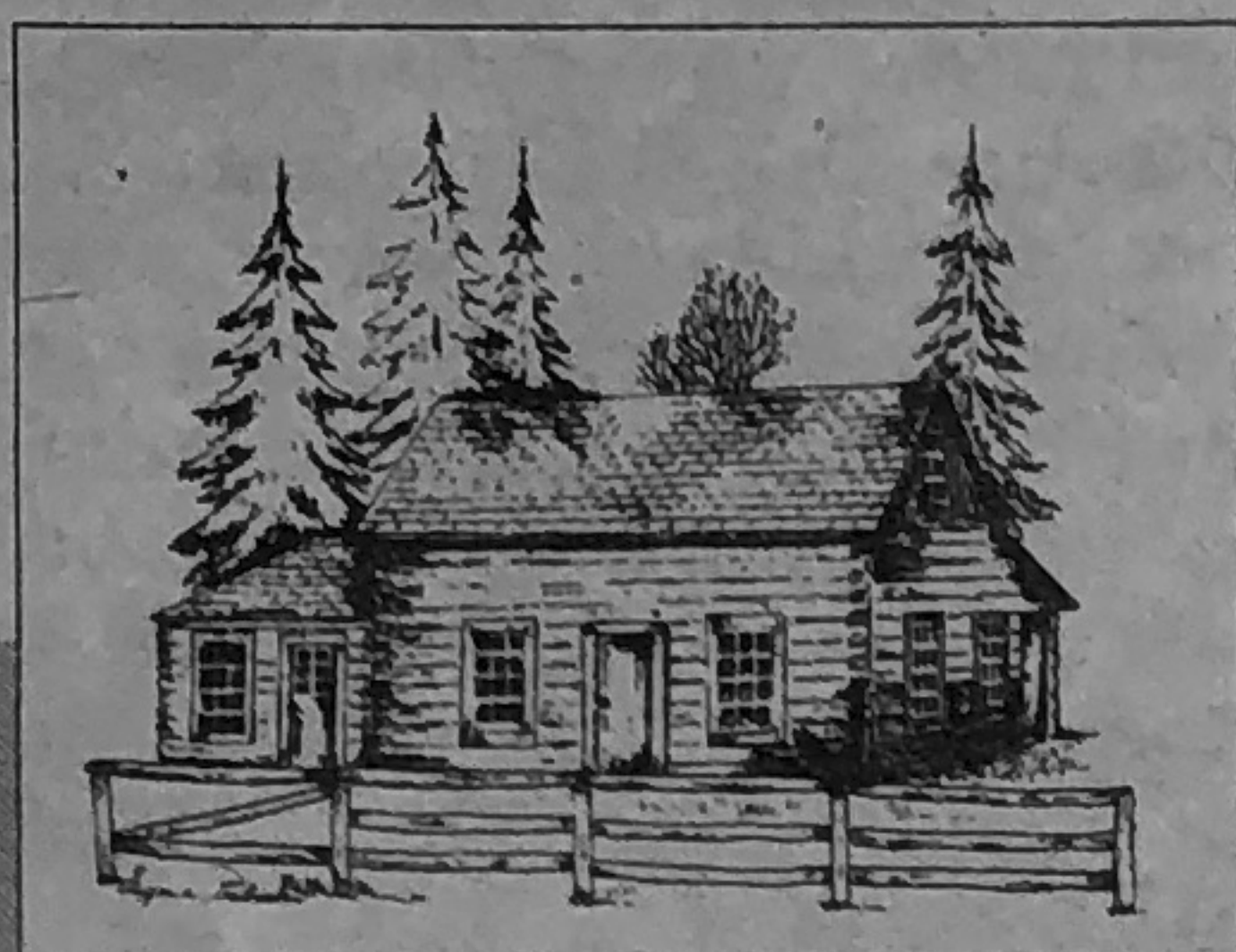


# Elcho CCC camp provided assistance to many



Provided by the  
Langlade County Historical Society.  
To donate, volunteer or become a  
member, call 715-627-4464.  
Visit the museum complex at  
Superior Street and Seventh Avenue  
or check out the Website  
at [www.langladehistory.com](http://www.langladehistory.com).

## Our History

### By JOE HERMOLIN Langlade County Historical Society

More than 60 years after the event, Ed Drab could still vividly recall his first day at the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Camp 657, then located at Summit Lake. An officer asked him to climb an observation tower. Confidently he clamored up about three quarters of the way and then looked down. He froze. A camp officer had to climb up and take his hand and lead him down. In spite of the embarrassment of his first day Ed thinks his period as a CCC enrollee was one of the best experiences of his life.

