

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Wendall Cross
INTERVIEWEE ADDRESS: Cedar Falls, IA
PHONE NUMBER:

Interviewer: Jim Farnsworth

Date: November 15, 2002

Bold print is CCC enrollee Wendall Cross

CCC years enrolled, 1933 thru 1936

DNR: Where was your hometown? **When I went in?**

Yes. **Charles City.**

DNR: And what age did you enroll? **Seventeen**

DNR: Where did you go before you went to the CCC camp, did you go to an induction center? **Well, I really don't remember where I went to go in. But I imagine probably it was at an employment office. Anyway, they were taking them in, but I just can't remember where it was.**

DNR: Some of them went to Fort Des Moines. **No, I did not go to Fort Des Moines.**

DNR: I talked to a guy Tuesday and he went right to camp. **Yes, I believe I went right to camp too.**

DNR: And where was camp? **I went to Caledonia, Minn. And I did one term in Caledonia and then from Caledonia they moved us all to Decorah. And I did one stretch in Decorah.**

DNR: OK, so you were in for how many years? **I was in for a year. Ok, that is right they had a six-month enrollment periods.**

DNR Why did you enroll in the CCC program? **Well, for one reason it was during the depression and my father and mother had a large family and it was hard for them to make ends meet. And after I got in I would send them \$25.00 dollars a month. I got \$30.00 a month and I sent \$25.00 home and I got five dollars month. And I never asked for any of the money, as I knew they needed it. I was working in commodity garden. They had a farm where they had potatoes and stuff. And I was working in the commodity garden hoeing and hilling potatoes. My Dad was with me and I told him that I was going in to the CCC camp and he said that was all right. I didn't get to come home much. I come home once with a guy from Mason City. I am not sure if he is alive or not, on a motorcycle and it was 30 below zero. You must have wanted to come home pretty bad. I guess so. *Laughter***

DNR: I am a motorcycle fan, what kind of motorcycle was it; we have to get it out? **It was a Harley.**

Oh was it. My Dad had an Indians. I have Honda's. Anyway.

DNR: So, you were at Caledonia, do you remember what year? **I believe it was 1934, I don't know for sure.**

Do you remember the time or month of the year? **I don't remember the dates. I use to have the papers, but when I went to the service, when I come home every thing I had was gone. My wife had left, and took my boy and I don't know what she done with my clothes or anything, I didn't have any clothes or anything.**

DNR: Was that the Second World War? **Yes.**

The guy I talked to on Wednesday, he came home and his wife was an alcoholic and he ended up divorcing her. **Yes, I did too.** And there were a lot of other effects too.

DNR: So you were at Caledonia and then you transferred to Decorah, do you remember why they transferred? **They transferred the whole crew. The whole crew went to Decorah because the job was done.**

So the whole camp moved then? **Yes, the whole camp moved and then we went to Decorah and we built dams, parks and bridges in the park and fish hatcheries. Mostly we were worked on fish hatcheries and recreation parks.**

DNR: Ok. Do you remember what you did in Caledonia? **Same thing. And I know that when we were in Decorah it was in the wintertime and we went back and forth in an old opened truck. We were out there all day and boy it was cold, really cold. Have you been up to Decorah? Yes. Well, I don't remember the name of the park anymore but it is on the west of Decorah.**

Is it on the west of Decorah? **Yes is it right along the Iowa River, the Upper Iowa River.**

DNR: You thought it was 1934 when you went in? **I am pretty sure it was 1934.**

DNR: Do you remember anything about your first days in camp, when you first arrived? **No, I don't. I don't remember anything about it. I know I was seventeen when I went in so I bet it was 1933. I think they provided all of the clothing.**

A lot of the men I talked to said they provide the work uniform and the dress uniform. **And we were in big bunkhouses. When we went to Caledonia we lived in tents because it was warmer weather but when we went to Decorah we were at the fair grounds and there were individual barracks and there were so many of us in a barracks. They gave us a number, but I don't remember what ones the numbers were anymore.**

DNR: Do you remember how many people were in the barracks? **Probably. (Tape is interrupted).**

DNR: It is interesting the Decorah and Caledonia connection. The camp was in McGregor came from Hokah. That is not very far from Caledonia actually and that was a summer camp there and they moved Hokah and then moved to McGregor in November. And they were in tents in Hokah and when they came down they had barracks, they called them winter quarters. **There was a bunch too at I believe La Crescent. I believe there was a camp at La Crescent I don't know for sure. But it seem to me there was.**

DNR: What types of personal items did you have when you arrived? **Not much my folks were awful poor. I don't remember, probably just my clothes. OK.**

DNR: Was there anything that they did not allow you to keep when you arrived? **No, I don't think so.**

DNR: Some of these questions may sound like the same; I just have to go down the list. **I was in Decorah with a guy from Charles City and I don't remember what his name was anymore. He came into camp after I was there.**

DNR: So you were in barracks buildings when you were in Decorah and tents when you were in Caledonia? **Yes.**

