

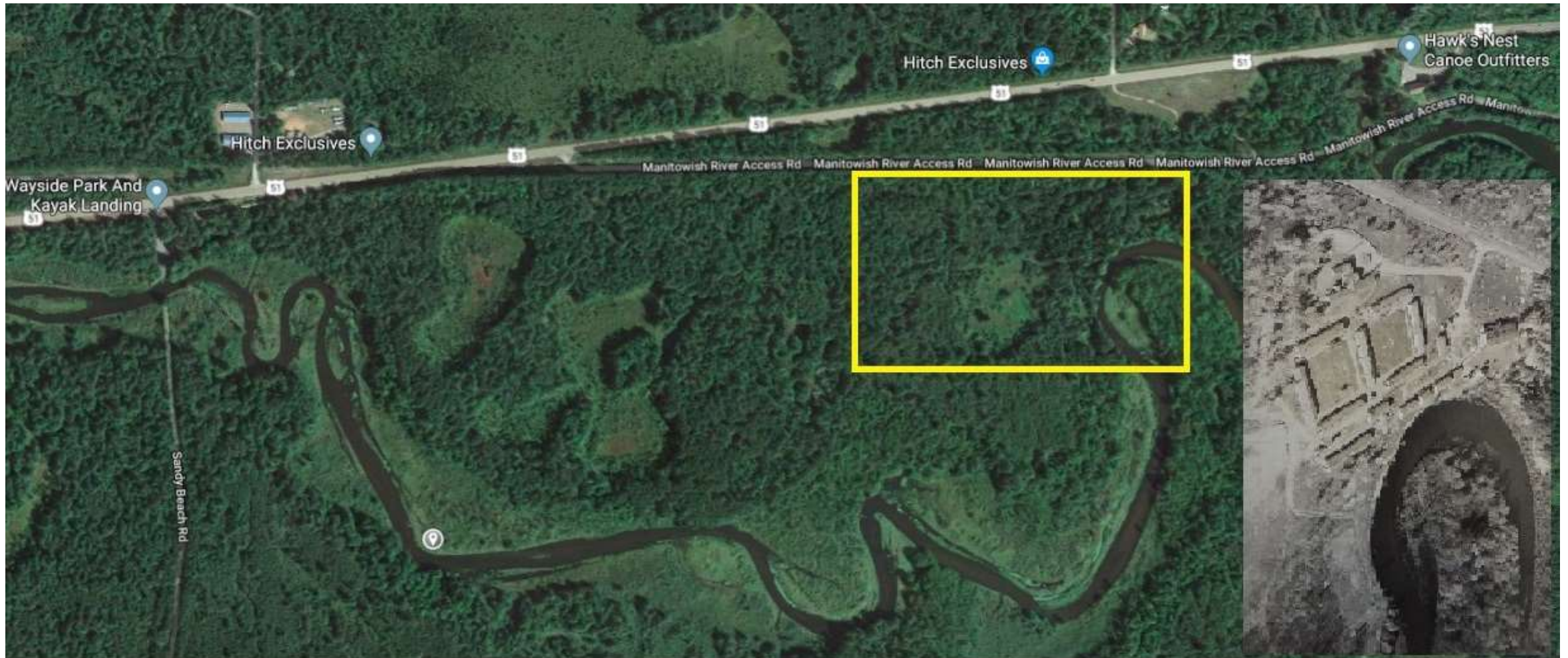
# History of Civilian Conservation Corps 660<sup>th</sup> Company State Forestry S-79 or Camp Mercer





# Modern Location of Camp Mercer

A national program that empowered rural communities and families



# How did Camp Mercer begin?

Driven by a sense of urgency to provide relief, recovery and reform, to end suffering from the Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) launched the CCC in the New Deal's famous "First One Hundred 100 days."

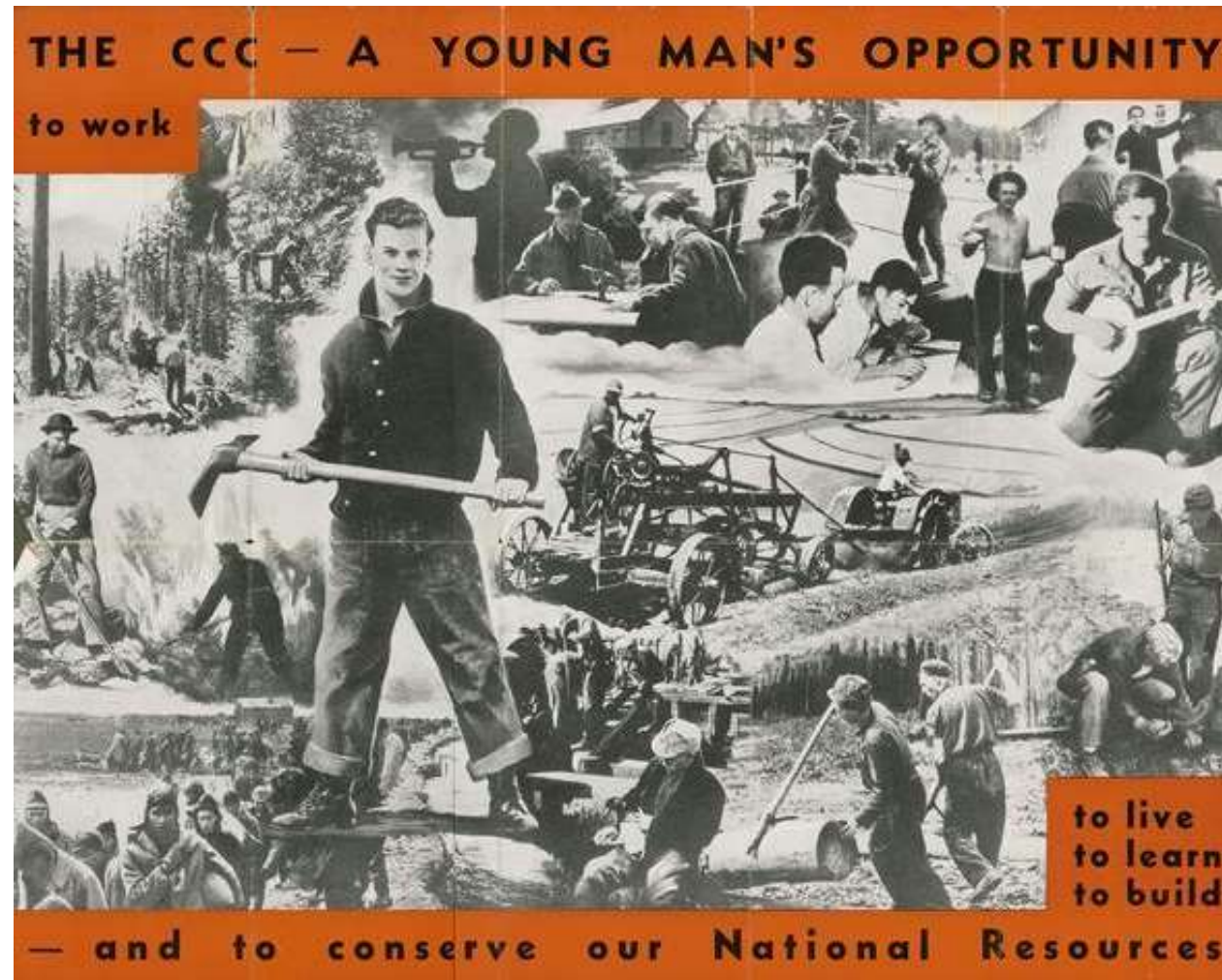
Along the bank of the Manitowish River, on June 21, 1933 the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) established 660th Company S-79 or Camp Mercer.





# Nationally, FDR's New Deal Championed Environmental Reform

CCC camps were a massive undertaking targeting relief for American youth, support for families, education and environmental stewardship.



- The CCC enrolled mostly young, unskilled and unemployed men between the ages of 18 and 25. The men came primarily from families on government assistance. Men enlisted for a minimum of six months.
- Each worker received \$30 in payment per month for his services in addition to room and board at a work camp. The men were required to send \$22 to \$25 of their monthly earnings home to support their families.
- Some corpsmen received supplemental basic and vocational education while they served. In fact, it's estimated that some 57,000 illiterate men learned to read and write in CCC camps.



Wisconsin minorities' participation in CCC camps have a unique legacy. Wisconsin and Minnesota were among a few states where African Americans were integrated into CCC camps and not segregated.



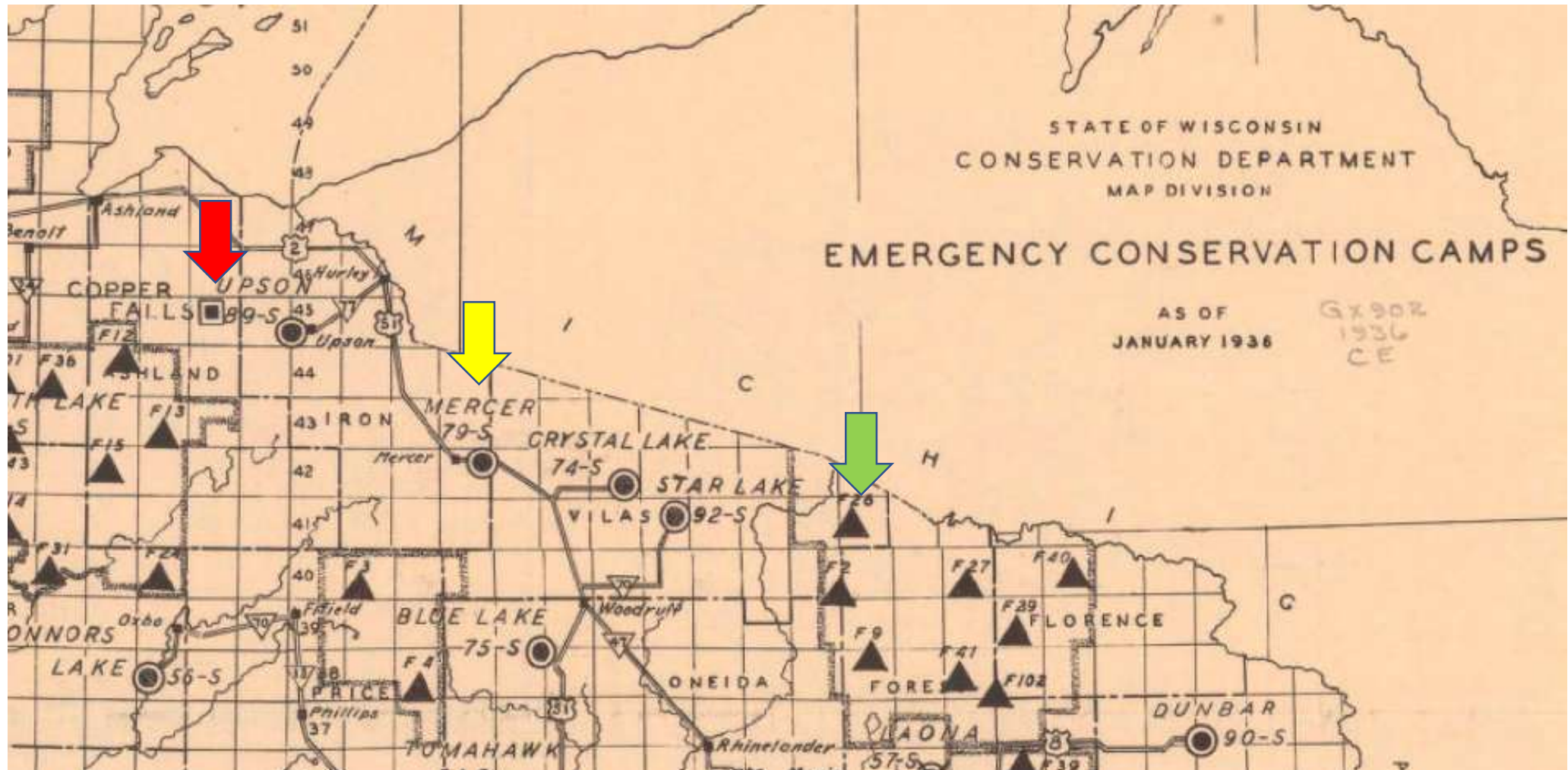


The closest CCC camp to Camp 660 was the Lac Du Flambeau CCC Indian Division Camp on Pokegama Lake. Wisconsin had six Ojibwa and one Ho Chunk Indian Division CCC Camps during the New Deal.



