

Maryland New Deal Newsletter

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By Brent McKee & Colleen Walter



Quote of the Month:

"Here and now I want to make myself clear about those who disparage their fellow citizens on the relief rolls. They say that those on relief are not merely jobless—they say that they are worthless... But you and I will continue to refuse to accept that estimate of our unemployed fellow Americans."

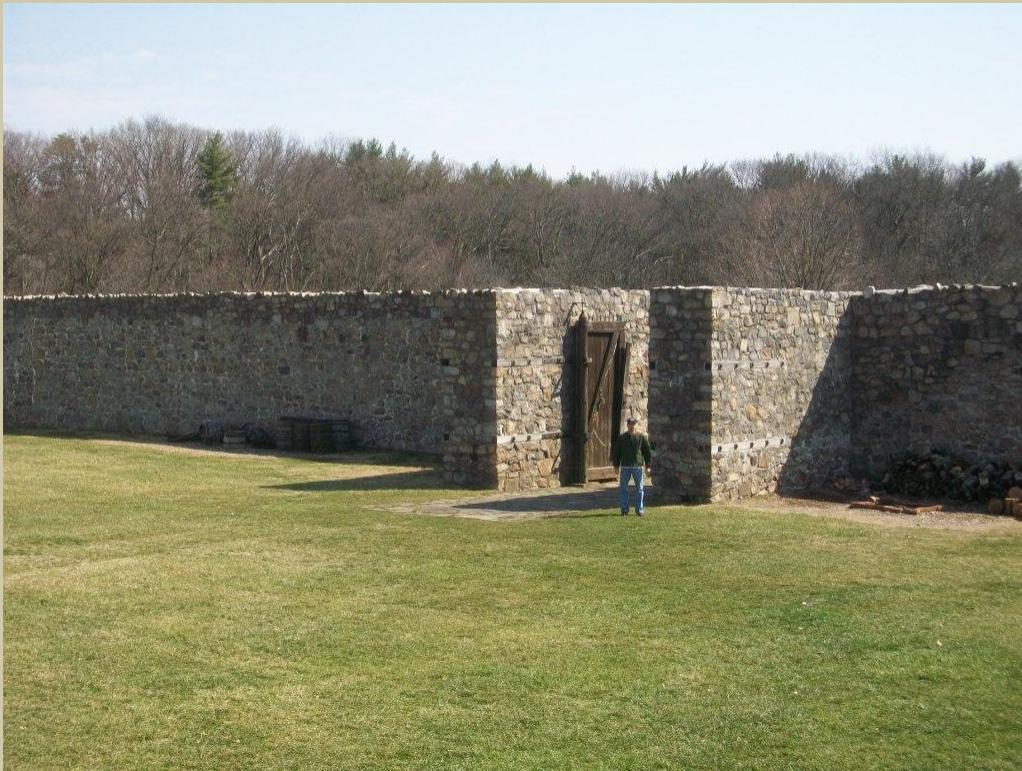
--Franklin Delano Roosevelt, October 31st, 1936, Madison Square Garden

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"The Civilian Conservation Corps at Fort Frederick"

By Colleen Walter



(Photo by Colleen Walter)

Many of the Maryland state parks enjoyed by the public today are the result of projects executed during the New Deal era. Known as the alphabet soup agencies for their acronym monikers, these agencies generated the much needed resources of manpower, capital, and supplies for the national infrastructure. Established during FDR's first one hundred days in office, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) is an agency that receives little modern recognition for its contributions despite its great legacy across the nation. In Maryland, the CCC restored the historic sites of the Washington Monument and Fort Frederick. Both sites maintain a small amount of exhibit space. At Fort Frederick that space was originally constructed by the CCC to house and display artifacts found on site during the process of construction. Today that same space houses a museum dedicated to the Corps itself.

However, this appreciation of the site's past was a product of the turn towards nationalism during the mid-twentieth century. Prior to the state's acquisition of the fort in 1922 the Williams' family owned the property. They

utilized the fort itself as an enclosure for the farm's orchard and livestock. Though the farmhouse remains on site as a historic structure today, this previous use speaks to the changes wrought within the fort over time. As with many new CCC campsites, when the recruits arrived they had their work cut out for them. Within the park the CCC built roads, pavilions, shelters, outdoor grills, and restrooms as well as providing the much needed service of forest fire protection throughout the region. At the fort proper, the Corps rebuilt all exterior walls and the stone foundations of the interior buildings after first excavating the long buried remains. This provided the framework for the later restoration of two soldiers' barracks in 1975. Those young men of the CCC accomplished over the course of a few years what was once the responsibility of a skeleton crew for the entire state. The Corps provided an impoverished generation with the opportunity to do valuable and much needed work that would improve the nation. This was instrumental to overcoming the national mindset prior to the Great Depression, which eschewed any assistance received without providing a service in return.

