

Whispers from the past – Camp Sisters

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps established Camp Sisters, Project F-110, Company #263, #1454, and #1648.

The camp was located two miles upriver from Camp Sherman on the east bank of the Metolius River, in a meadow surrounded by ponderosa pine trees. It was a CCC camp from 1933-1942.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the CCC “for the relief of unemployment through the performance of useful public work” while preserving the nation’s natural resources. The projects mostly involved forestry, flood control, prevention of soil erosion, and fighting forest fires.

CCC camps were located all over the country, employing unmarried young men between the ages of 17-24. Other than California, Oregon had the largest number of CCC camps west of the Mississippi. According to state records, in 1940 there were more than 2,000 men in Oregon CCC camps.

While working mainly in rural areas, they helped build, improve, and restore the national forests and parks, and other public lands. They fought fires and removed beetle-kill trees, all the while developing self-confidence, learning new skills, and providing income for their families.

The CCC provided housing, food, clothing, and medical services, in addition to educational and vocational training. The young men served for six months to two years and earned \$30 a month. In a period in the U.S. when the races were usually segregated, at the Oregon camps young black and white men all worked together.

During the spring of 1933, the first company of workers arrived at the head of the Metolius River and constructed a summer camp, which was abandoned that fall. While there, they built several miles of forest roads, did a lot of hazard reduction, campground improvement, fire fighting, and other forest work.

The following spring, 25 members from Company #1648 arrived to construct a permanent camp to replace the temporary one built the previous year. The camp consisted of buildings built

in a rectangle, including three barracks and a mess hall, with a kitchen at one end. In another building there were mechanic, carpentry, and sign shops. A separate garage housed the trucks. There were quarters for the Army officers who ran the camp, as well as Forest Service personnel.

By fall and winter of 1934-35, a full company of 200 men was working at Camp Sisters. One of their major projects during that time period was controlling the pine beetle, which had infested approximately 127,000 acres of forest.

From then on, companies arrived and left until 1942. During that time period, a number of Sisters residents were employed at the camp, teaching a variety of skills. One Sisters man in particular had a huge influence on the lives of the young men who passed through Camp Sisters.

Sisters High School principal Lloyd B. Baker became the educational advisor at the camp in 1937, serving for about four years. His responsibilities included developing the educational program for the young men and securing teachers to staff the program. Baker was also in charge of the camp recreation program, and served as the company commander or his assistant when either was gone from camp.

Baker also found himself in the classroom, helping boys with no formal education to learn reading, writing, and math. He also taught high school math and camp administration to key personnel.

Another Sisters resident and Forest Service employee, Robert Wakefield, worked with boys in the carpenter’s shop, carving and painting signs, and building tables and benches for campgrounds. They even constructed a portable house on skids, in sections, complete with plumbing and wiring, to be used by the Forest Service during timber sales.

Archie Brown, of Sisters, and other Forest Service personnel were assigned to Camp Sisters to work as instructors and foremen. They included Bes Estes, Ray Dempsey, Gilbert McCleary, Ray Moore, Keats Hunter, and Cleon Clark.

Jonas Hammack, who later worked as an Oregon Highway District

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