In Wisconsin, Four different CCC camps operated:

- 1) Soil Erosion Service
- 2) State Parks improvements,
- 3) Federal Forestry programs
- and 4) State Forestry programs





660th Company  
was one of 14  
State Forestry  
Camps in  
Wisconsin and  
was designated  
S-79

### The Rangers Tell Us.

- Tree planting, according to Asst. Supt. Pripps, has been finished for a long while, but there is still a variety of work being done.

n- On Highways U. S. 51, County G and B at Winchester, clearing is being done. Fire lane construction is being done on the Circle Lily.

The telephone line work at Winchester is still under way, and the tower there is almost completed.

Fish rescue work is a new project carried on at Turtle Flouage.

Yet, the least of this news is the best. Fire-fighting, with the exception of a few small fires, is almost unheard of these days.

In the summer of 1933 tents were the only living quarters at Camp Mercer. While the Manitowish River served as a bathhouse. Tents were slowly replaced by barracks.





The winter of 1933-34 challenged the original Camp Mercer recruits who endured tough conditions, while building the larger administrative 660<sup>th</sup> Company Camp

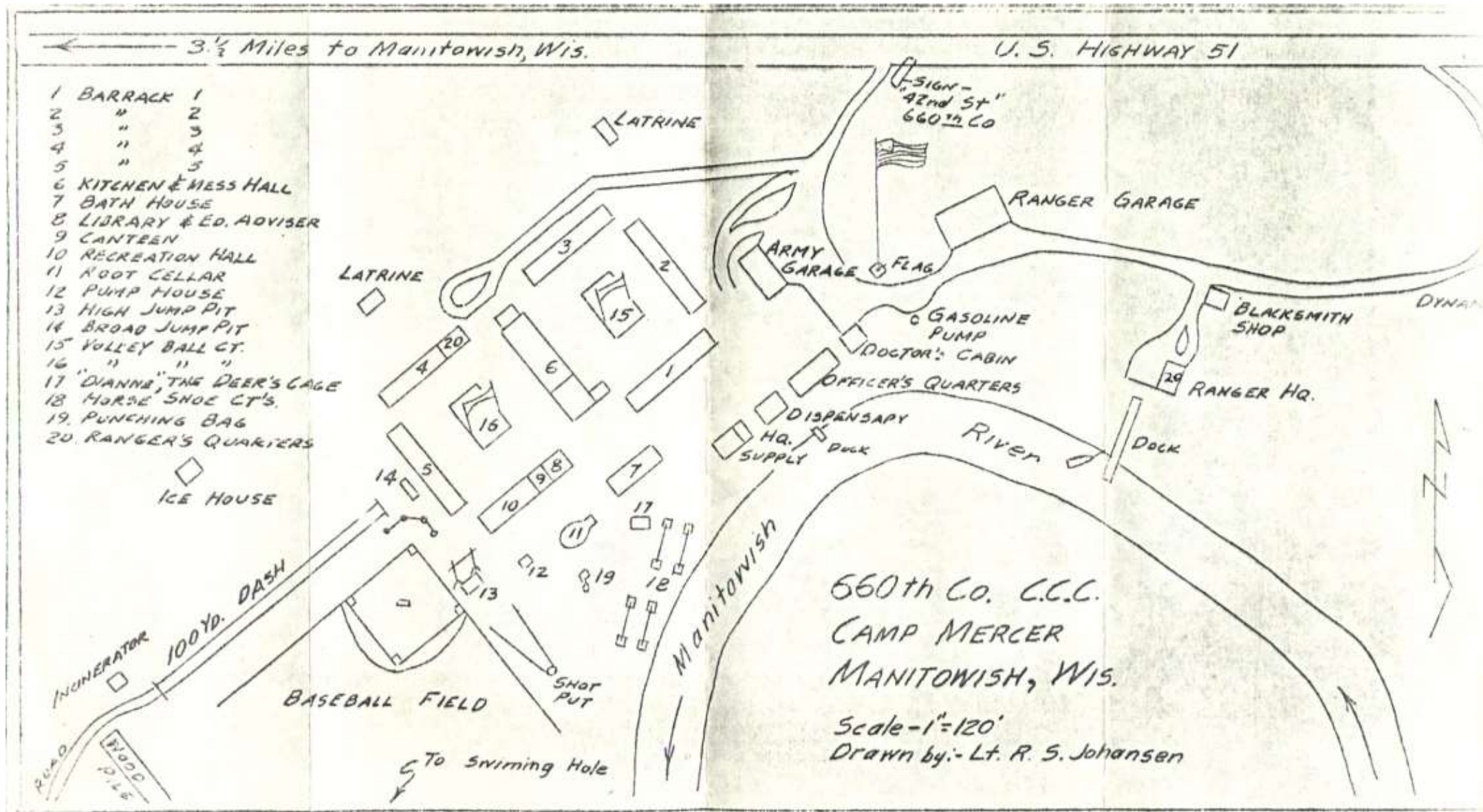


“He [FDR] proposed to recruit thousands of unemployed young men, enroll them in a peacetime army, and send them into battle against destruction and erosion of our natural resources. Before the CCC ended, over three million young men engaged in a massive salvage operation described as the most popular experiment of the New Deal.”





# 660<sup>th</sup> Company CCC SF-79 or Camp Mercer-1935

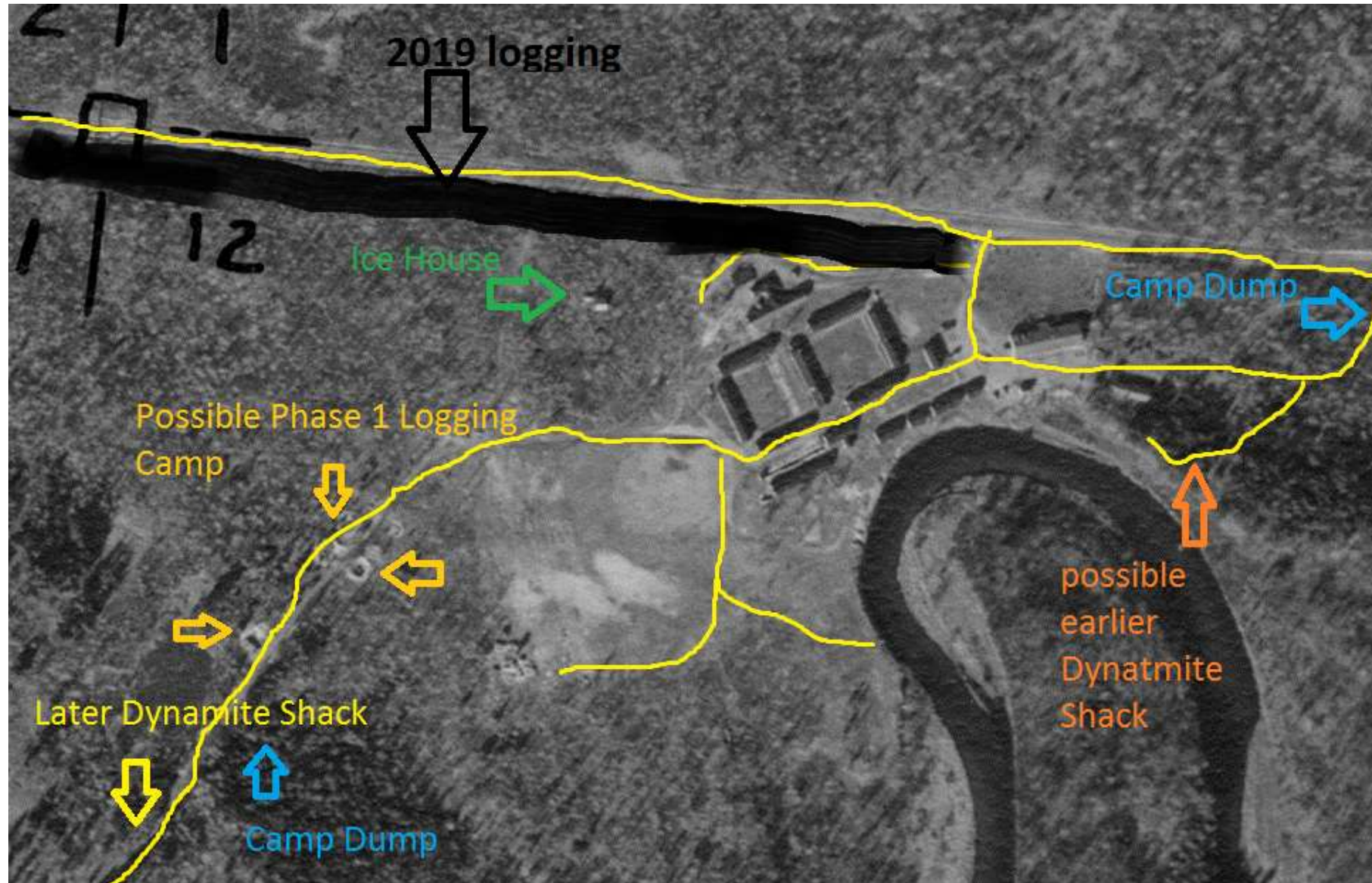


# 660<sup>th</sup> Company CCC SF-79 or Camp Mercer-1938





The berms in this 1938 air photo suggest a 1911 logging camp site that matches the citation from George LaPorte

