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Cover: *Kenilworth Castle Ruins, England: Great Arched Passage leading to the Great Hall (Photographs by Rumiko Handa). (See p. 33)*

Articles

- 1 The Challenge of Preserving Public Memory: Commemorating Tomochichi in Savannah
ROBIN B. WILLIAMS
- 17 Domesticating the “National Optic” after the Third Reich: Preservation and Morale Building in Postwar West Germany
KAREN L. MULDER
- 29 Sir Walter Scott and Kenilworth Castle: Ruins Restored by Historical Imagination
RUMIKO HANDA
- 45 Bernd Foerster: Architect, Educator, and Preservation Activist
HUGH C. MILLER
- 59 Sustainability in the Adaptive Reuse Studio: A Case Study in Cincinnati’s Over-the-Rhine Historic District
JEFFREY T. TILMAN
- 75 Learning Among Friends: Using Heritage-Based Educational Practices to Improve Preservation Law Pedagogy
BARRY STIEFEL and GILBERT STIEFEL
- 87 The Young Preservationist: Findings from the First Undergraduate Historic Preservation Education Symposium
ANDRÉA LIVI SMITH

Special Report

- 97 Lessons in the Woods: Examining the Landscape Legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps in the Allegheny National Forest
ANN KOMARA

Book and Film Reviews

- 105 Chad Freidrichs (director). *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* (Film Review)
AMY D. FINSTEIN
- 106 Jeffrey M. Chusid. *Saving Wright: The Freeman House and the Preservation of Meaning, Materials and Modernity*
JANE KING HESSON
- 108 Dan Austin and Sean Doerr. *Lost Detroit: Stories Behind the Motor City’s Majestic Ruins*
John Gallagher. *Reimagining Detroit: Opportunities for Redefining an American City*
Andrew Moore. *Detroit Disassembled*
MICHAEL MCCULLOCH
- 111 Abstracts, *Preservation Education & Research*, Volume Five 2012
- 115 *Preservation Education & Research*, Information for Contributors & Readers

Lessons in the Woods: Examining the Landscape Legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps in the Allegheny National Forest

ANN KOMARA

ARRIVING

Turning east off Pennsylvania Rt. 66 traversing the Allegheny National Forest (ANF), the small convoy of cars carrying ten University of Colorado Denver landscape architecture students and one professor descended on a dirt road into the valley. They drove past a few homes, the Marienville Sportsman's Club, the turnoff to the fishery on Spring Creek, the local sweetwater spring, and finally, near the hamlet of Duhring at the bottom of the hill, they took the turn across the covered bridge onto the site – Civilian Conservation Core (CCC) Camp ANF-1, also known as Camp Landers. For two weeks at the end of June 2008, the team unearthed the secrets and tales of this rich cultural landscape, met and interviewed local community members and constituents, and prepared materials for a cultural landscape documentation, a preliminary master plan, and a Determination of Eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. This field report offers insights into how this process was approached and what was learned along the way.¹

Prior to heading to Pennsylvania from Denver, the summer design studio group spent two-and-one-half weeks gathering base information, preparing for the site visit, and formulating the “lines of inquiry”: Why was this Civilian Conservation Corps camp, commissioned in 1933 and one of the very first operating in the nation, placed *here* in the ANF? What degree of integrity is evident at the site and in what condition? What do we stand to learn about the New Deal era through this site and its context? What does this site's history offer for understanding the larger cultural landscape of northwestern Pennsylvania?

Does visual evidence exist showing how the CCC enrollees and their work affected this landscape? How can we tell this story, and what will be needed to do this?

TACTICS

To get at these questions and deliverables, the studio team developed strategies to accomplish the necessary work in our short time in the field. First, the graduate students took stock of known individual strengths and interests as they pertained to the work at hand (Fig. 1). For instance, one student had a background in archaeology, another had experience surveying with traditional and total station equipment, one had a proven knack for eliciting oral histories and another for archival research, another was a talented draftsman and sketcher, and another an excellent photographer. Each student brought some talent and capacity to the team; the goal was for each “expert” to coach the others in learning new aspects of the site work. All were expected to add new skills to their repertoire (Fig. 2). Second, we operated like an office, with daily team meetings, a critical path to identify and manage the tasks and highlight accomplishments, and ongoing contact with our constituents and the site owners.

Our research began with an aerial photograph of the camp and some basic facts about its period of operation from 1933 to 1946 (Fig. 3). ANF-1 has been held privately since being decommissioned in 1947. The owner shared site records and gave us free range over the property, including a dedicated space in the original CCC Recreation Building that



Fig. 1. The University of Colorado Denver graduate landscape architecture studio participants on site at ANF-1 CCC camp, June 2008. Front row, left to right: Sandy Low, Fanny Lee, Ann Komara, Szu-Min Yang, Susan Martino. Back row, left to right: Shelby Scharen, Brian Stuhr, Carter Marshall, Maureen Cameron, Doug Futz, Jenn Thomas (Photograph by Jenn Thomas).



