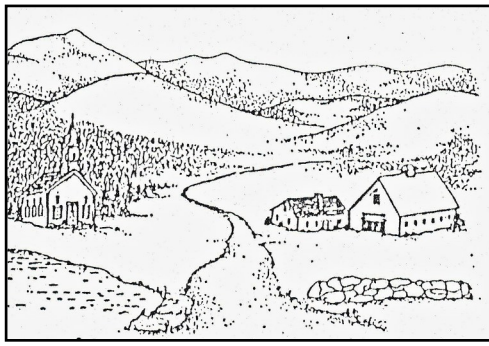
Issue 143 June 2025



Chatham Times
Past and Present

CCC Camps in Stow & Chatham

By Jeanne Eastman

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins, planned programs to bring our country out of the Great Depression. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was one of their programs, and it quickly passed in Congress. An article in The Bridgton News (12/14/1934) stated, "Most important of all, however, in the work of these camps is the removal of thousands of discouraged youths from the streets of the larger cities back into the woods where they learn to find themselves and eventually they go back into civilization with their chests thrown out and their shoulder back, ready to grab the world by the tail and hang on."

Cold River CCC, 1933

By May 1933, 200 men enrolled in the CCC, 152nd Company, arrived in Stow, Maine, at the camp that had just been set up for them at the base of Evans Notch. They stayed in tents until the barracks were ready in the fall.

One enrollee at Cold River, William Miles, remembered, "The first night we was in camp I'll never forget. There was five or six of us thought we'd go to a dance. We asked the supervisor where the nearest dance was. "Well, down to Stow." "How far is it down the road?" "Oh, about two miles and then some." We didn't know where the hell we was goin'. Well, there was only one road there anyway so we all got together and started out. They were all dirt roads in that day. We got into Chatham, stopped at a farmhouse to get a drink of water. We asked 'em how far it was to the dance down in Stow, the schoolhouse down in Stow. 'Oh, a couple of miles down the road.' (chuckle) We kept on walkin'. We couldn't believe it, nine miles to the dance, nine miles back. The next morning, Sunday, at daylight we was walkin' down the road towards camp. Our feet were so sore! We had dress shoes on. We had the sorest feet you ever seen in your life by the time we got back. Oh, we had a good time but, *#%@*, that walkin' back. You couldn't get a ride, there was no automobiles on the road."

Though the men were not being trained for military duties, the Army was in charge of the camp (feeding, housing, and administration), while the US Forest Service supervised the work projects. Enrollee Thomas Oates recalled, "Some army officers charged with the operation of the camps believed the situation was a military one and demanded action in a military manner. An officer at Cold River Camp was tossed into Cold River one dark night because he was too strict with his methods. The perpetrators were never caught."

The 152nd company's work included fighting blister rust in pine trees, timber survey, fire suppression, construction of 66 miles of hiking trails and shelters at South Baldface and Province Pond, construction and maintenance of telephone lines, renovating the Cold River Ranger Station at the old Brickett house, creating the Cold River Forest Campground and a lookout tower on Speckled Mountain, and, by far the most impressive project, building the southern end of the Evans Notch Road, which required 30 tons of

continued on page 4

Notes from the President

Our museum room is looking wonderful. Margery Eastman and Gail Calomb have made displays of our photos and paintings on our new walls. Bev Aiman has sewed curtains for the windows. The display case from the old Pepin's store is showing off trail maps and photos. We hope you'll stop in to enjoy it all some Tuesday morning or during one of our events this summer.

Our chili sales on Maple Weekend were successful. Thanks to Sheryl Emery for chairing the operation, and to all who made pots of chili, cornbread, and desserts.

Our May 3 program on Hillside Farms, with Peter Benson, was very interesting and educational. Our next newsletter will summarize his descriptions of how these farms evolved.

We just held our Annual Membership Meeting, preceded by a potluck supper and followed with a lesson on slide rules. It's hard to believe this tool was invented in 1680 and was the computer technology that got people to the moon and back! Thank you, Jim Calomb, for the lesson. It seems there is no going back now that we have modern, fast, and accurate calculators.

We have a busy summer planned, with programs and fund raisers. If you'd like to join in with our volunteers, please just let it be known! We'd love to have you and will find projects that suit your skills and interests.

We have several items that have been donated for our September raffle drawing. See the enclosed sheet with the tickets. You can see the items on our website or at any of our summer events. Would you like to purchase a few tickets for a family member, a neighbor, or yourself?