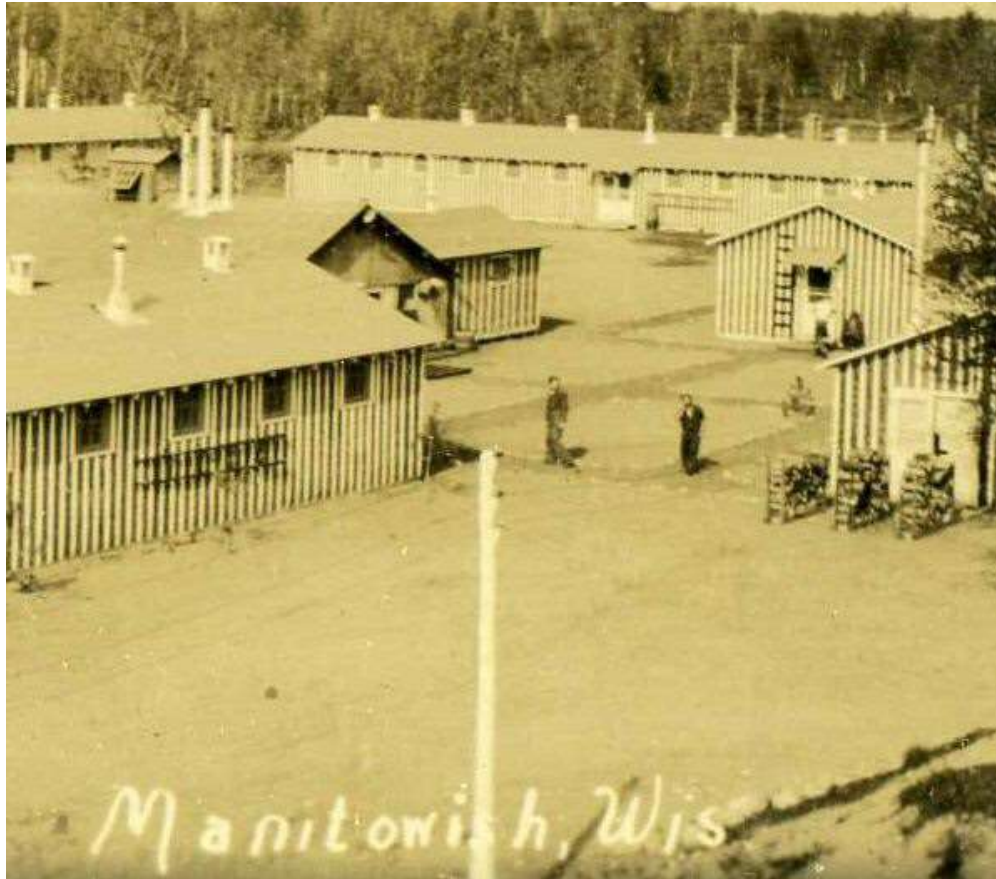


- CCC 660th Company permanent status, large size and scope suggests it served as an administrative CCC Camp that provided special services and oversight to other CCC camps.
- On June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1935 100 men from 660th Company were re-assigned to Superior, Wisconsin to create CCC Company 3663.



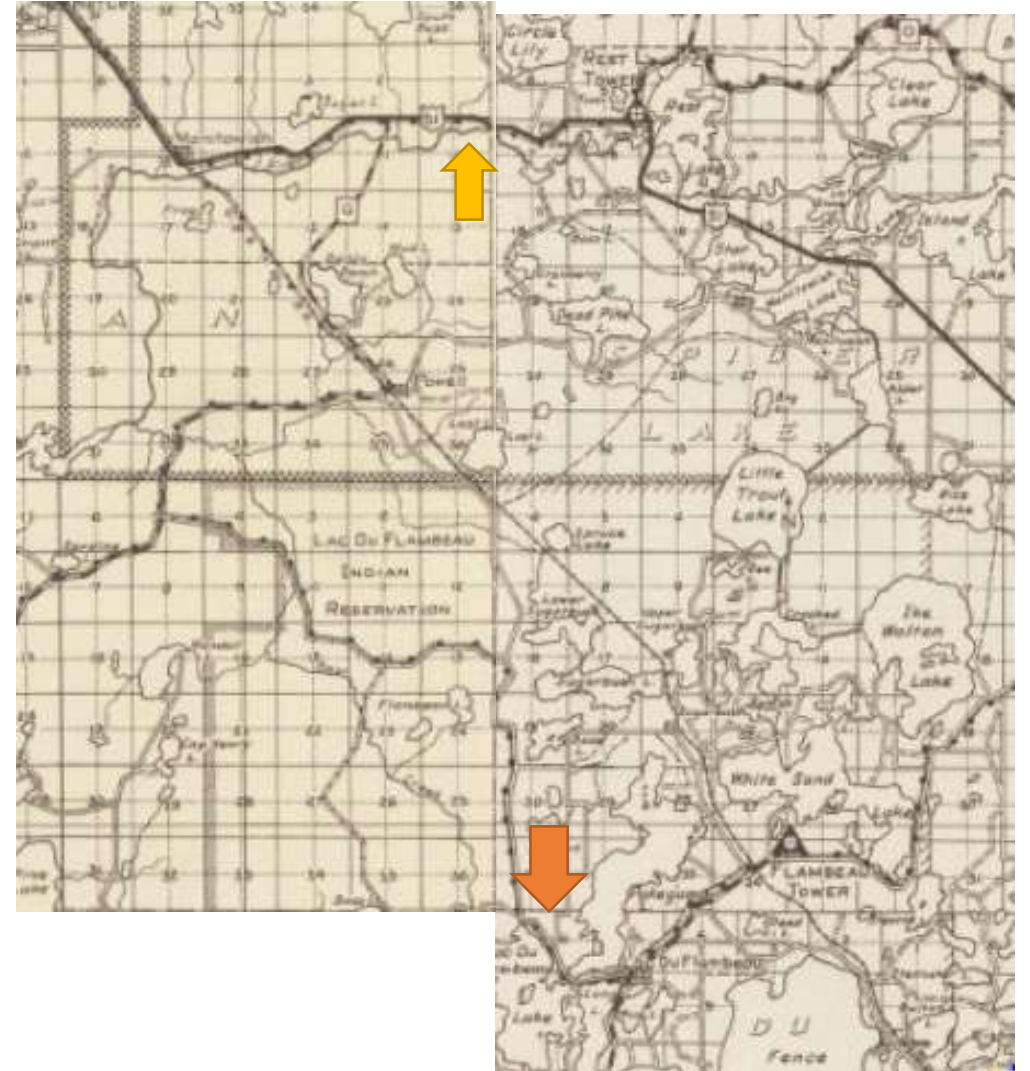


CCC Camps tended to be located in remote areas near a railroad depot in rural America



During the Depression CCC Camps offered hope to families  
and environmental revitalization

In the 1930's and 40's CCC  
Camps were segregated.  
Manitowish Waters proximity  
to both an Indian Division CCC  
Camp in Lac Du Flambeau and  
a white CCC Camp along the  
Manitowish River illustrates the  
regional diversity of  
environmental stewardship.



In Wisconsin, 6 bands of Ojibwa and 1 band of Ho Chunk participated in CCC-Indian Division projects



# THE CCC INDIAN DIVISION

*Aid for depressed Americans, 1933-1942*



Lac Du Flambeau CCC-Indian Division(CCC-ID) Camp operated differently than traditional CCC Camps, expanding the age range of participants and allowing tribal direction of projects



# Tribal leadership and other agencies targeted projects that fit community needs

<i>Physical Improvement</i>	<i>Development of Natural Resources</i>
bridge maintenance and construction	fish hatchery
fire tower maintenance	lake development
water supply systems	seeding wild rice lakes
trail maintenance and construction	forest planting
minor road maintenance and graveling	forest stand improvement
hazard reduction	white pine blister rust control
telephone installation	fire fighting
ditch drainage	fire prevention
dam construction and maintenance	firebreak construction and maintenance
garage, cabin, warehouse, CCC-ID camp building construction	public camp ground and picnic ground development
razing undesirable structures	stream development
restoration of historic structures	wildlife preservation
signs, markers, monuments— construction and maintenance	map making and miscellaneous surveys



The LDF CCC-ID Camp was featured in a government film promoting program success. <https://youtu.be/JbKIPSdjlh0>





The Office of Indian Affairs selected the LDF CCC-ID as an exemplar operation, illustrating the strength of the CCC-ID program



Importantly, families benefited dramatically, and LDF CCC-ID engagement and earnings were the highest

In more personal terms, employment data from four reservations suggests how many Chippewa families must have benefited from opportunities afforded by the CCC-ID:<sup>16</sup>

<i>Reservation</i>	<i>Average Number of Men Employed per Month in 1937</i>	<i>Average Number of Families Benefited</i>	<i>Total Money Spent on Indian Labor up to March 31, 1937</i>
Bad River	43	40	\$ 82,211
Lac Court Oreilles	44	40	\$105,000
Lac du Flambeau	83	75	\$178,324
Keweenaw Bay	35	30	\$ 43,350

Fire tower construction and fire prevention were one of the many projects completed by the LDF CC-ID