In the end, the federal government spent over \$39,700,000 and employed 35,800 men through the Civilian Conservation Corps program in the state. This infused the local economy and raised the morale of a generation soon readying for war. Many enrollees were prime candidates for officers during the World War II, as they were already indoctrinated to Army expectations and daily regimen. In repairing the ruins of wars past, the men of the CCC acquired the discipline and fortitude required for the war yet to come.

Sources:

- (1) Bailey, Robert F. *Maryland's Forests and Parks: A Century of Progress*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Pub, 2006. (2) Cohen, Stan. *The Tree Army: A Pictorial History of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942*. Missoula, MO: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1980. (3) "Fort Frederick State Park History," http://www.dnr.state.md.us/centennial/FortFrederick_History.asp (accessed July 15, 2012). (4) "Fort Frederick State Park," <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/western/fortfrederick.asp> (accessed July 15, 2012).

"How the Works Progress Administration Helped Preserve Maryland's Civil War History"

By Brent McKee



(Photo courtesy of the Antietam National Battlefield staff)

Most people who know of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) are probably familiar with the WPA's construction projects, e.g., roads, bridges, and buildings. People who have delved a little further into the history of the WPA are probably aware of the arts-related projects, e.g., concerts, sculptures, and theater plays. What is probably less well known, but equally interesting, are the WPA's projects involving historic preservation. One such project in Maryland was the restoration and improvement of Antietam National Battlefield, near Sharpsburg.

Though more research needs to be performed (and, in fact, the National Park Service is engaging in research to rediscover its New Deal history), a few things are known. WPA workers repaired and re-pointed many sections of the wall around the Antietam National Cemetery (see photo above) and also worked on the grounds inside the cemetery. They worked on the roads around the battlefield, e.g., raising a section of road that was prone to flooding. They helped prepare for the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Antietam (1937) by examining and classifying artifacts and creating exhibits. There are also newspaper accounts detailing approved WPA projects to landscape, reset monuments,

rebuild bridges and paths, and restore the Burnside Bridge to its wartime appearance.

The WPA's work at Antietam was only a small portion of their overall work in history and historic preservation. In Maryland, they also worked at Fort McHenry, the Charles Carroll Mansion, and the Rossborough Inn at the University of Maryland College Park campus. Across America, they collected oral histories of former slaves (the "Slave Narratives"), helped expand the Historic American Buildings Survey ("HABS"), wrote history and visitor guides for every state, created 1,238 new monuments and historic markers, and worked on various historic sites and structures.

The jobless Americans of the Great Depression (like the jobless Americans today) were the recipients of perpetual insults. Cast as lazy good-for-nothings, many lived in hopelessness and despair. Yet, when given job opportunities in programs like the WPA, they proved again and again that they could "deliver the goods." Their historic preservation work at Antietam National Battlefield—and their preservation work at other sites across Maryland and the nation—is a lasting legacy of proof that they were *not* "good-for-nothings." Like the unemployed today, they were simply people who needed jobs.

Sources:

- (1) Nomination Form, National Register of Historic Places Inventory, 1981, on file at the Maryland Historic Trust. (2) WPA Photograph Collection, University of Maryland College Park Archives, multiple boxes/folders. (3) Antietam National Battlefield archival materials, and conversations with National Park Service staff. (4) Federal Works Agency, *Final Report on the WPA Program, 1935-43*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946. (5) "Two Maryland Projects Approved By Roosevelt," Baltimore Sun, May 4, 1941. (6) Arthur B. Musgrave, "Hagerstown Recalls Antietam," Baltimore Sun, June 13, 1937. (7) "WPA Project Planned for Burnside Span," Baltimore Sun, September 18, 1940.

Our New Deal Benefit Today!

Fort Hill High School in Cumberland, Maryland was built with the assistance of funds from the Public Works Administration (not to be confused with the WPA). The school property around the building was developed with the assistance of WPA labor (grading, driveways, construction of the football stadium, etc.). Since the 1930s, this New Deal project has provided education, athletics, and social activities for thousands of young Marylanders. The new school year starts on August 27!

New Deal Art



(Photo by Brent McKee)

Above: This mural is in the Upper Marlboro Library (Prince George's County). The building used to be a post office. A flyer available in the library describes the mural: "*The Tobacco Cutters*, by Mitchell Jamieson was inspired by the crop that was the mainstay of Upper Marlboro for many years. Painted in 1938 in the WPA style of the Great Depression, the mural was restored as part of a renovation project..." Note that the flyer describes the mural as a WPA style painting, not as a WPA project. According to the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation Division, Mitchell Jamieson (1915-1976) was commissioned by the Treasury Department to paint this mural (and others). See <http://www.usbr.gov/museumproperty/art/biojamie.html> (accessed July 24, 2012).

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!