So, was there any method of how they assigned lodging or how you were assigned to the barracks? **No, I was just something like the service. You had to be in at a certain time. Your bunks needed to be put up and cleaned.**

DNR: Do you remember any thing specific about the tents? **No, I don't remember.**

DNR: Were they big wall tents. **No, they were smaller. The barracks were bigger. There were quite a few of us. We had to go to the mess hall to eat. We didn't eat in our tents and that was the same at Decorah, we went to a mess hall.**

DNR: Was the mess hall at Caledonia a tent or was it a building? **I don't remember, but in Decorah it was a building, the same as our barracks were.**

DNR: When you were in the barracks did you have cots to sleep on or did you sleep on the ground? **No we didn't sleep on the ground, we had cots at Caledonia. When we were in Decorah we had single beds.**

Ok. Were they stacked? **No, they were all in a line.**

DNR: Do you remember if the building had interior walls or was it just a shell? **It was just a shell. I can't even remember how we heated it. It must have been bottled gas because we didn't have any wood or anything. Ok.**
The wood where we made the parks and dams and stuff we had big barrels and we have fires in them. To keep warm during the day we would keep that barrel going red hot, and we would get so much time out of a day to go stand by it and get warm. When you working with a pick and shovel you could keep pretty warm anyway.

DNR: Do you know who supplied the bedding? **It was the Army that probably gave us the blankets. Yes we had Army blankets. I remember that. I suppose or I imagine all of that came from Fort Snelling because there was a camp at Fort Snelling in Minnesota, Minneapolis. I am pretty sure they provided the bedding and blankets and stuff. We had a laundry. It was so far back it was hard to remember.**

DNR: Was that in a separate building? **Yes.**

DNR: When you were in the barracks was there a cadre that stayed with you, group leaders? **No, they didn't have a special room.**

DNR: Were they CCC? **Yes.**

DNR: Military personal, did you know anything about them? **No, I don't.**

DNR: Can you remember your bunkmates? **I remember one guy from Reinbeck. I was going to tell you about this guy that went AWOL, they found him up around McGregor someplace and they brought him back. I can't remember his name but I do know some of his relation was from Reinbeck and he is a lawyer. I have asked about him, but no one seems to know him and I never have found where he was.**

DNR: Do you know what kind of punishment he was given for going AWOL? **No.**

DNR: Do you remember anything about the food in the mess hall? **The food was always good. The food in the mess hall was just as good as when we were in the service. It was clean and everything. We didn't get the same thing everyday. It was a good variety. A real good meal.**

DNR: Do you remember who did the cooking? **No, I don't, but I think they brought our lunches out to us or maybe we took them with us. We might have taken them out with us. Sack lunch. We had to be on the job by 8 o'clock in the morning and the truck had to have out there by 8 o'clock in the morning. Then they brought us in at 4, we were out there for 8 hours. Ok.**

DNR: Some of the men remember taking their lunches and others said they had a hot meal brought out to them. **I don't remember for sure, but I don't think we had hot lunches, but I think they brought us out our lunches or we took them with us. I remember we had fall weather gear. I really enjoyed it. It was really all right.**

DNR: Do you remember anything about the holiday meal since you had to stay a lot? **It was about the same for a holiday dinner. Turkey or chicken or something like that.**

DNR: Do you remember what day was payday? **I think it was the last day of the month. All they would give you was your five dollars and they sent the other money home to your parents. I don't know about the other guys if they went and got there**

money, but I only went home once when I was in there no twice. I went home on the train. I bummed home on the train one time from Calmar. Calmar was pretty close to Decorah. And we would catch a ride to Calmar and then we would ride the freight train and ride to Charles City.

DNR: Did you have to send the money home or did they take care of it? **I am pretty sure they took care of it, because I didn't get to see it.**

DNR: So what did you do with your five dollars then? **We would buy a hamburger once in a while or something like that. You would get liberty some time. I remember I had a toothache and had a cavity. And I got that fixed in Decorah. I don't remember if I paid him or not. Maybe I still owe him.**

DNR: Did they send you up to a private dentist? **Yes.**

Maybe they paid for it then. **They might have paid for it then.**

DNR: What days off did you have, how did you spend them? **We would go into town at Decorah and go to a show. That is about the only thing we ever done, went to the show. Ok.**

DNR: Did you have part of Saturday off? **Yes, we had part of Saturday off.**

Back out at the job site or at the job site? **Out at the job site.**

DNR: How was the Sabbath observed in camp? **Oh, I can't remember that far back.**

DNR: Do you remember any sports activities in camp? **Yes, we had baseball and softball. I think it was at Decorah that we had sports but at Caledonia it was getting cold weather before we went to Decorah and I don't think we were doing too much then.**

DNR: Do you remember how long you were in Caledonia before you went to Decorah? **Oh, I believe a pretty good share of six months.**

DNR: Do you remember if they had a camp team? **I don't remember that.**

DNR: Did you participate in any of the sport activities? **No. We just played when we wanted too. Just recreational? Yeah.**

DNR: Can you tell me about any personal conflicts you had? **No, I was pretty bashful back then. I had never been away from home.**