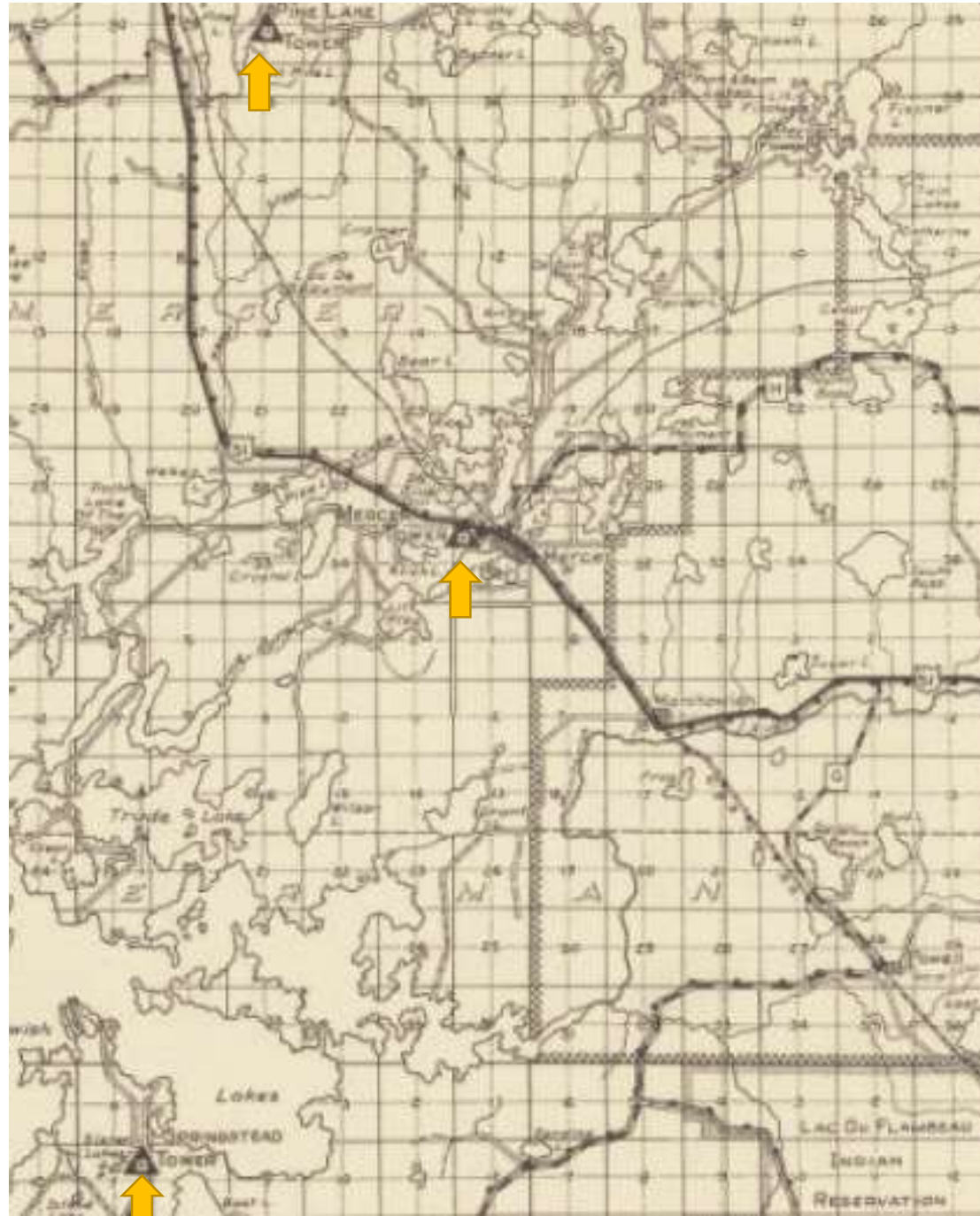


# FIRE!

Company 660's legacy illustrates a strong focus on fire: prevention, suppression and restoration,

“This camp has completed the following work during the period June 20, 1933, to May 14, 1937: Forty-six miles of fire lane construction; five fire lookout towers constructed; one million trees planted: Norway, White, and Jack Pine, lake improvement of twenty-one lakes; transplanting of fish, fire suppression, fire pre-suppression, and fire prevention all season.”

Building  
Depression era  
fire towers were  
part of the CCC  
accomplishments





# Rest Lake Fire Tower dismantled and rebuilt



Fire tower construction including cement work continued in winter, freeing men to fight fires in the spring, plant trees during summer and deliver on the mission of the CCC .





# Rest Lake Tower (left) & Mercer Tower (right)





Fire prevention also included logging trees for telephone poles. New phone service allowed immediate communications from watch towers to the CCC fire fighters.



Telephone poles were  
skidded by both horse  
and tractors





Spring was fire season and the droughts of the Great Depression ravaged the Northwoods





CCC boys hold the fire line!



# Fighting fires on Powell Marsh by Carl Christensen

So that year went by and then in the summer, that summer, they had someone out on Powell Marsh and they was gonna heat up a cup of coffee or something. They made a fire out there and they started Powell Marsh on fire. That fire swept up to the Powell Road. We fought with as much as we could fight with to keep it from going across Powell Road because it would have got into Manitowish and wiped out everything. So the wind went down and the fire died out which was lucky for us but on the other side, into the marsh it kept going. Powell Marsh is about 12,000 acres or more that burnt over that year. I worked on that because everyone in the country was called in because they recruited us to go to work on that fire. So I was one of them and George LaPorte was along there and some of the other local fellows, I don't remember all their names now. We had men from Mercer, we had men from Winegar and from Winchester. We were all working on that fire.

## Fighting fires on Powell Marsh by Carl Christensen

And they called the CC's in and the commander, what we wanted to do was backfire and the commander says no. He says you can't backfire because that's not legal. We have to put it out. All them CC boys was walking around with tanks on their backs with a squirt hose on so they could squirt on the edge. That was all right putting the fire out where there was a little edge on it. They couldn't get water. I was the only one there that had a legal blasting license to blast with dynamite. So what they had me do was blast holes in the marsh so they could get water. So the CC would pound up a hole and drill a hole down into the marsh maybe five or six feet or so and then I would load that with dynamite, set it off and then they would have an open crater there that would fill with water so they could get water for their tanks.



# Powell Marsh fire



# Sherman Fire





CCC tractors were used to build fire lines, fire lanes and plant trees





# Educational Programs were an important pillar of the CCC

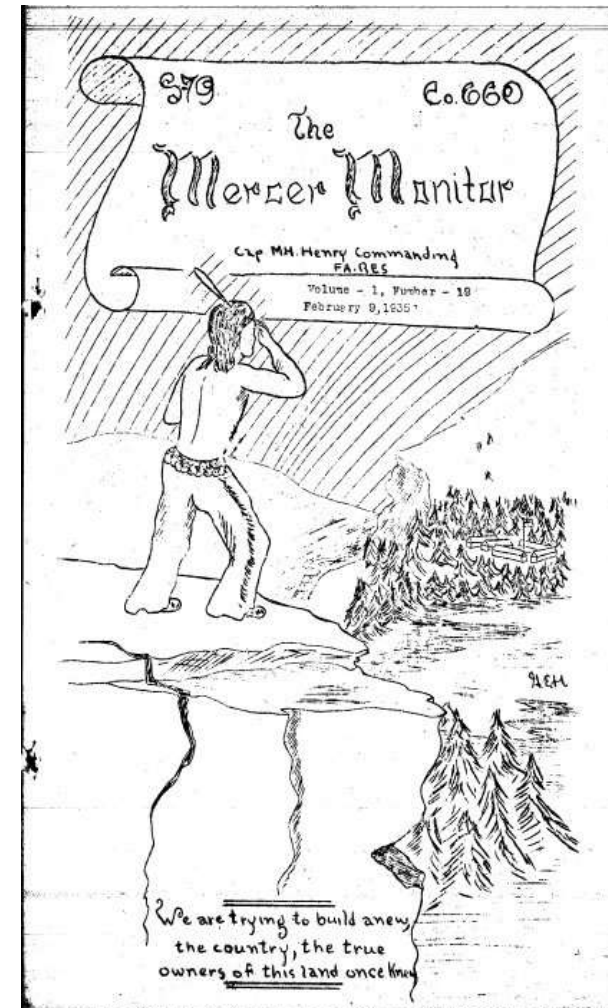
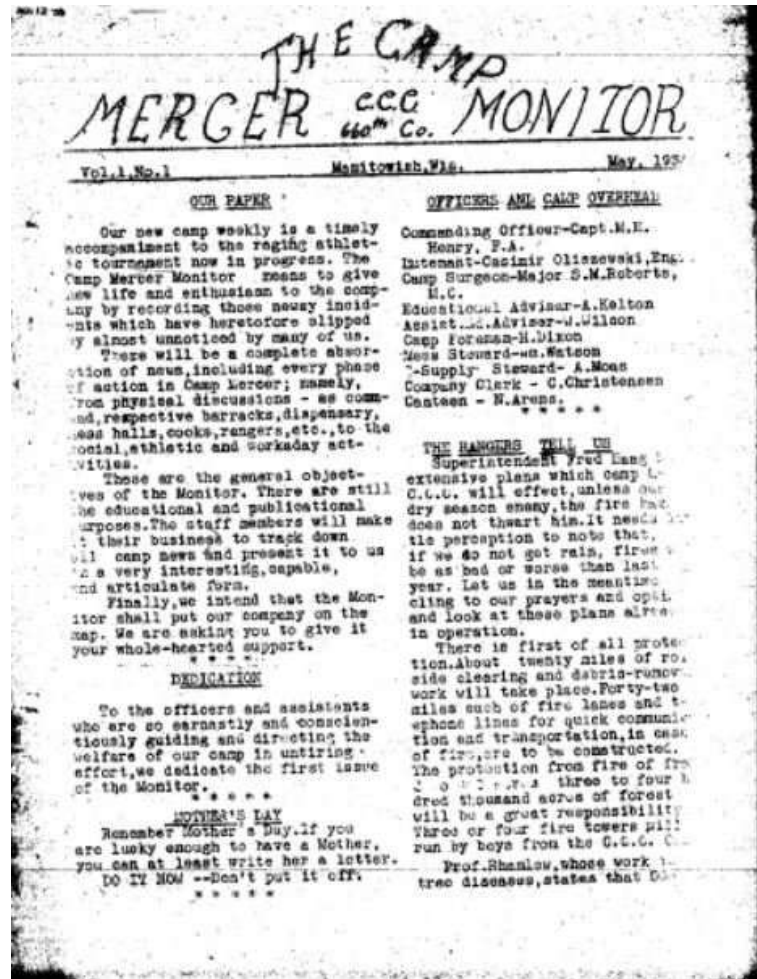
The Great Depression caused schools to close and many children were without access to public education for years. These educational gaps were strategically addressed through an array of CCC educational programs meeting the varied learning needs of CCC participants.

“In April, 1934... inaugurated...academic and vocational courses. The academic field consisted of elementary, high school and college courses with recognized credit at local institutions. The vocational courses were many and varied. A few were: Typing, bookkeeping, agriculture, photography, leathercraft, woodworking, and auto mechanics.”

“The educational building has steadily grown from a meager eight-by-twelve-foot room to a full barracks, and has recently been revamped into one of the finest of CCC educational buildings”.



Additionally, the 660th Company community published, "The camp newspaper, "Mercer Monitor," ... founded May 2, 1934. Publication has been made regularly ever since."





<https://www.mwhistory.org/selected-mercerc-monitors/>

39 Mercer Monitor Newspapers Just click on the image to select and scroll down to access more documents.



May 5, 1934 Mercer  
Monitor



May 19, 1934 Mercer  
Monitor



June 1, 1934 Mercer  
Monitor



June 27, 1934 Mercer  
Monitor

## Athletics

### Camp Vs. Mercer

Wins one; Loses one.

Camp Mercer took an easy game from the Mercer City team July 4th.

Camp, leading thru out the contest, was never endangered.

The Monitors played heads-up ball and were on the long end of the count 15 to 7.

Sunday July 7th the Camp Monitors again engaged in a diamond conflict with the Mercer City team. This time however Mercer won by a score of 9 to 5, due to the fact that only about half of the regulars played.

### Camp Vs. Little Bohemia

Camp Mercer Monitors took an interesting game from Little Bohemia Sunday at Little Bohemia by a score of 11-7.

The boys played good ball, and the starting line-up seemed invincible. They held their opponents scoreless for the first seven innings. It was only after the line-up was shifted that the opposing team scored.

### A New Kittenball Tourney

A new kittenball tourney has started. The first game, a hotly contested affair, ended with a victory for Barrack 2, by a score of 4-1. This was one of the fastest games seen on the diamond this year.

If this keeps up we should see one of the best tournaments held anywhere in the state.

