

Maryland New Deal Newsletter

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By Brent McKee & Colleen Walter



(WPA poster art)



(WPA poster art)

Notable Quote:

"The WPA was one of the most productive elements of FDR's alphabet soup of agencies because it put people to work building roads, bridges, and other projects...it gave men and women a chance to make some money along with the satisfaction of knowing they earned it."

--Ronald Reagan, in his autobiography *Ronald Reagan: An American Life*, New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1990

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IN THIS ISSUE:

The CCC, the Snow, and the Stork, by Colleen Walter2

Personalities from the 1930s: Woody Guthrie (1912-1967): *"I roamed and I rambled and I followed my footsteps,"* by Bill Barry4

Patuxent Research Refuge: Maryland's Amazing New Deal Treasure, by Brent McKee8

Our New Deal Benefit Today: Hagerstown City Hall11

New Deal Art: "Promote the General Welfare"12

Neat Links12

Bios.....13

Can you help?13

“The CCC, the Snow, and the Stork”

By Colleen Walter



(Left: CCC boys at work in Maryland, image courtesy of the Library of Congress. Right: Snow in the western Maryland mountains, photo by Brent McKee)

Many benefits of the Civilian Conservation Corps program were, and are, overt and clearly defined. Conceived to revitalize the natural environment and to create work projects to employ youths, both of those admirable aims generated immediate benefit to nearby local populations. However, the impact of the camps upon those peoples went far beyond any initial conception or intention. These benefits were wide-ranging and their effects were long-term. These included, but were not limited to, the education of the enrollees, the mingling of young peoples, and the establishment of an emergency response program in remote areas. Each of these benefits will be discussed in more detail in future articles. In the spirit of this winter season, however, I would like to highlight the story of a forgotten & snowy rescue by the CCC boys.

The informal development of an emergency response team by the CCC camps in western Maryland was particularly valuable to the local region. Making use of the able-bodied enrollees at the remote camp locations, the State Roads Commission would send out distress calls when needed. Still recalled in local memory are valiant and necessary efforts of the enrollees from several camps during the St Patrick's Day Flood in March of 1936 in the Cumberland region. However, that is just one instance in a long line of unsung heroics on the part of the enrollees.

It seems that Company 324 at Fifteen Mile Creek Camp S-53, in Allegany County, responded to more distress calls than any other company on record. Mother Nature was particularly savage in those early days of the CCC. The catastrophic flooding of the spring had been preceded by a very snowy winter. On January 23, 1936, the enrollees were snowbound and work projects were impossible to undertake. Then they received a distress call about a woman in labor and trapped by the heavy blanket of snow on the ground twelve miles away from their camp. It was imperative she get to the hospital, but no access roads were cleared, and the main road was three miles away. As if this were not bad enough, all of the State Roads Commission's snow plows were in the next county over, fighting even larger snow drifts. And so, forty enrollees volunteered and twenty were selected to assist. Those men dug until ten o'clock at night in order to successfully free the woman. The job was difficult without plows and a steady supply of salt, but the enrollees demonstrated their willingness, determination, and courage to get the job done.

The relationship between the enrollees and the local communities was never perfect and the experiences varied greatly from one camp to the next. However, by serving as an emergency response team in a rural region with few other resources, the youths fostered a sense of community and good will with the local population. The rescue efforts of the CCC engendered the respect of their neighbors.

Sources:

District No. 2 Third Corps Area Civilian Conservation Corps: Official Annual 1936. Yearbook. Direct Advertising Company, November 1936. MSA SC 1178-15. Maryland State Archives, 188.

John Mash, *The Land of the Living: The Story of Maryland's Green Ridge Forest*, p. 709, The Living History Foundation of Allegany County, 1996.

"While Snow Birds are Hopping, CCC Youths Aid Stork in Flight." *The Sun*, Feb 01, 1936.

Personalities from the 1930s: Woody Guthrie (1912-1967): *"I roamed and I rambled and I followed my footsteps"*

By Bill Barry

(Quote is from the Guthrie Song "This Land Is Your Land")



(Woody Guthrie. Image provided courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Image is part of the Division's NYWT&S staff photographs collection and is "in the public domain per the instrument of gift.")

"Woody is just Woody. Thousands of people do not know he has any other name. He is just a voice and a guitar. He sings the songs of a people and I suspect that he is, in a way, that people. Harsh voiced and nasal, his guitar hanging like a tire iron on a rusty rim, there is nothing sweet about Woody, and there is nothing sweet about the songs he sings. But there is something more important for those who still listen. There is the will of a people to endure and fight against oppression. I think we call this the American spirit."