We'd also like to hear your ideas for newsletters, programs, and exhibits.
May your summer be fruitful and include time enjoying Chatham!

Jeanne Eastman

Contact Us

1061 Main Road; Chatham, NH 03813
chathamnhhistoricalsociety@gmail.com
www.chathamhistoricalnh.org

Board Meetings

April – October, 3rd Tuesday, 6:30 PM

Open Hours

Tuesdays 9 – Noon
We look forward to seeing you!

Board of Directors

President, Jeanne Eastman
Vice President, Sheryl Emery
Treasurer, Beverly Aiman
Secretary, Maria Palmisano
Directors, Steve Eastman
Gail Calomb
Alan Eastman
Paul Loscocco
Curator: Margery Eastman

The Peddler's Peck

A bundle of news from the neighbors over the years

The Oxford Democrat, Dec. 14, 1881 (as published in Cold River Chronicles by David Crouse): ...It is now about seventy years since they made the first settlement, forty of which the citizens of Chatham had no road by which they could get to their Capitol or to their courts without travelling down through Fryeburg, a long roundabout way and out of the State, and the reason was they could have no road to the westward, being hemming in by their mountain fastnesses. They now have united with the town of Stow to petition the County Commissioners for the third time to locate them a road through Evan's Notch, so called, to the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad, in Gilead, the whistle from which is heard by many of the petitioners at their homes....

Portland Sunday Telegram Sept. 22, 1935: Since the first settlement the valley has been accessible only from the south… not many people found their way to its secluded spots. With the building of the new highway through Evans Notch … these conditions are changing. The road lacks about a mile to be completed, but already sightseers are motoring to the valley… A few have ventured through to Gilead though this is frowned upon by the road builders.

Corinne Waite: My father, Robert Thornton Waite (1901-1992) remembered hiking through Evans Notch before the road was built. It was probably in 1930 when the AMC's August Camp was in the area around Hastings on the north side of the Notch, and he was one of the hike leaders. He said he hated to see a road built in an unspoiled area, but he was pleased with the result – that is, it wasn't a major highway like that through Franconia.

David Crouse: I don't remember that my father told many stories of his time in the CCC (at the Wild River Camp). However, I do remember one. He served with a man from Cherryfield, Maine, who would often show others how to do something, saying "THAT's the way we do down in Cha-ray-field!" So whenever my father showed me how to do something, he would parrot what that man said!

Millard Chandler, in his 1935 diary: October 13, Anna and I went up thru Evans Notch and up to Dixfield Notch. Very beautiful scenery all the time, but the best of all was up to the top of Evans Notch looking toward the Cold River Valley.

Conway Daily Sun, 3-20-2025: A varied thrush, a bird native to the Pacific Northwest, has been frequenting a bird feeder in… Stow, Maine.

Donations

Thank you for your generous support!

Greg Thurston: family scrap book, Eastman Family genealogy book; **Carl Perry:** photo of Perry house; **George Perry:** photos of Claire and Herbert Perry; **Steve Eastman:** portraits of Ithiel and Carolin (Eastman) Clay; **Elaine Caltabiano-Schneider:** three wooden chairs for children.

Monetary donations: **Gene Chandler, Eric King, Dale Temm** (in memory of Richard Eastman, Sam Nesbitt, and Jim Harris), **Dianne Beaton** (in memory of Doug Beaton), **Linda & David MacLeod** (in memory of Sam Nesbitt). We so appreciate all donations!

If we have left anyone out, please let us know so you can be properly thanked.

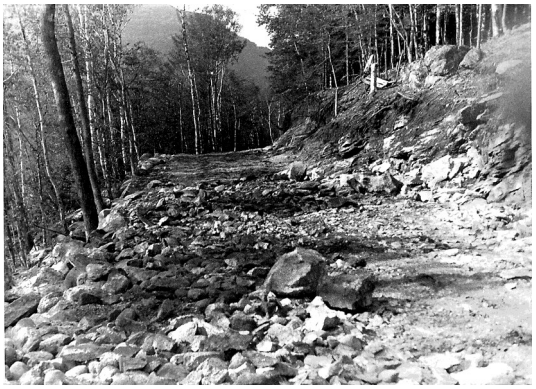
"CCC Camps in Stow & Chatham," continued from page 1

dynamite and much hand work with pick ax and shovel. The 156th Company at Wild River Camp in Gilead built the north part of the Road.

