

# Rabideau CCC Camp: *Yesterday and Today*

By Amy Acheson

Born in the Depression Era under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal," the Rabideau Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Camp in northern Minnesota garners national importance today, thanks to hard working preservationists through the years.

During the 1930s, the federal CCC program, run jointly by the U. S. Army and U.S. Forest Service, brought civilian laborers across the nation welcome reprieve in tough economic times through hands on work opportunities and training. An estimated 2.5 million men participated in the program throughout the United States.

Rabideau CCC Camp, located in the Chippewa National Forest just south of Blackduck, Minnesota, was one of around 200 CCC camps operating in the State during the time. A wide variety of work was completed at the camp. Bill Yourd, current Heritage Program Manager of the Chippewa National Forest, comments, "They created recreation areas, built roads, strung telephone wires, surveyed lakes, provided fire protection, and planted trees—they did a huge amount of work on the Chippewa National Forest and planted thousands and thousands of acres of restored forest."

The success of FDR's mammoth "tree army" effort continues to be forthcoming of those ideals etched from the past as Rabideau offers conservation work and educational opportunities to the youth today. The camps became symbolic of a time when people worked together for the betterment of our land and its people. "They are a tangible reminder of one of the great conservation programs in the history of the United States," quoted former Preservation Alliance of Minnesota Board President Rolf Anderson in

"As part of additional research conducted for the National Historic Landmark nomination to identify and assess all surviving CCC Camps in the United States, it was determined that Rabideau CCC Camp in Minnesota remains the best preserved camp in the United States."

—Rolf Anderson

*Preservation Matters* during the early 1990s. Anderson was highly involved with the formation of a cooperative partnership to restore Rabideau.

Touted as the "best preserved" CCC camp in the United States, Rabideau was upheld by a unique set of circumstances and volunteer efforts in addition to PAM's advocacy that made it possible to reach the status of being listed on the National Register of Historic Places (1976) and designated as a National Historic Landmark (2006). After World War II began, the camps were left as attention was given to the war at hand. Anderson quotes, "The camp buildings were considered temporary structures and nearly all were razed or dismantled when a camp closed. The fact that the Rabideau camp has survived is very unusual and the site can be considered an extremely scarce historic resource."

One of the reasons Rabideau stayed fairly intact was because the University of Illinois Forestry and Engineering Departments ran its summer program at the Camp during the years of 1946–1972. Basic maintenance was issued. After time, the camp was in need of more attention. It wasn't until the 1990s that federal funding became available to oversee rehabilitation of the buildings, including the barracks, a mess hall, education buildings, and office headquarters. The Preservation Alliance of Minnesota initiated that action.

Recently, federal stimulus money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 was awarded to Rabideau in the amount of \$1.5 million dollars for the Chippewa National Forest to rehabilitate the Camp with direction to use historic standards to ensure the historic integrity put forth by the State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service. This important work is being completed at the time of this publication's issue.

Today Rabideau continues to flourish due to the collaboration of numerous organizations and community volunteers. Visitors to the historic Camp can enjoy interpretive areas, picnicking, a scenic drive and day hikes. "Over time, Chippewa National Forest has truly invested in Rabideau, both in the facilities and the historical context," said Recreation Program Manager Ann Long Voelkner. "Those ideals of education, job skills, contributing to the economy and young people's lives are the same ideals the Chippewa Forest Service has looked into to bring Camp Rabideau into the future."

Sources: *Preservation Matters*. Sept. '91 and Oct. '93, USDA Forest Service, Chippewa National Forest; Rabideau CCC Camp Nomination Statement.



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