Our All-Camp Kittenball team rates in the opinion of the Adviser, second to none. All outdial games played so far have been won by overwhelming scores. We would like some real competition in Kittenball.

Cartoons and athletic news became unique features of the Mercer Monitor



Special attention to topics like "rookies" were all part of the greeting new CCC recruits enjoyed

Page 1.

~S~ THE CAMP 660th Co. 79 ~

# MERCER MONITOR

CAPT. M. H. HENRY, COMMANDING

VOLUME I - No. 5 MANITOWISH, WIS. JULY 12, 1934

## MANY NEW "ROOKS" ARRIVE IN CAMP VIA TRUCK

One of the biggest consignments of men Camp Mercer has ever received arrived via truck on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, July 1-3. In all, 105 men were recruited. Seventeen from Merrill, 17 from Medford, 33 from Wausau, 11 from Siren, 21 from Balsam Lake, and 5 from Spooner.

Left quite desolate with the discharge of so many veterans, Camp Mercer is contrastingly in a teeming state. The camp, with a population of 259 men, is way above capacity.



### "Rooks" Pleased With Their New Home

We rookies, who arrived in Camp last week, are more than satisfied with our new environment. We think the food, recreational activities, and other facilities are luxuries for a CCC camp and really hadn't expected to find conditions this pleasing. We surely enjoy Watson's cooking, as we are the last ones to leave our tables after eating. We sure like his pies!!

Two things we are impatient about are our "shots" and a chance at some good hard manual labor or K.P. on Sundays??

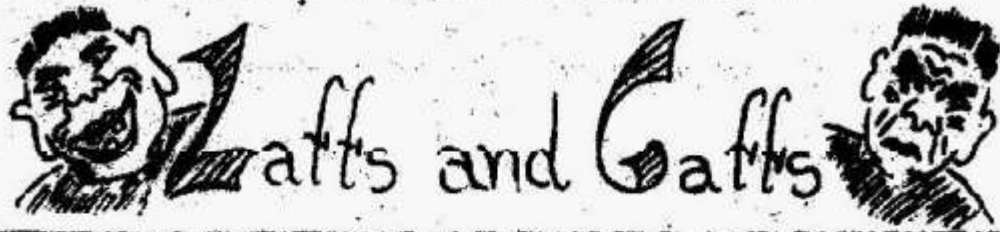
We claim, that we never slept more soundly in all our lives than we do now. When we fall asleep we don't awaken until that confounded bugler blows out of bed. We believe we have gained several pounds already.



# Comic relief was also part of the Mercer Monitor

Page 6

Mercer Monitor



W. Weirauch--If I have talked too long it's because I haven't my watch with me, and there's no clock in this classroom.

Vidsaune--There's a calendar behind you.

Stroming--I bet you didn't have a good time over New Year's.

Arnoberg--Oh, yes, I did.

Stroming--Then why ain't you sick today?

Judge--And how old are you, Madam?

Witness--I'm around 30.

Judge--So I perceive. Now, how many years is it since you got around

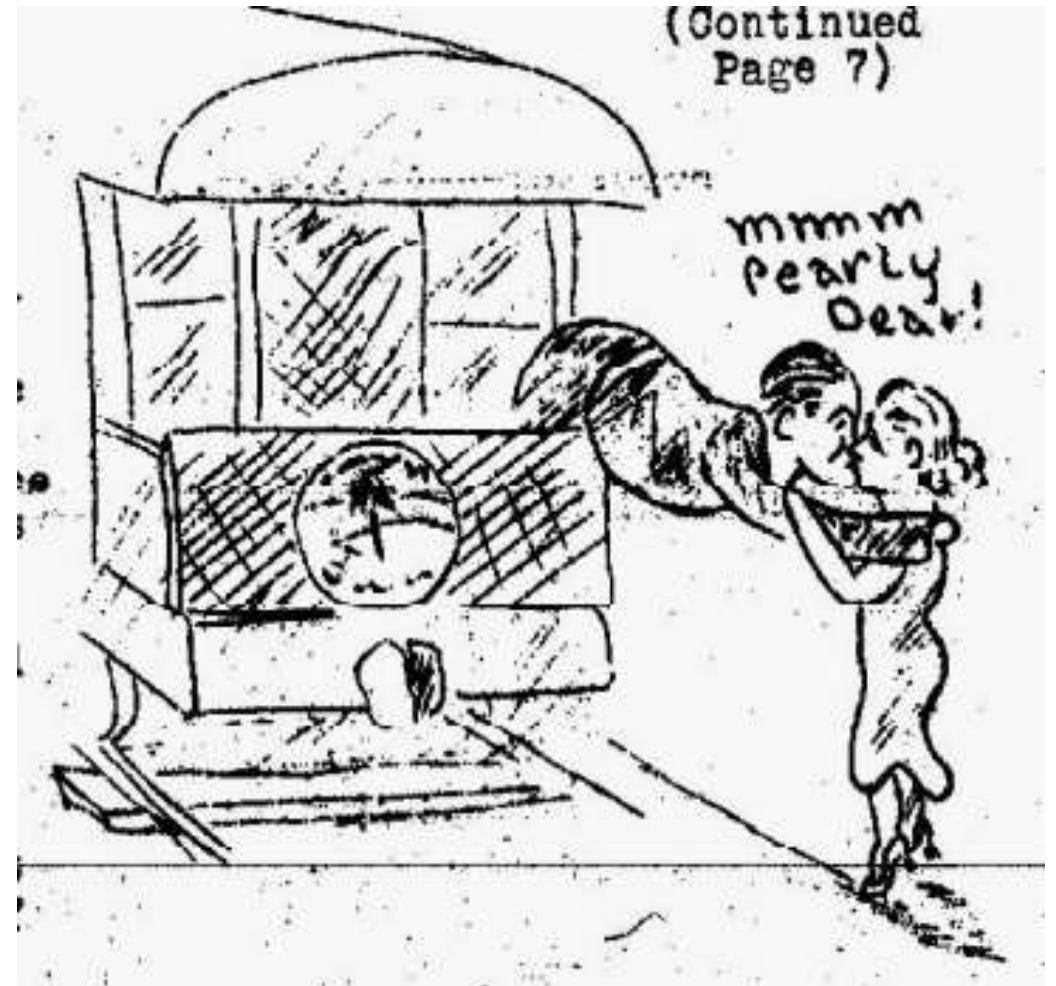
Koski--What is an illiterate?

Korpela--A person who has sense enough not to read or write.

Mary--My husband says he married for beauty and brains.

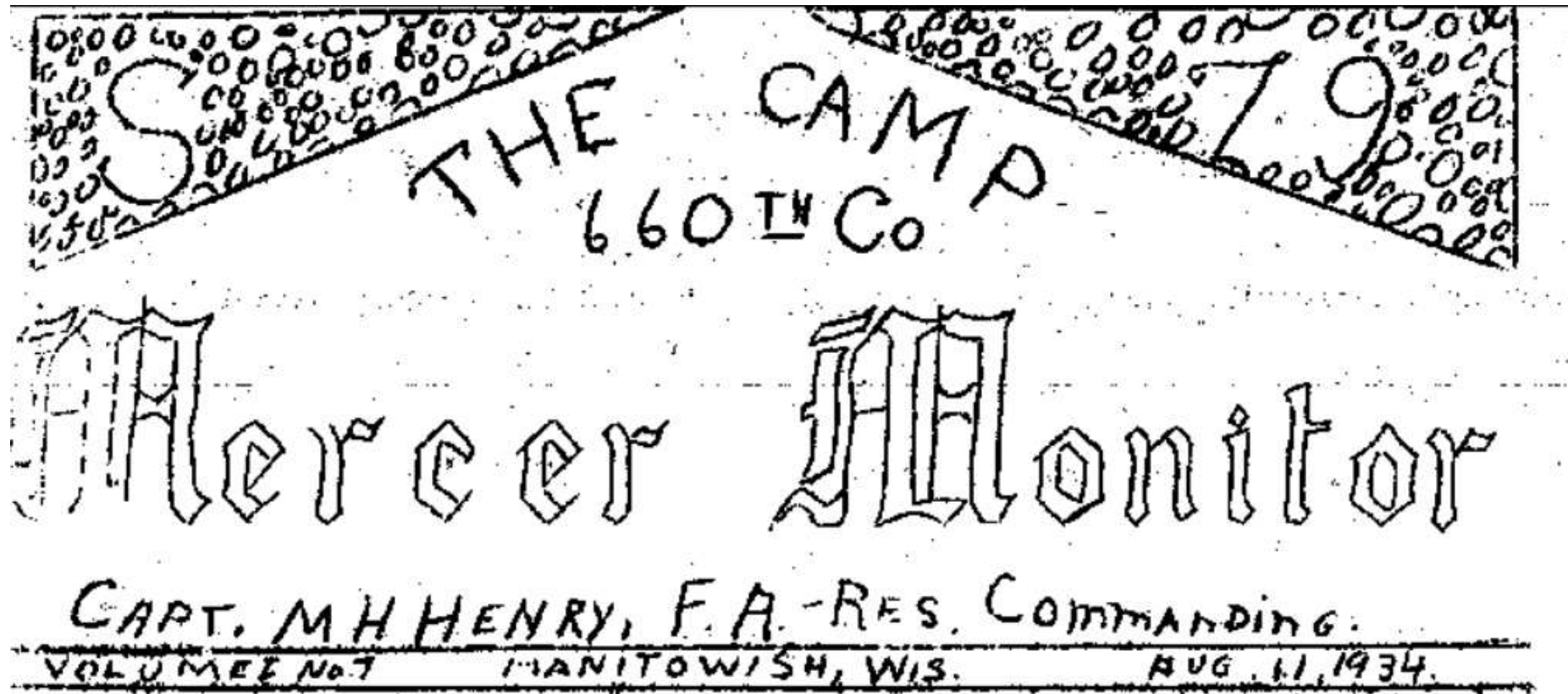
Marie--Ah, then you're not his first wife.

(Continued  
Page 7)



Sadly, national controversy regarding the New Deal and the CCC spilled over into the Northwoods

The staff of the Mercer Monitor tried to separate the politics of the time from the reality in Northwoods communities





that the CCC boys are doing.

Much has been said, both for and against, the establishment of what is almost universally known as the CCC camps. It is the opinion of the Monitor that most of the propaganda we hear against the establishment and progress of these camps, said their operation is due largely to politics. We who live at Camp Mercer and see the operation of the camp from day to day, feel that an injustice is being done when we hear our work criticized as is frequently done, and it is the object of the Monitor to make every effort to keep our readers informed as to the facts.

A large percentage of the boys are engaged at the present time battling a very dangerous fire, which would without a doubt cause terrific havoc with the small amount of timber the lumbermen, of many years ago, so generously left for those who followed. In this case of disastrous forest fires we ask any fair minded person.