William Miles said in an interview years later, "They cut right into the side of the mountain pick and shovel, pick and shovel most of the time. When we first started up there, we didn't have any air tools or anything like that. We used to drill our holes for dynamite by hand. I used to swing a hammer and the other guy had tongs. He held the star drill, turned it back and forth. (We) used to have these big sledge hammers and belt them. We worked!"

Evans Notch Road, 1933

Arthur McGuire recalled, "At first I was a regular laborer, pick and shovel. Then they asked me if I'd go and help the dynamitin' man. After four o'clock we used to go over and do the blasting. (They drilled hole) during the day and then at nighttime this man and I went (and blasted). The majority (of my job) was carrying in the darn things. I wasn't an expert on (dynamiting). I'd go down the road a ways to see that nobody was there in danger."



Evans Notch Road, 1933

Thomas Oates remembered this event: "The dynamiting was done during the dinner hour when no one was around: two men, one man ran the jack hammer and another man set the dynamite. Well, on this particular day when we come back there'd been an accident. There was a dynamite hole that hadn't been wired. They missed it somewhere in the blast. They had run the air drill into a stick of dynamite. When the dynamite went off, it blew the drill rod and jack hammer up in the air and tore him all apart."

The Berlin Reporter published the following report on 11/21/1935:

New Evans Notch Road Opens Indian Paradise

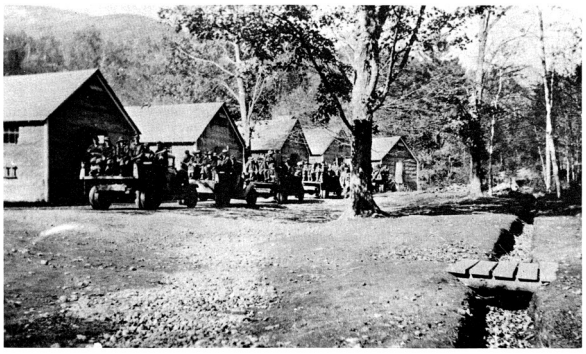
… our group of rainy day trampers turned into the broad new highway at the foot of Evans Notch in an appreciative mood. Setting forth up the smooth gravelled road, it was hard to think back to a similar morning three years before when a few of us had clambered amongst the hundreds of recently cut tree stumps marking the first preparation for a forest road… Along the course of the roadway, the blows of axes could be heard in the woods to right and left, where members of the local camps of the CCC were eliminating dead or injured trees, and otherwise improving the appearance and safety of the forest nearest the road. Here and there where the road had been levelled by the cutting down of an unnecessary rise, other boys were at work smoothing the surface of the gravelly bank and spreading thereon enough good forest loam to make it possible for grass and shrubbery to gain a foothold there and hide the damage recently done… Further on we were even more interested to find that the process of widening the first rough road, and blasting away inconvenient ledge was still going forward. Some boys were drilling with rattling compressed-air drills, others were at work with crow bars and picks, while still others employed a caterpilar (sic) tractor and drag to haul away the debris… Mr. Paul Bedard, Research Assistant with the Canadian Pulp and Paper Company, stated that the CCC workers of the Cold River Camp turned out work the equal of that done by any group of older and more experienced men he had ever handled.

continued on page 5

"CCC Camps in Stow & Chatham," continued from page 4

Each young man, between the ages of 18 and 25, received $30 per month. Of this, $25 was sent home to their families, and the remainder they could use for an occasional trip to town to a movie and a soda, or for other occasions around the camp (cigarettes at the camp store, a fee to the one who had to empty the "thunder bucket" in winter, etc.). Millard Chandler sold 50 cents worth of gas to many of the "boys." They ate better here than they had been eating at home. Along with all their labor, the educational, physical, and religious needs of the enrollees were met. They learned to live and work together. In the evening there were guest speakers on topics such as "Sailing the Seven Seas," "The Human Side of War," and "Missionary Work in Korea." . Their educational programs included auto mechanics, surveying, American history, accounting, and business law. There were hobby groups: carpentry, orchestra, dramatics, news writing. Some men published a camp newsletter, "The Cold River Ripple." The library was "the busiest spot in camp," with 200 volumes donated by local people and exchanged with other camps.

Cold River Camp also had baseball and basketball teams. An enrollee reporter wrote in 1936, "The Cold River basketball team travelled to Old Orchard, Saturday, January 26th to play the Old Orchard Boys' Club. The trip was very cold (they rode in the back of the camp truck) and the men did not get warmed up until the middle of the game, but victory was the reward for the troubles they had had, winning 36-31." Boxing, volley ball, and ping pong were also popular. There were also weekly "sings," with Keat Chandler (our local school teacher) sometimes playing piano.