Like many young men of his generation in the Great Depression, Ed Drab had no employment prospects and the family farm in Strassbourg in southern Langlade County was on the brink of financial collapse. He earned \$30 a month, \$25 of which was sent home. Ed's younger brother would eventually enroll in the CCC as well. For the Drabs and for many other families throughout the nation the earnings of CCC enrollees staved off financial ruin.

At Franklin Roosevelt's inauguration on March 4, 1933, with the country deep in the Great Depression, he promised Americans a "New Deal." One of his first initiatives and arguably one of the most successful was the establishment of the CCC. Less than three weeks after his offer of a "New Deal" his Secretary of Labor, Francis Perkins, presented a plan to Congress which approved it.

CCC Camps operated in a mili-

tary style and under several departments including Labor, War, Agriculture, and Interior. The CCC existed from 1933 to 1942. Some ran only briefly, but by 1942 when the CCC was disbanded with U.S. entry into World War II over 4,000 camps had been established. The peak years were in 1935-1936 with about 3,000 camps. The prime objective of the CCC was reforestation although establishment of parks and recreational facilities featured fairly prominently in its mission.

Camp 657 was established at Summit Lake in June, 1933 and would continue to operate until 1941; almost the entire life span of the program. In the summer of 1933, when Ed Drab was there, enrollees lived in tents while more permanent barracks were erected at Otter Lake in Elcho. After some unforeseen delays, in November, 1933 enrollees marched in military formation from their tents in Summit Lake to their barracks at Otter Lake, having already endured several sub-freezing nights.

A typical day involved reveille at 6 a.m., calisthenics, breakfast, and barracks clean-up before heading off to field work by 7:45 a.m. Lunch at noon was often served in the field and the crew was back in camp by 4 p.m. Following cleanup, lowering the flag, and supper at 5 p.m. the evening was free. There were games, recreation, and classes. Many young men received the training and education that would serve them in later life during their time in camp. Lights out was at 10 p.m.



For the first summer and fall of Camp 657 enrollees slept in tents.

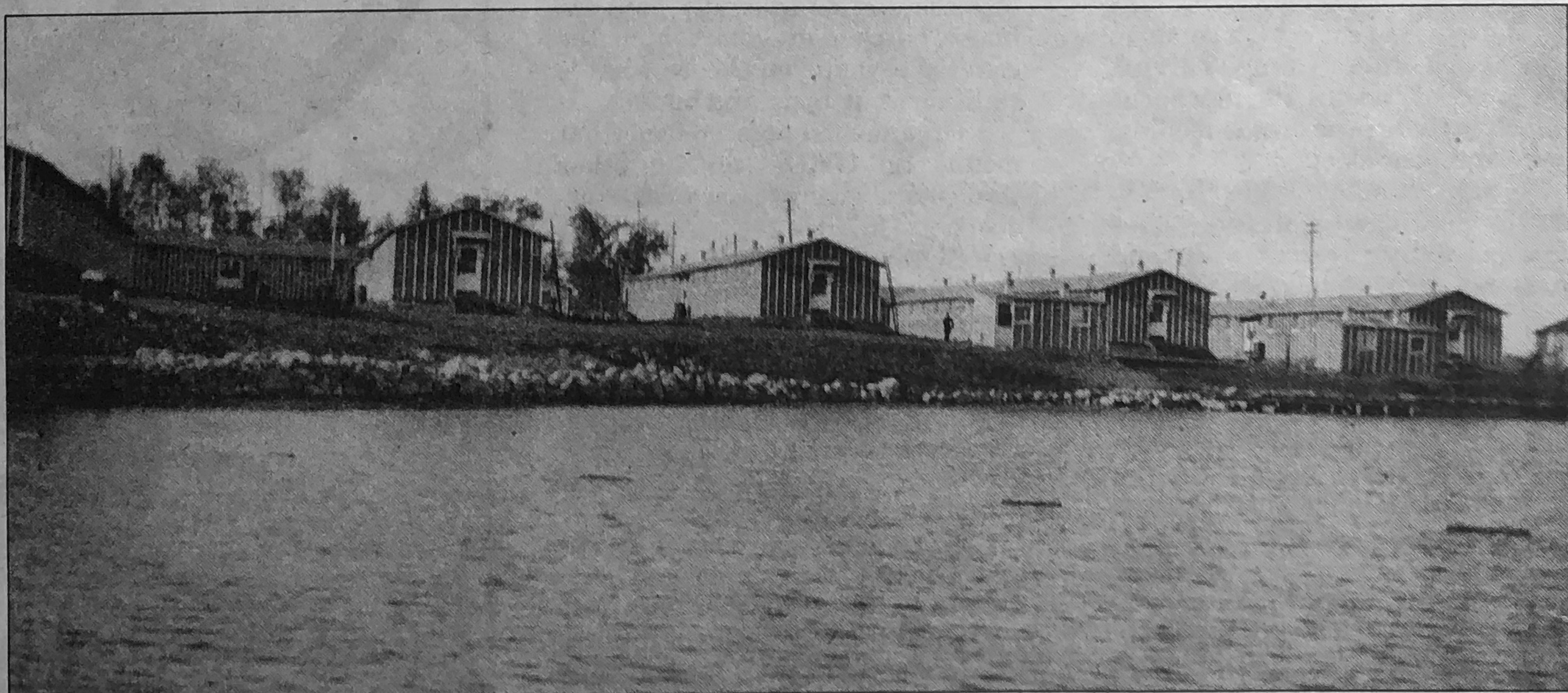
During its first four years of existence Camp 657 built 83 miles of truck trails, 12 miles of fire breaks, 23 miles of vehicular bridges, 235 miles of telephone lines, four lookout towers and two lookout cabins, 15 firefighting toolboxes, and 23 buildings. Enrollees planted 1,379 acres of trees and improved an additional 485 acres for forest stands. They prepared three acres of land for game which would supply food, developed streams and ponds and stocked them with fish and also established three acres of recreational campgrounds, including Camp Susan.