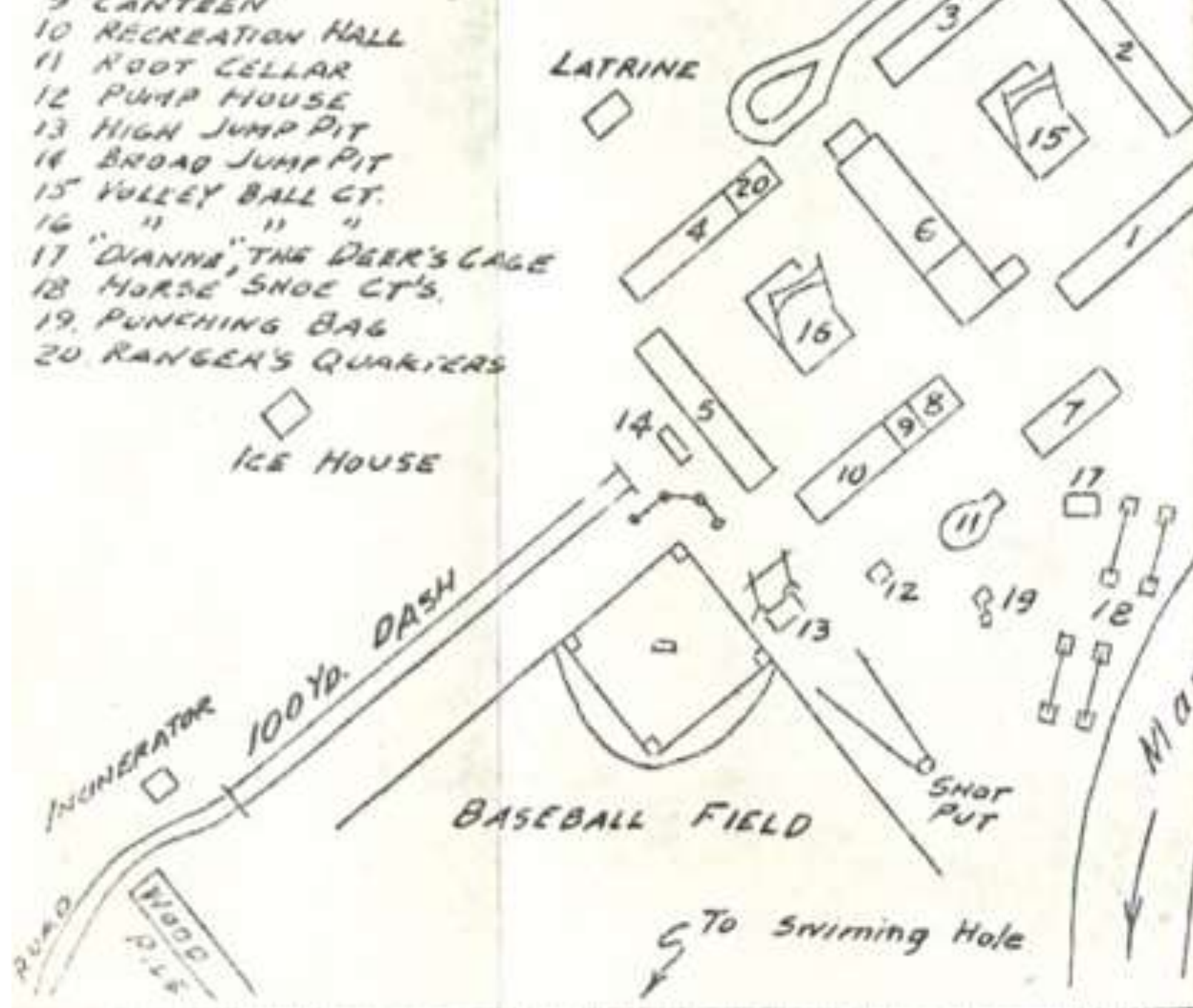
Athletics and outdoor recreation were another pillar of CCC culture

660th Company baseball champions of the Sparta CCC District for 1936

Recreations activities are often featured in the 1937 Sixth Corp Area Annual and the Mercer Monitor newspaper, showcasing, track & field, volleyball, football, baseball, swimming, archery, boxing, billiards, basketball, running, ping pong, skating, hockey, softball (kitten ball), canoe jousting, card games and musical bands. Athletic competition between CCC camps were supported by camp athletic directors, coaches and travel allowances. Most of these activities were conducted on the grounds of 660th Company, although, ice skating and hockey practices were conducted one and quarter miles east of Camp Mercer on Dog Lake. CCC images and camp newspaper articles reveal Camp Mercer took great pride in both athletics and excellence



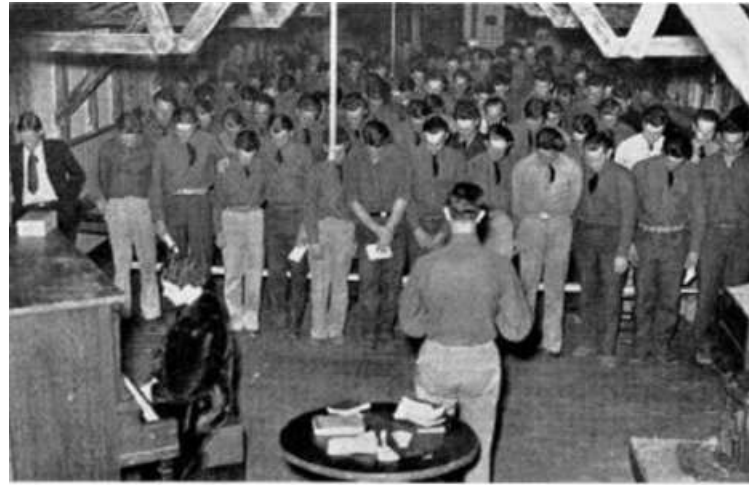
The western portion of Camp Mercer was dedicated to athletic facilities



# Sports and competition



# Recreation, faith and entertainment

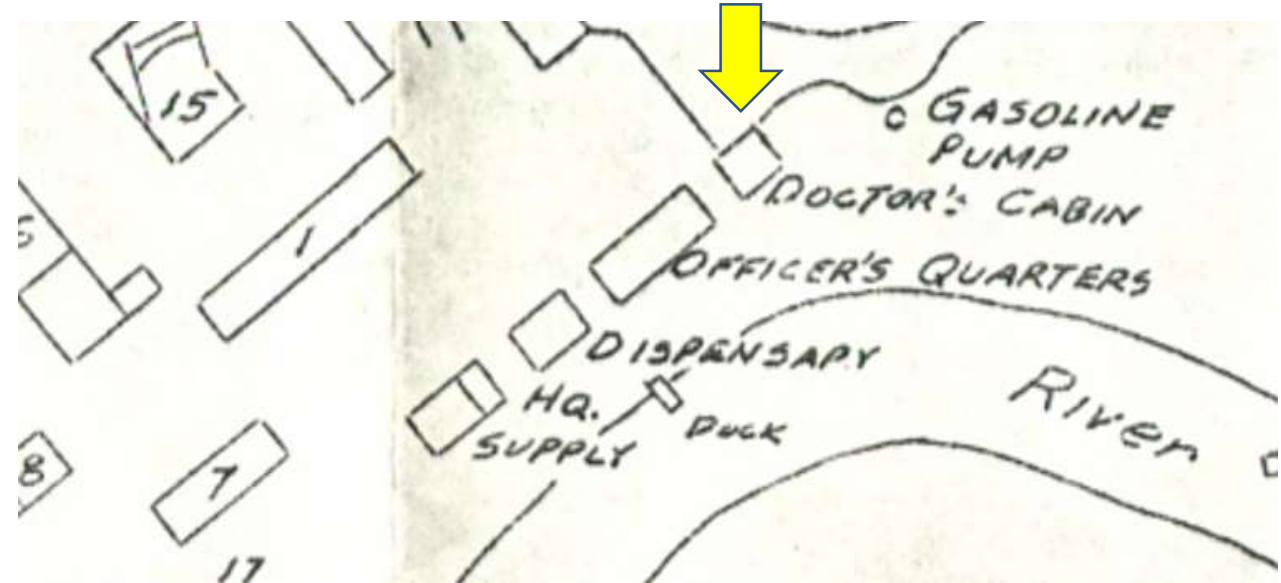
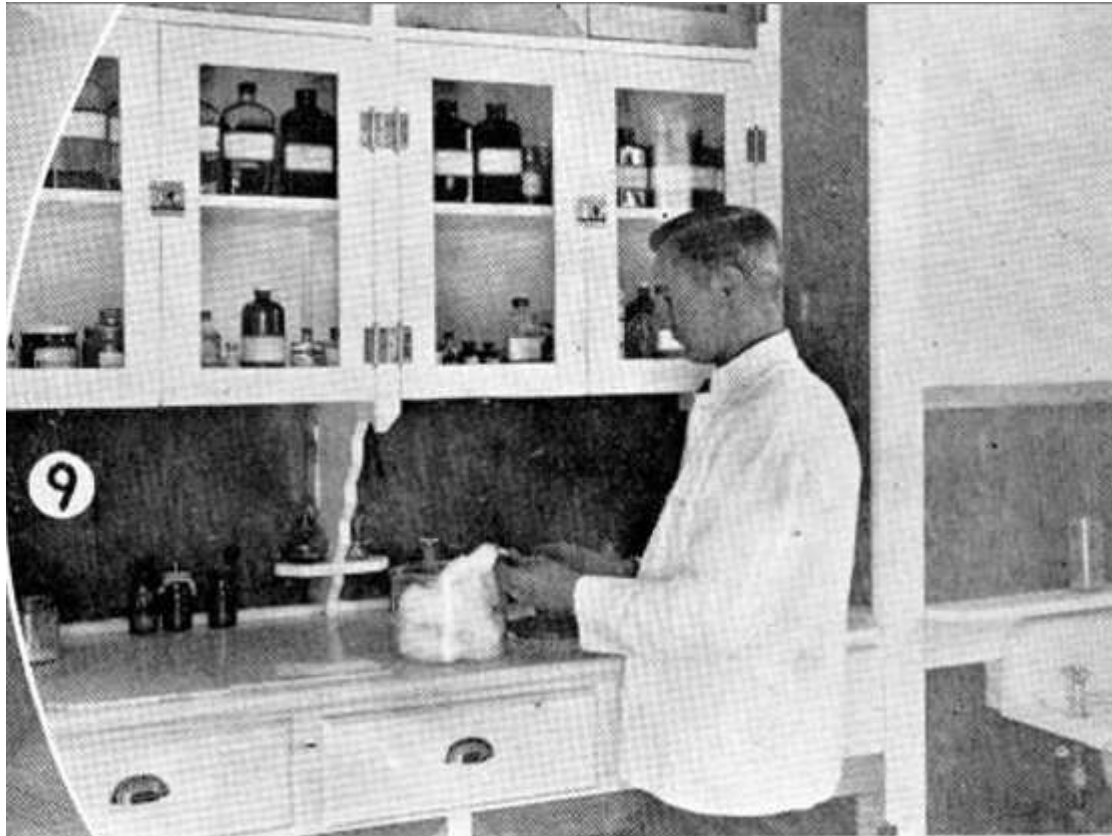




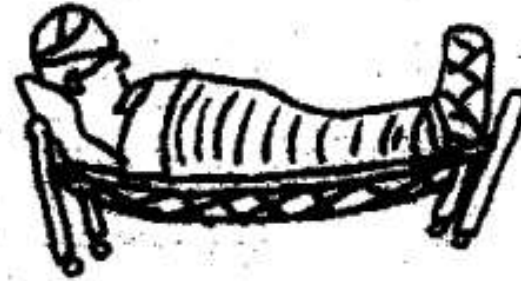
Ice skating and Hockey were held on Dog Lake just beyond the Iron and Vilas County lines.