DNR: Do you remember any punishment that they gave to rule breakers? **No, I don't remember any of those.**

DNR: Did you have any educational or trade opportunities at camp there? **Yah, they had a woodcraft shop. I remember they had quite a good woodcraft shop.**

DNR: The work you did when you were at the CCC? **Well, we built dams and we had to chip lime rock out for dams with a pick and shovel and things like that.**

DNR: Did you work in the quarry then at times? **No, it was along the riverbanks.**

DNR: Did you just pick it out of the ground? **It seems some of them did work in the quarry and they hauled lime rock out to us. Seems like they hauled the lime rock out to us and then we had to lay them you know.**

DNR: You mean you were actually laying the stone for the dam? **Yes.**

DNR: Do you remember what those dams were on, were they little tributaries, or were they on the Upper Iowa? **Some of them were on the Upper Iowa and some of them were on the little drains and creeks down there.**

DNR: You said you worked out to the fish hatchery? **Yes, it seems like we built some fish hatcheries by Decorah. It wasn't at Caledonia, we built them in Decorah. It was on the west end of Decorah.**

DNR: What was your duty at the job site? **Oh, laying rock or picking or shoveling. Mixing the motor? Yes, mixing the motor.**

DNR: Did you have any specific duties around camp like firing the stove? **No, the only thing around camp was to keep the camp picked up and your bunks made up.**

DNR: Did you have a formal inspection? **Yes, it was usually on Saturday morning we policed the ground and had to clean up.**

DNR: And your own personal area? **Yes, we cleaned up around our camp.**

DNR: How about your own personal area? **Yes, we had to keep that up. We had to have a trunk. There was a guy in camp that made trunks and we bought them from him. I don't think he charged us very much. Maybe that is where the five dollars went for. I brought that truck home and I don't remember where it went.**

(Wife): Telling Wendall it was in his mother's attic when she passed on.

Wendall: Well, maybe that was probably it.

(Wife): He had a brother that died in the war and all of his belonging was in the attic along with Wendalls

Wendall: I bet that is what it was.

DNR: What type of skills did you receive when you were in camp? **I received no skills; I just behaved.**

DNR: Did you remember some of the people that you worked? Were there was some people that they hired locally? **I don't remember any local people that they hired. There were always two truckloads of men. Rain or shine you know and then they took us back at night.**

DNR: And there was anybody there at the job site when you arrive? **No, they would assign guys for bosses, group leaders. They were the ones that supervised the work and did what had to be done. We were going to drive up to Decorah and look at that park up there and we never did.**

DNR: I will probably have to go up and drive around. **I wonder what the name of that park is? I am not sure it is a city park. It had a campground down through there.**

DNR: I think we have gone through the list of questions. **Where are you from? I am from McGregor, Pikes Peak State Park. They really have fixed that up it is just beautiful.**

DNR: We had a CCC camp in McGregor about the time you were in there. The CCC act was signed in the spring of 32 so they were one of the first camps they went to Fort Des Moines to Maquoketa to McGregor and they came in to McGregor in November of 1932. **Oh, I think I went in, in 33 and 34 cause I could remember there was some guy that made silver rings and I bought one and I don't know what I paid him for it. Anyway, it had the year of 34 on it so I was probably at Caledonia and then went to Decorah. It was in the wintertime when I was in Decorah. It was probably 33 when I was in Caledonia and it was in 34 in Decorah. I remember fairly well the entire time. We were in Decorah is was pretty cold weather and then it got nice in the spring.**

DNR: Do you remember how you were transferred to Caledonia to Decorah? **By the train, I don't remember, could have been a truck. It was a long time ago and it is hard to remember that. We have been married 56 years. Well, congratulations, I am working on 34. A couple of months it will be 35. (Wife): We were married 4-6 of 46. I will be darned. A year before I was born. (Wife): You could have been our son. Wendall; I really don't remember too much about it anymore. Have you ran into anymore CCC boys around here that you can remember?**

DNR: I am just given a list and I just go down the list, I am not finding people so much as I am interviewing. They had an article in the paper asking for names of people in the CCC. **Yes, that is how I contacted you. There was an ad in the paper asking if you had ever been in the CCC to contact us. We were from Charles City and I drove truck up there for 30 some years and then we moved down here and went to work at Rath Packing. That was a big mistake I should have keep driving a truck. We know a DNR guy in Des Moines; Jim, he is on the road. He runs portable scales. He is out of Iowa City, a real nice guy. (Wife): He was on a ship on the Aleutian Islands in Japan.**

DNR: When you were in the Aleutian Islands were you there when the Japanese attacked? **Oh, Yah.** Nobody knows about that.

Wife in background: Old Tokyo Rose, every day she would come and say they sunk the Destroyer, they got the US Richmond, they sunk it. And they were still going strong.

We got caught in the Osh Kosh Sea they hemmed us in and when we came out we had the Destroyers and the Cruisers. We were dragging bottom all of the way out but we got out at 3 o'clock in the morning. I was up there going on two years.

END OF INTERVIEW