--John Steinbeck

If a scrawny 5' 7", 140-pound man with a raspy voice can be called "bigger than life," it's Woodrow Wilson Guthrie, whose 100th birthday is being celebrated this year. Named for the Democratic candidate for President in 1912, Woody was

born in Okemah, OK, which "in Creek Indian means 'Town on a Hill,' but our busiest hill was Graveyard Hill and just about the only hill in the country you could rest on." Woody's childhood was chaotic, with a wandering father and a house fire that killed his 7-year old sister. His mother, Nora, suffered from Huntington's disease, a genetic disorder that leads to dementia--often mistaken for insanity or alcoholism--and loss of muscular control. This disease was passed on to Woody, who in turn passed it to several of his children. He spent the last years of his life, 1956-67, hospitalized but visited by the next generation of folk singers, like Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs and, of course, by his son, Arlo.

The Great Depression was another destructive factor for Woody but also became the inspiration for his life and for many of his early songs. Woody's father moved to Pampa, TX when Woody was 14 and, to support himself in Okemah, the boy learned to play the guitar and the harmonica. At the age of 18, Woody moved to Pampa and played on the streets and in a band with his half-brother. He married Mary Jennings and had three children but was never settled down enough to be a "regular" father to them, or to any of the children by two other wives.

In thinking back about this time, he wrote in *My Life*, "there on the Texas plains right in the dead center of the dust bowl, with the oil boom over and the wheat blowed out and the hard-working people just stumbling about, bothered with mortgages, debts, bills, sickness, worries of every blowing kind, I seen there was plenty to make up songs about." From this experience came one of his most famous songs, "So Long, It's Been Good to Know You."

Like so many of the "Okies," Woody took off for California, the promised land, hitchhiking, hopping freights or even walking, after The Great Dust Storm of 1935 hit the prairies. In 1937, he got a job with in Los Angeles on KFVD radio with Maxine "Lefty Lou" Grissom, singing "old-time" traditional songs as well as some original songs later compiled as *Dust Bowl Ballads*, including classics like *Vigilante Man*, *Tom Joad* and *I Ain't Got No Home in this World Anymore*. His song *Pretty Boy Floyd* (1939) made the Oklahoma bank robber into a Robin Hood figure:

You say that I'm an outlaw
You say that I'm a thief

Here's a Christmas dinner
For the families on relief

Yes, as through this world I've wandered
I've seen lots of funny men;
Some will rob you with a six-gun,
And some with a fountain pen.

Woody also wrote an original song celebrating Tom Mooney, who was in jail, framed for planting dynamite in San Francisco in 1917, and who was released in 1939.

The KFVD news announcer Ed Robbin, who became Woody's political mentor, introduced him to the west coast radical community, including Will Geer (better known to many as Grandpa Walton), who played Mister Mister in the original production of *The Cradle Will Rock* and who set up concerts for Woody in southern California. Woody also began writing a column called "Woody Sez" for *The Daily Worker*, the Communist Party newspaper, as his working-class consciousness developed.

In March 1940, Guthrie was invited to play at a benefit hosted by The John Steinbeck Committee to Aid Farm Workers, to raise money for migrant workers and met Pete Seeger, who became his lifelong friend. In 1940, Woody wrote his most famous song, "This Land is Your Land," originally called "God Blessed America" in response to Kate Smith's version of "God Bless America," although the song was not published until 1944.

Woody's life after the 1930s is beyond this article but he led an exciting, if troubled life, suffering from blacklisting and increasing physical problems due to Huntington's disease. At one point in the early 1950s, he lived in Florida with his third wife in a bus on land owned by Stetson Kennedy, who had been in charge of the state's WPA writer's program and who offered living space for blacklisted artists. Woody died on Oct. 3, 1967 after many years of hospitalization.

Let Woody's own words describe his music: "I hate a song that makes you think that you're not any good. I hate a song that makes you think that you are just born to lose. Bound to lose. No good to nobody. No good for nothing.

Because you are either too old or too young or too fat or too slim or too ugly or too this or too that....songs that run you down or songs that poke fun of you on account of your bad luck or your hard traveling. I am out to fight those kinds of songs to my very last breath of air and my last drop of blood." - Script written by Woody Guthrie on December 3rd, 1944 for a WNEW radio show, 1944.