Proper medical care was essential considering the dangerous work and harsh conditions CCC men sometimes faced. 660th Company had a dispensary for medical needs that was manned by a camp surgeon.



The Mercer Monitor camp newspaper included a column called, “Infirmary Infections.” Updating the men of Camp Mercer regarding current medical needs and precautions.



## INFIRMARY INFECTIONS

Dispensary      Infections  
By 'Bob' Avery

With the advent of the new year many men have caught colds which in many cases have developed into influenza. An epidemic can easily find a home in this Camp if we are not careful. Every precaution should be taken to avert a situation of this kind.

Chester Czech, Supply Sergeant, contacted the measles while home on leave and consequently was forced to remain at home a few days after his leave had terminated. He returned to Camp sooner than was expected and is none the worse from the attack. That 'army front' of his is still as large as ever.

Eddie VanRens, Ambulance Driver, is home on leave. No doubt Green Bay will brighten up for a few days, tsk, tsk.

An inspection was made of five Michigan Camps in this District last Monday. Robt. Avery was pinch hitter for Ed. VanRens and altho you may not believe it, the Major is still walking around.

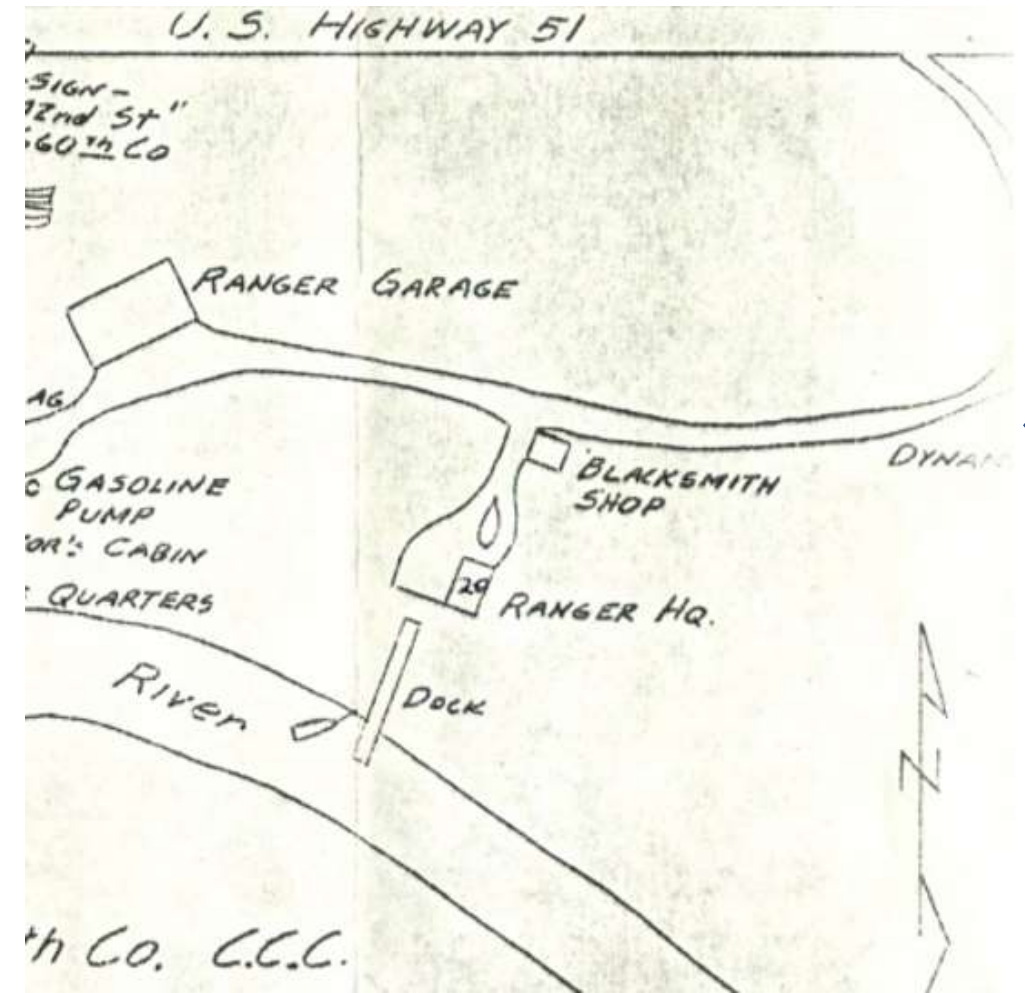


A series of buildings also parallels the Manitowish River which initially housed the doctor, officers, dispensary, and supply headquarters starting in 1933-34. The role of these building certainly changed when the new camp headquarters was constructed north of the barracks quad.

Further investigation will hopefully reveal the purposes of the Manitowish River buildings after the second phase of construction at Camp Mercer.

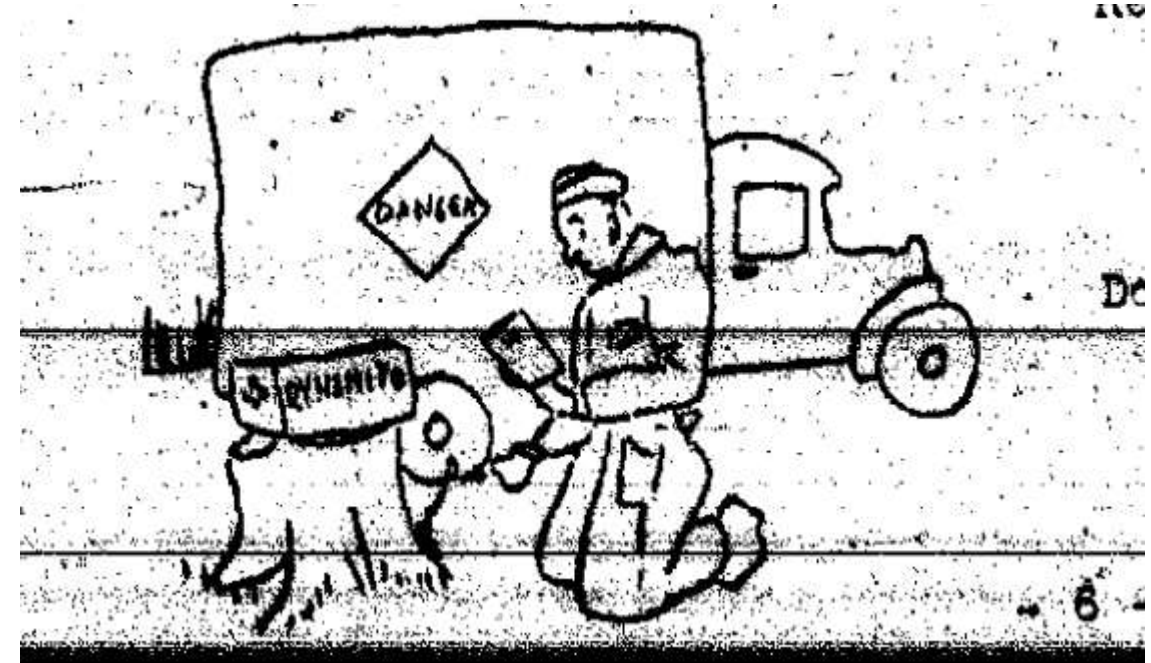


The 1933-34 map of Camp Mercer reveals the dynamite “shack” or magazine on the far east corner of the site. Camp Mercer workers use of dynamite for construction and clearing is illustrated in a 1933-34 image of 660<sup>th</sup> Company field work.





The more recent dynamite shack still stands on the western edge of the site. Heading west from the CCC 660th Company site along the road paralleling the Manitowish River. A Mercer Monitor cartoon seems to mock the training of the Camp Blasters!





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# MERCER MONITOR

E.J. Raushenberger 1st. Lieut. Sig. Res. Commanding.

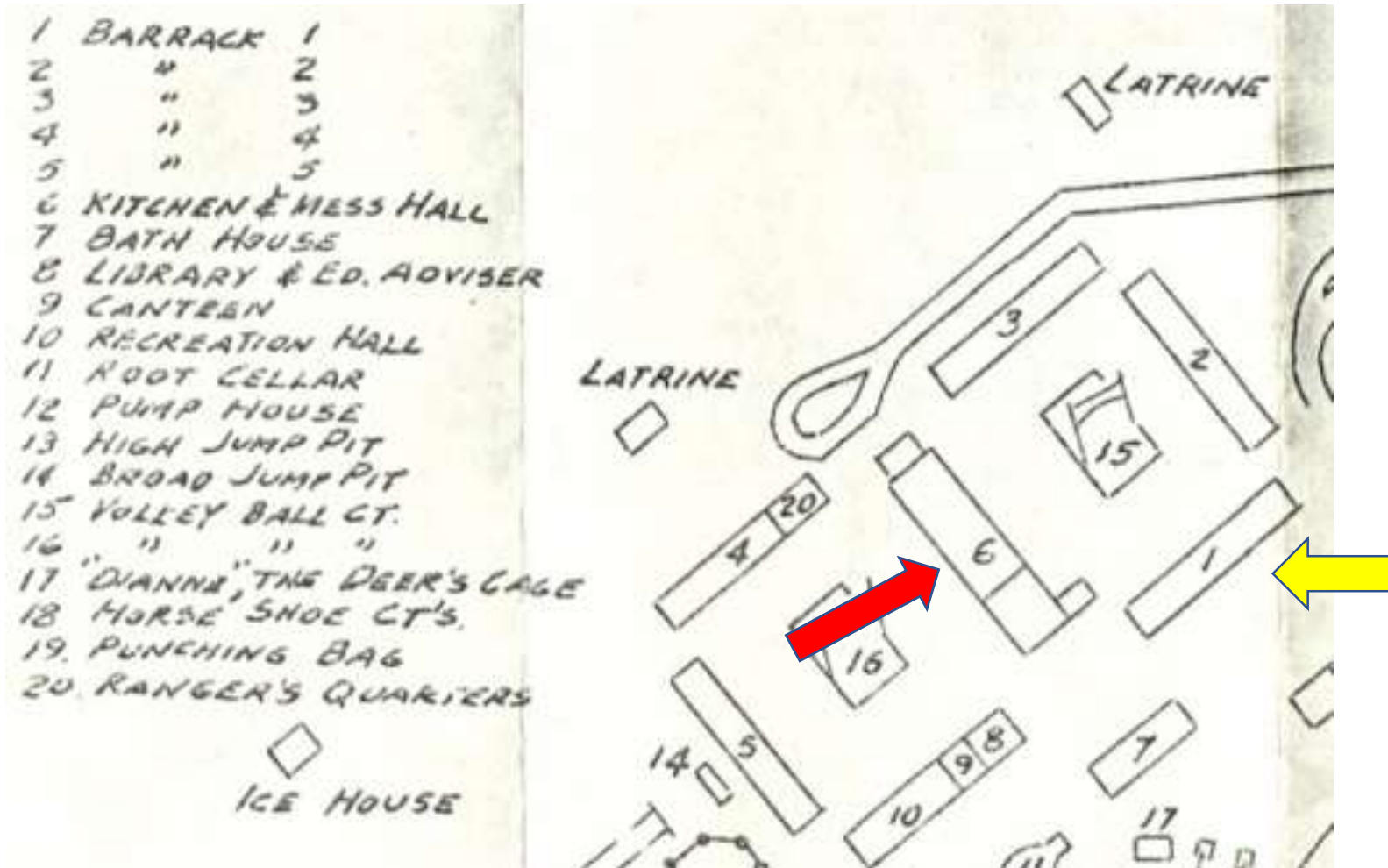
February, 1937.