It was not all work and no play for enrollees at Camp 657. Recreation included sports. Boxing was popular, partly because in required little space and not much equipment. But basketball, baseball, and football teams were also formed and played against local

high schools and other CCC camps. Camp 657 called themselves the Packers and at one point requested of the Green Bay Packers some uniforms. Several weeks later a large box was delivered to the camp. It contained discarded uniforms, many too large for the young men in the camp but eagerly worn nonetheless. There were a few arguments in camp as to who would get to wear Curly Lambeau's uniform. One enrollee claimed that since he had once seen the Green Bay Packers play he should have the honor but he was outvoted.

Camp 657, like many others, published its own newspaper which featured stories of local camp events, CCC related stories from the CCC's national newspaper Happy Times. It gained advertising revenue from Elcho and Antigo businesses. The Elcho

See Our History Page 19



More permanent barracks on Otter Lake in Elcho were ready for use by November, 1933.

than the  
a "New Deal  
Labor, Francis Perkins, pro  
a plan to Congress which approved  
it.  
CCC Camps operated in a mili-

CCC Camps operated in a mili-



Musical members of the camp formed a band and would greet new enrollees or say farewell to those leaving by serenading them at the Elcho depot.

Continued

## Our History

Eagle, as Camp 657's newspaper was called, won second prize for best camp newspaper.

Enrollees would also socialize with local people by going to dances at the High Point in Summit Lake and the Muskie Inn in Elcho. Ice skating on Otter Lake with some of the young women of Elcho was also a popular activity. These events helped establish good relationships between enrollees and the local population and it seems that everyone got



A marker at Otter Lake designates the location of the barracks.



Recreational activities included ice skating on Otter Lake with locals.

along. Years later Camp 657 would hold its reunions at the High Point in Summit Lake.