There are so many great resources for Woody that it is almost overwhelming, covering all of his extraordinary talents—singing, songwriting, prose, and paintings and drawings—and capturing his unique historical persona and personality. The web sites <http://woodyguthrie.org/> and <http://www.woody100.com/> are marvelous with endless links. To commemorate the centennial of his birth, The Smithsonian Museum issued an enormous compilation "Woody at 100: The Woody Guthrie Centennial Collection," including 57 tracks ranging from the well-known to the recently discovered, and called in purple prose by a *Washington Post* reviewer "a sumptuous summation of a career that has affected and shaped American music for generations." Woody's autobiography, *Bound for Glory* (1943)—later made into a very dull movie of the same name—is wonderful, as are Jim Longhi's *Woody, Cisco, and Me: Seamen Three in the Merchant Marine* (1997) and Joe Klein's *Woody Guthrie: A Life*. There is also a new documentary about Woody's gig with the Bonneville Power Administration in 1941 called *Roll On Columbia* but my personal advice is to skip the reading and just listen to Woody's songs—then you will appreciate why he is a legend.

Bill Barry is the retired Director of Labor Studies at The Community College of Baltimore County and developed a course, The History of the 1930s, which will be offered again at CCBC-Essex in the Spring, 2013, semester <http://faculty.ccbcmd.edu/~wbarry/History%20of%201930s.html>

“Patuxent Research Refuge: Maryland’s Amazing New Deal Treasure”

By Brent McKee



(Merriam Laboratory at Patuxent Research Refuge, built with the assistance of the WPA. Photo by Brent McKee)

Reflecting on my research & travels in Maryland these past few years, several amazing New Deal treasures come to mind: The city of Greenbelt, Catocin Mountain Park, Camp David, artwork in post offices across the state, Fort Hill High School in Cumberland, Glen Woods at Towson University, and the forests & parks of Garrett County, to name just a few. For me, however, the most impressive New Deal site in Maryland is Patuxent Research Refuge (PRR).

According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service website for PRR: “Established in 1936 by executive order of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Patuxent Research Refuge is the Nation's only National Wildlife Refuge established to support wildlife research. Today most of the research on the refuge is conducted

by the US Geological Survey (USGS) through the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center.”

PRR covers over 12,000 acres of land in Prince George’s and Anne Arundel counties. Visitors to the refuge can hunt, fish, hike, and visit the impressive National Wildlife Visitors Center. And, in a restricted area of the refuge (advanced permission is needed to visit) important scientific research has been going on for decades. According to Dr. Matthew Perry, a recently retired PRR scientist, scientific studies have been conducted on various species, including box turtles, black rat snakes, red shouldered hawks, and migratory birds. Important research accomplishments at PRR have included the effect of lead ingestion in waterfowl, endangered species management (including the Bald Eagle), and the effect of the pesticide DDT on bird eggs.

So, who is responsible for all this great work? Certainly the scientists—like Dr. Perry—who dedicated their careers to strengthening our nation’s biodiversity. But, before the scientists, it was FDR and his alphabet soup of agencies that obtained the initial sections of land and built the structures. They created the venue for Dr. Perry, his predecessors, and his colleagues to do their important work.

The list of PRR creators sounds like a who’s who of the New Deal. They included FDR, the Civil Works Administration, Rexford Tugwell (known for his work in creating the Soil Conservation Service and the Resettlement Administration), the Public Works Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the National Youth Administration.

Oh yes, and the WPA.

The WPA built many structures at PRR, and quite a few of them still stand today, e.g., laboratories, garages, a staff apartment building, and a superintendant’s house. Additionally, the WPA put up fences, helped create Cash Lake (where you can still fish today), performed roadwork, and even helped restore Snowden Hall, a building with history dating back to the 18th century.

Dr. Leland B. Morley, PRR’s first superintendant wrote a fascinating first-person account of the construction of the refuge. Of the WPA workers (workers

who many in America scolded as good-for-nothing shovel-leaners and a waste of taxpayer money) Morley wrote: "The quality and quantity of the work performed by the refuge WPA project on the whole was excellent. The men were interested in the project and the laborers, with few exceptions, took pride in their work and the praise that they earned."

Here is my take on PRR: It stands as a monument to what the unemployed can accomplish when they are given opportunities instead of insults. The structures, the land, the subsequent scientific discoveries, and the ongoing recreational opportunities at PRR are living testaments to the good work that those "lazy" men and women of the New Deal work programs performed.