The dynamiters went to town! Smith, Hirte, Fafford, Chevrier Nelson, Bonk, Garm, and Sup't Summers went to Hurley February 9th, to take a test for qualification as a State licensed Blaster.

A unique feature of 660th Company is an architectural anomaly of a log cabin mess hall created during the earliest phases of 660th Company Construction. “...first building erected was the mess hall, made of logs and put together by such men as Dan McDonald, Dan Weir, and Mike Barney, three venerable lumberjacks from the Paul Bunyan days.”

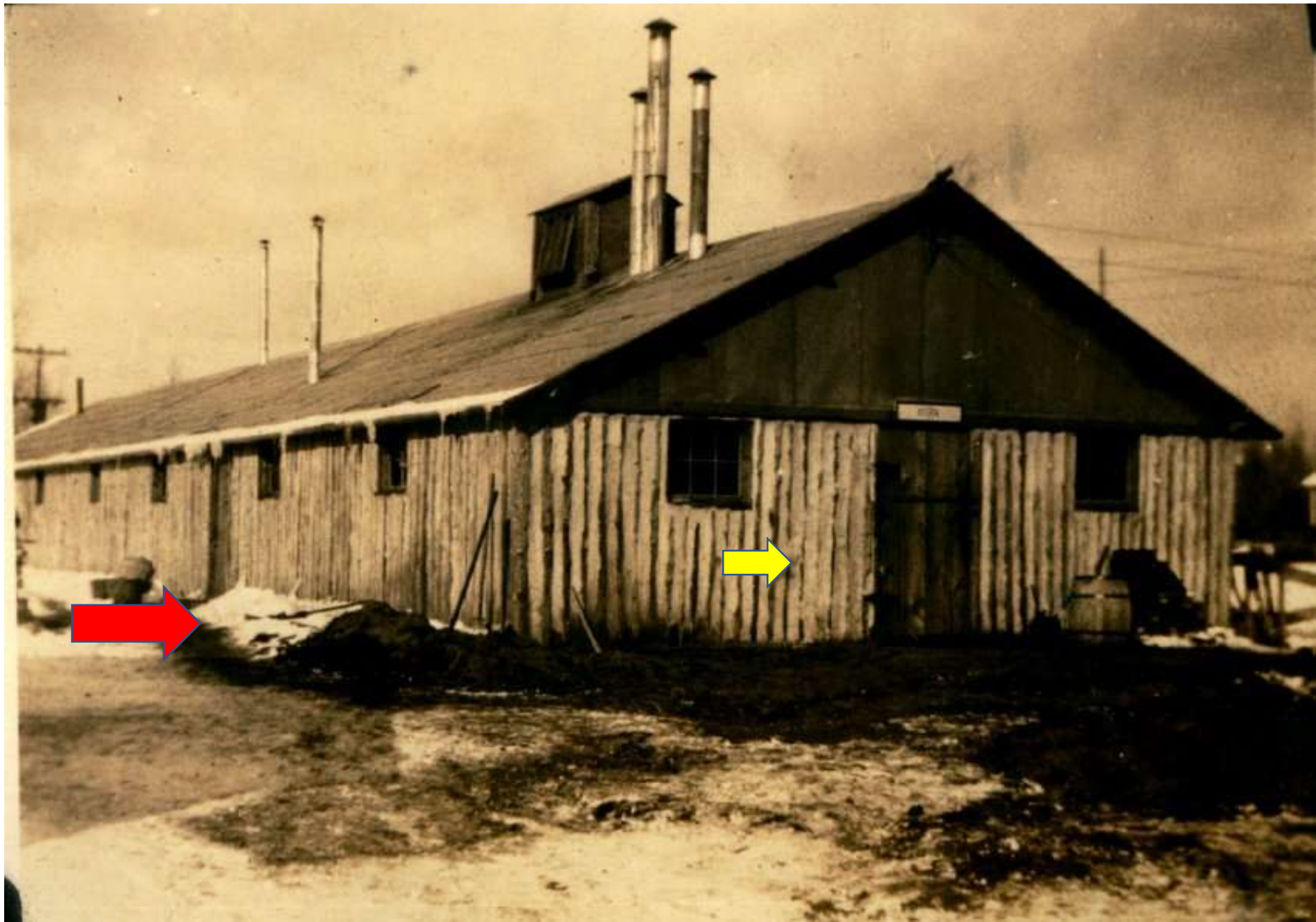


The map of 660<sup>th</sup> Company locates mess hall as the central building 6. The Mercer Monitor reports that the mess hall was moved in December 1934 and the old log mess hall became a canteen and recreation hall.





This image titled, “mess hall” has classic vertical log construction (yellow arrow) and earthen berms (red arrow) along the foundation.



Reviewing the CCC Camp Mercer Photo Album from 1933-34,  
an image of the Camp Mercer Mess Hall reveals atypical  
vertical log and log beam construction, a clear departure  
from typical CCC mess halls and buildings





Importantly, the new ranger station at Company 660 replaced the State Forest Ranger Station at Rest Lake that operated from 1912 until 1923.

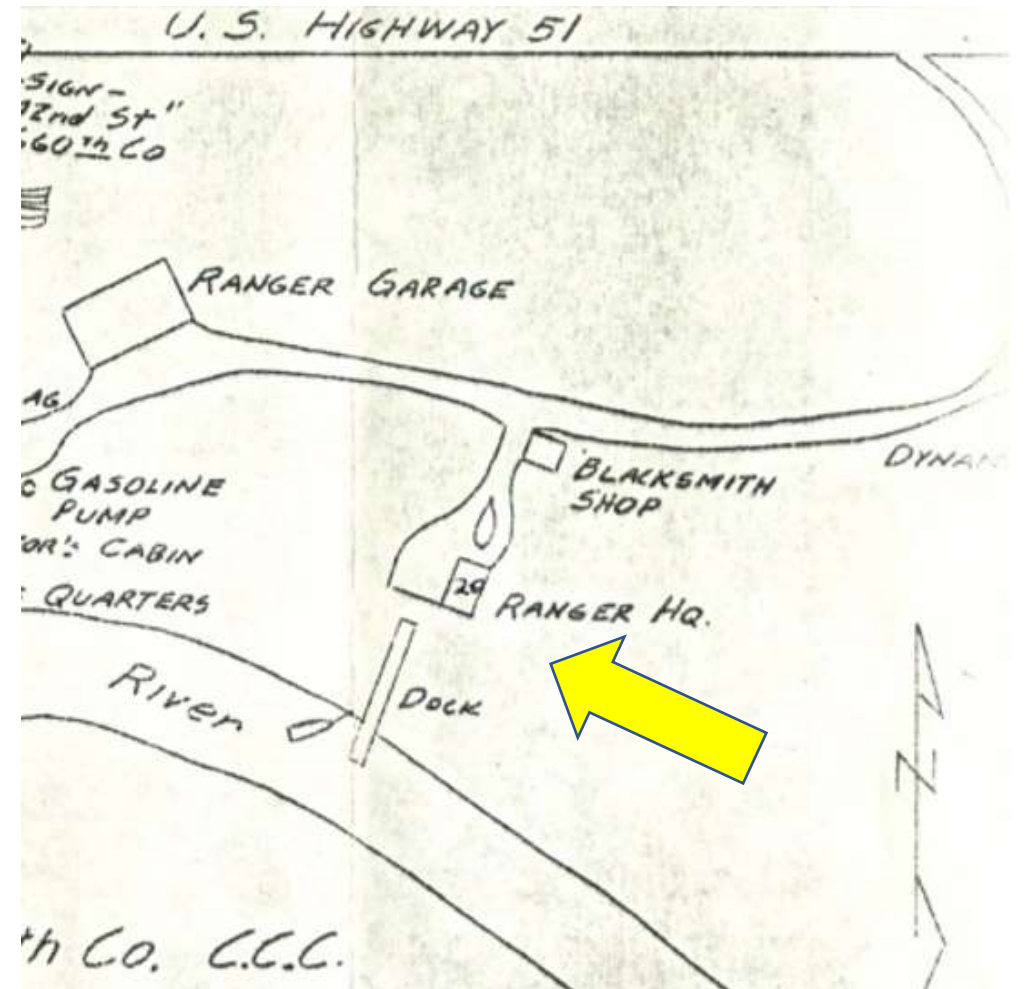


**RANGER CABIN WITH LOOKOUT TOWER.**

By triangulation methods, the location of a fire may be quickly and accurately determined for any point within the forest reserves.



Most ranger facilities occupied the eastern edge of Camp Mercer and documents suggest that the new Mercer Ranger station was constructed by 660<sup>th</sup> Company around 1934-35.



The Ranger Station moved from CCC Camp Mercer by 1936 to Mercer WI





Camp Mercer operated year-round and the men of the 660<sup>th</sup> Company did not get “snow days”





Chores included doing your own laundry



Recreation included winter pass times like hunting on snowshoes and an occasional beer party





Camp mascots were part of the early culture at Camp Mercer





# Why this matters!

Tom Brokaw, suggests efforts of U.S. citizens responding to the Great Depression and World War II earned them the legacy of, “The Greatest Generation”. These Americans stepped-up, saving the United States from economic collapse and the world from totalitarian dictatorship. Camp Mercer’s stories and images allow citizens today a peak into how many of the youth from the Greatest Generation contributed to the recovery of America. Their pride, determination, and perseverance to achieve a common goal of environmental renewal evidences why the CCC remains one the most popular New Deal projects. Importantly, the rigorous training and achievements of CCC men also proved to be formative to the mobilization of U.S military forces in World War II.

Farewell and thank you to our CCC boys on the Manitowish