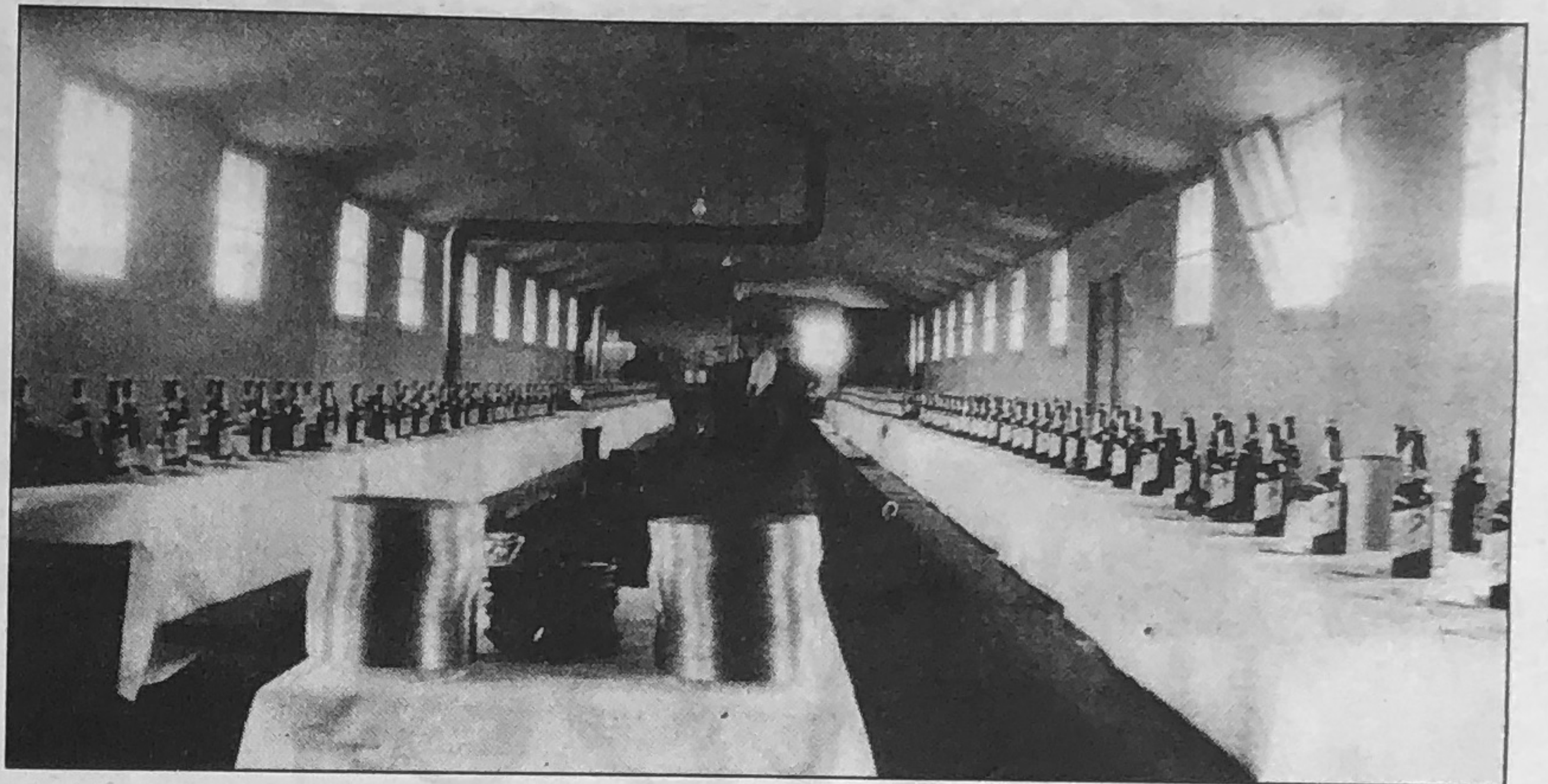
The legacy of the CCC is impossible to assess accurately. Eighty-five years after the program began recreational facilities that people enjoy today are thanks to the efforts of these young men. This includes Devil's Lake and Wyalusing State Parks in Wisconsin and parts of the Nicolet-Chequamegon National Forests in northern Wisconsin. Regrowth of the forests of the Northwoods after

## Learn about CCC camps in Historical Society archives

The Langlade County Historical Society Museum has an extensive collection of material related to CCC Camp 657.

Photographs, camp newsletters, documents, memorabilia, and a brief history may be viewed at [www.recollectionwisconsin.org](http://www.recollectionwisconsin.org). This site makes available many documents and photographs from Wisconsin's history. To date the museum has uploaded our photos of Indians, railroads, logging, CCC Camp 657, Langlade County soldiers in World War I, and Civil War letters and diaries. Type "ccc camp 657 elcho" in the search bar.

Other related stories and materials may be viewed at [www.wi101.org](http://www.wi101.org). This new site is titled "Our History in Objects" and tells the story of Wisconsin by relating history through specific objects. Search for "pillow sham" or click on the interactive map on the region around Elcho to view a camp commemorative pillow sham and stories related to CCC Camp 657 and how it fit into the general pattern of the Great Depression in Langlade County and immigration to Langlade County.



When Prohibition was repealed each enrollee received a bottle of beer in the mess hall. No questions were asked about age.



Work crews often ate in the field with food delivered in trucks at noon.

the logging boom was a direct result of CCC tree planting. In 1983, on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the CCC the National Christmas tree in Washington came from a CCC region in the Chequamegon National Forest.

An additional but intangible legacy of the CCC is that it raised the awareness of the general public to issues of nature conservation. Many of the reforestation efforts were due to destruction caused by the lumber industry of what may have seemed an inexhaustible resource. But resources were exhaustible and alarms were

being raised by academics. The CCC through its work and interactions with the local surrounding community had a direct impact on farmers and urban dwellers seeking outdoors experiences. In this way the CCC helped promote the philosophy and efforts of the conservation movement.

Decades after the CCC program its benefits to the enrollees and their families, the environment, and to all who enjoy the outdoors remind us of one of the most successful programs of FDR's New Deal and serve as an example of what government programs can accomplish.

*Spiegel* Northern Door Specialists  
W8520 CTY. D - ANTIGO, WI 54409  
715-627-4718 • [www.raynor.com](http://www.raynor.com)

### CALL THE GARAGE DOOR EXPERTS

- Residential and Commercial Garage Doors and Openers
- Sales, installation and service by the pros.
- "For As Long As You Own Your Home" warranties.
- Serving the area since 1974.



Exceptional Energy Savings!  
R-Value - 18.0

**RAYNOR**