152nd Co., Cold River C.C.C. Camp, crew leaving for work on the Evans Notch Road, 1934.

Cold River CCC, 1934

"August 22, 1934 was a day of unusual importance for the officers, department heads and boys of the Wild River And Cold River CCC camps. During the afternoon the two ends of the road through Evans Notch were connected, roughly to be sure, but a seven year old half-ton pick-up truck.....made the first trip through. The truck christened long years ago 'Oscar' has seen hard service and might be deemed fit for the junk pile by some less loyal crews, but not so in this case....."

Half of the men stayed in camp for Christmas 1935 (They had New Year's week off, when the other half returned). Guests for Christmas dinner and entertainment included Miss Pauline Pendexter and Dorothy Harmon. "Miss Harmon and Richard Reynolds, an office worker in the camp, sang duets and a most enjoyable afternoon was spent." (Dorothy Harmon and Richard Reynolds were later married.)

The April 1936 editions of the Cold River Ripple included these words sung to the tune of "Red River Valley:" "This valley they say we are leaving; We are bidding this old camp adieu. When I think of the good times we've had here, I hope that the rumor's not true." But it was; on May 22 the Cold River Camp closed and moved to Chatham Center near Langdon Brook, where their main project was to build a road from Chatham Center over the hills to Jackson. This project was never completed and the camp closed April 30, 1937.

After the Great Hurricane in September 1938, the Chatham Center camp was opened again for Co. 160 which had been at Moosehead Camp in Greenville. Their duty was hurricane emergency. For the next year they restored parts of the National Forest, and cleared and repaired 21 miles of roads so that valuable timber could be salvaged. The men also helped fight forest fires. This camp closed October 6, 1939.

Sources: Builder of Men, by David D. Draves; Corps of Granite, by Robert W. Averill and Kris Pastoriza; In the Public Interest, by Jon Schlenker; a collection of articles from the "North Conway Reporter," compiled by David Crouse; other articles on the CCC camps from the CHS archives.

Remembering a Veteran

condensed from a complete record written by Barbara Sperling

Benjamin George Sperling was recruited into the Navy on October 28,1967 at the age of 18. He went to NTC Great Lakes, Illinois for his recruit training. He served foreign and sea duty as a US Navy Airedale AMH3 with VC-4 and HC-4. He also took part in numerous land and sea searches and rescues with HC-4 while on ship, at various military bases.

Benjamin George Sperling

George was very keen on the aerial aspect of the military and learned everything he could about the aircraft and helicopters. He received his F8 Plane Captain Ground Support and loved working with his crew on the jets/helicopters. His performance Evaluations through the years were similar no matter who wrote them; "Sperling is a very capable plane Captain, efficient worker needs no supervision. Meticulous and takes the time and care to do the job right the first time. Military behavior is excellent, efficient worker, completes all jobs with precision and gets along exceptionally well with his squadron mates. Should consider a leadership role."

George received his flying status involving operational or training flights in Feb. 1969 and was appointed to the rate of Aviation Structural Mechanic (hydraulics, airframes, and related systems), Third Class. He was with Fleet Compron Squadron Four (specialized squadrons known as the Dragon Flyers in the Navy that train and prepare carrier air wings for deployment). He also worked with Flecompron Eight, VC-4 (Lant Shore) and Helicopter Combat Support Squadron4 in numerous locations.

George and his squadron received a commendation for receipt of the Chief of Naval Operations Aviation Safety Award for Fiscal year 1970. No accidents or flight incidents for a whole year is a big thing in the military. It makes the difference between life and death. While serving his country George did have several "incidents," close calls, involving pilot error, that he was fortunate to survive.

George was always proudest of the rescues, whether at sea or on the ground. Helping others was always his greatest joy in life. One that meant a great deal to him was not a military event, although it happened during his military service. Stationed at the Naval base in Lakehurst, NJ, they were contacted and called in to help with locating a lost little boy in the Pine Barrens of NJ, an immense area to cover and typically once you went in and got lost you might not come back out. From above they scoured the Barrens for hours until finally, George, hanging out the side of the copter, spotted the boy. They lowered him down; he had to detach to get to the boy, carry him back and hook them both in to be raised back up. He said he would never forget how afraid and weak the little fella was, but so happy to have found him and brought him home.