So, go and visit PRR. Enjoy a hike, go fishing, take the kids to the Visitor Center (they'll love it), and if you're a hunter, get information on when, where and how. If you're into architecture, contact PRR and arrange a visit to see some of the historic structures. And if you do visit PRR, please take a moment to remember the New Deal and the jobless Americans who made PRR possible.

***Find PRR on the Living New Deal map here:

<http://livingnewdeal.berkeley.edu/map/>

***See my photo exhibit of PRR at

http://www.wpatoday.org/Patuxent_Research_Refuge.html

Sources:

(1) Patuxent Research Refuge website,

<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/patuxent/index.htm>, last visited January 8, 2013 ,

(2) "The Evolution of Patuxent as a Research Refuge and a Wildlife Research Center," by Dr. Matthew C. Perry, 2001, available at

http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/history/cronhist/PatuxentHistory_Perry.pdf, (3) "Early

History of Patuxent Wildlife Research Center," by Dr. Leland B. Morley, 1948, available at <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/history/cronhist/Morley4.pdf>, (4)

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form, prepared by Paula S. Reed, Ph.D. and Edie Wallace, Historian, of Paula S. Reed & Associates, Inc., 2002, available at the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties website, <http://www.mdihp.net/>.

Our New Deal Benefit Today! Hagerstown City Hall



(The Hagerstown City Hall. Photo by Brent McKee)

The Hagerstown City Hall is home to many of Hagerstown's administrative/governmental offices & functions. According to a 1977 Maryland Historical Trust Inventory Form—prepared by historic preservation consultant Ronald L. Andrews—it was constructed in 1939-40 as a Public Works Administration project (PWA, not WPA) and its architecture is "Renaissance Revival." Like many PWA-funded projects, the building is large and monumental in appearance. According to Andrews, "The structure was designed by the Baltimore architectural firm of Taylor and Fisher with Amos J. Klinkhart of Hagerstown as associate architect."

New Deal Art: “Promote the General Welfare”



(Bas relief by Lenore Thomas, on the Community Center building, in Greenbelt, Maryland. Photo by Brent McKee)

This bas relief is one of several that adorn the Greenbelt Community Center. All were sculpted by Lenore Thomas, who is described in a 1983 Maryland Historical Trust Inventory Form as a “New Deal WPA artist.” The preparers of the form—Tracy Dillard and Richard Striner of the Art Deco Society of Washington—wrote, “The panels on the Center School (as it was then called) reflect the idealism of the New Deal in that at the time there was great interest in the common man.”

Neat Links

New Deal Art Registry: “The New Deal Art Registry is a collaboratively assembled and maintained guide to surviving public art that was created under the New Deal programs, 1934-1943. We aim to compile a reliable and complete list of murals, sculptures, frescoes, mosaics, and other works that still exist in public buildings throughout the US.”

<http://www.newdealartregistry.org/>

College course at the Community College of Baltimore County: "History of the 1930s":

<http://faculty.ccbcmd.edu/~wbarry/History%20of%201930s.html>

(A section of this course is available for Spring Semester 2013)

Bios

Brent McKee is a board member of the National New Deal Preservation Association, a volunteer for the Living New Deal mapping project, and creator of "WPA Today," a web project designed to help preserve the history of the Works Progress Administration, particularly in Maryland (www.wpatoday.org). He holds a Master of Public Policy degree from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. He can be reached at wpatoday@gmail.com.

Colleen Walter is active in the history field through a variety of organizations. She works as both staff archivist and gallery assistant at the Benjamin Banneker Historical Park and Museum. She also does on site living history interpretation at the National Colonial Farm, Accokeek Foundation. Her interest in the New Deal and the work of the CCC in particular came from her work with the MD Department of Natural Resources Committee for Maryland Conservation History. She continues to serve them as an active member and secretary of the Foundation, which recently earned non-profit 501C-3 status. Her master's thesis for the University of Maryland, Baltimore County focused on the three pronged impact of the Corps upon the nation- at environmental, economic, and social levels for both the enrollees and local populations.

Can You Help?

Through our newsletter (and other activities) we're trying to raise awareness and interest in Maryland's New Deal history. We are also hoping to start a non-profit organization to preserve, present, and promote this history (possibly including the entire Mid-Atlantic area). If you can help in any way, e.g., information leads, article submissions, technical suggestions, we would appreciate it!