Unfortunately, it wasn't long after George was out of the Navy that he started having grand mal seizures from a tumor that grew on the optic nerve (attributed to the injuries in the Navy), which was removed in 1971 at the VA Hospital in the Bronx, NY. It left him with loss of sight, skull loss, some memory loss, some difficulty with reading, and he still had grand mal seizures which is typical. They gave him a 15-year life expectancy, he had a lot going against him; but of course George broke those odds again and lived another 34 years. We moved to our cottage in Chatham in 1976. George got to see our daughter marry the love of her life, and then two beautiful granddaughters. He always considered himself a very lucky man.

•••

My Father's Courage

by Shellie Sperling, age 12 from the Pequawket Valley News, April 5, 1989

My dad is a very caring person and he means a lot to me. He has been through a lot and saved many lives! He always thinks of other people before he thinks of himself. A lot of people may think courage comes from physical actions but to me it also comes from inside of a person. My father was in the Navy and he served many physical actions of courage. He saved many lives because he was on the rescue squadron. His strong will and love for his family have seen him through the hard times. His strong spirit has guided him through a brain surgery and terminal illness.

He has gone through a lot emotionally and physically and when I saw the chance, I knew he would be very happy to have a song dedicated to his courage and strong will to live! When I think of proud experiences, I think of my dad. (Shellie put this piece to music and won Music category.)

In Memory

Our deepest sympathy to the families of these loved ones:

Alvin Emerson, 81; passed away February 10. Stow. Alvin joined the US Army after high school and was stationed in Germany during the Vietnam War. He worked as a long distance truck driver, and loved spending time with his family and working around the house.

David Crouse, 85; passed away March 9. Bangor, ME. David grew up in Stow and from an early age was interested in the area history. He served in the US Army, and then served on the City of Bangor Planning Department. He was then self-employed, doing furniture restoration. David has written several books on local history, wrote 98 issues of the Cold River Chronicle newsletter, maintained a Facebook page on local history, and was always available to answer any questions on local history. He was an honorary member of Chatham Historical Society.

Sheryl Thompson Carrier, 79; passes away April 25. Stow. Sheryl was instrumental in the family business, G.B. Carrier Corp., drywall and painting. She was president of the N. Conway Community Center Board, a member of Eastern Star, a Cub Scout Den Leader, and supporter of the many activities in which her children and grandchildren participated.

Christopher Perry, 32; passed away May 12. Durham, NC. Chris grew up in Chatham, the son of Bill and Sue Perry. At Fryeburg Academy, he played football, basketball, baseball, and track, and participated in Odyssey of the Mind. He was working for New Bank as a software engineer.

Upcoming Events

June 21, 7 PM – "Wit and Wisdom: The Forgotten Literary Life of New England Villages," with Jo Radner. Based on her research on lyceums, 19th century community events to improve the mind.
July 25 (Friday 4-6 PM), 26 (Saturday 9-2), 29 (Tuesday 9-Noon) – Local Art and Artists Art Show at our schoolhouse. Let us know if you have pieces you'd be willing to lend us for the exhibit.
July 26, 9-2 PM – Artisans Fair at our schoolhouse. Art & crafts for sale. $10 fee for artisans to set up a booth to sell their items. Contact us if you'd like to participate.
August 10, 10-2 PM – We will be selling chili, muffins, books, and t shirts at the Summer Bazaar across from Fryeburg Fair Main Entrance.
August 16, 6 PM Ice Cream Social and Jim Wilfong telling the story of David Crouse.
September 6, 1 PM – Town Picnic on our Schoolhouse lawn.
September 14, 2 PM – Molly Ockett, told by Bunny McBride, presented in Fryeburg.
October 11, 1 PM – Stories of the People in the South Chatham Cemetery, at the cemetery.

Chatham Historical Society
1061 Main Road
Chatham, NH 03813

Dues and Donations

Chatham Historical Society is a non-profit 501(C)3 Charitable Organization
1061 Main Road, Chatham, NH 03813

Name: _____

Address: _____

Winter Address: _____

Email: _____

☐ I'd like to pay my membership dues: ☐ $10/year ☐ $100/lifetime

☐ I'd like to make a donation: $_____ ☐ General

☐ Building Fund

☐ Award Fund for HS Seniors

☐ $150 Paver with Veteran's Name

☐ Purchases, Raffle Tickets, etc. $_____Description_____

Total Enclosed: $ _____

☐ I'd like to be contacted for more information.