Fig. 2. Some of the University of Colorado students working the transit to survey the structures and features at the CCC ANF-1 site. Every student was required to take a turn on the transit and learn how to operate it; the students were also taught how to record the survey data (Photograph by field team).



Fig. 3. Aerial view, c. 1938, Civilian Conservation Corps Camp ANF-1, near Duhring, Pennsylvania. The Recreation Building is the rectangular structure near the center of the complex, seen here just above the pond. The Mess Hall is diagonally angled off to the right projecting toward the creek from the parallel rows of dorms. The vehicular bridge across Spring Creek is visible near the upper left of the image (Photograph courtesy of the estate of Malcolm Reed).

served as our tactical base. Their openness to our presence gave us the opportunity to work long days and added an unexpected depth to our appreciation and understanding of the site. The ambiance and “feel of the place” – the early morning mist, mid-day mugginess, evening bullfrogs and lightning bugs – became part of our site knowledge.

PARTNERSHIPS

Another essential aspect of the fieldwork involved partnerships and connections with local experts who offered information or skills and with community members who knew of the site’s history. Some of these contacts were prearranged in support of

the educational goals; months prior to the start of the studio, the professor had established key contacts with the site owner and the Allegheny National Forest local ranger station in Marienville, particularly with ANF interpretive archeologist Amanda Glaz. She and her colleagues contributed information on the twelve other CCC campsites in the ANF, now known only through photographs, traces, and stories. Ms. Glaz led a field trip to several of these sites (Fig. 4). Teams from the ANF ranger station visited the site several times. They provided field equipment for our use, such as a tree core device, and they taught us how to use it. By analyzing the tree cores we were able to ascertain plantings from the period of significance, notably rows of pine trees dating from the CCC

days. On another visit they provided GPS location data; this allowed them to supervise the students' placement of two permanent survey markers on the site, thus linking our site coordinates into the USFS database.

Other specialists included local political figure and historian Eric Patton, whose lecture highlighted a century of local forestry activities and industries, including rampant clear-cutting for timber and tanbark used in local tanneries, for wood alcohol, and for charcoal. Michael Schultz, a CCC historian with extensive information about the area, led a tour of Loleta Recreation Area and Clear Creek State Park, where the students could see firsthand some projects built by the CCC enrollees.² He was unstinting in sharing his knowledge and provided valuable connections to CCC enrollees and local resources.

About a week into our work, Professor Isabelle Champlin brought her summer archaeology field class from the University of Pittsburgh Bradford to join us on site. She is recognized as an expert on the local CCC-era sites, and this was a special opportunity for her to do reconnaissance at ANF-1. Her group worked with us in an area north of the Mess Hall; we used our site information and "field guessing" to locate the post holes for two missing barracks, which we then outlined with stakes and

bright survey tape. The outlines made visible the original layout and helped us to figure out the location of brick sidewalks that led to doorways (Fig. 5). The archaeologists showed us how to lift years of built up sod to reveal these brick walks, which we then documented and re-covered. They also taught us how to tag and label finds. Significant artifacts included a CCC fire hose found beneath one of the barracks, some U.S. Quartermaster CCC plates recovered from a toss spot in the creek, and exterior light fixtures and original furnishings found at various buildings.

As our fieldwork progressed, the community became aware of our presence and work. Excitement grew; in fact, it snowballed! People contacted us or the ANF or the owner to offer their stories and to come see "what was going on down here." This led to oral histories and tips for archives or contacts with people who might have photographs or news clippings. We also gave public presentations, ranging from a formal "briefing" to the Forest County commissioners to a site tour and presentation to inner-city high school students participating in an ANF expeditionary learning summer camp. This public interface confirmed the value of the AmeriCorps hours the students were earning through this studio.³



Fig. 4. Amanda Glaz, interpretive archaeologist with the USDA Forest Service, Allegheny National Forest Marienville Branch, led a field trip for our group to visit some other Civilian Conservation Corps sites. Unlike ANF-1, this site is typical of the other camps in the ANF, where little remains to show it was once a thriving CCC camp (Photograph by field team).



Fig. 5. One excavation done in partnership with the field studies unit from the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford revealed brick sidewalks laid with a variety of locally made brick, many clearly imprinted with the manufacturer's name (Photograph by field team).

DISCOVERIES AND DELIVERABLES

The two weeks flew past, with each day bringing new discoveries and confirmations. The students' range and skills at reading a site increased exponentially as they became more aware of the history and began to connect facts to the site. Nuances like small rises and dips in terrain became "fact" for pipelines, and a low spot within reach of the kitchen revealed a trash midden. Connections into the larger landscape grew clear. For instance, the village of Duhring held not only the General Store where the enrollees picked up mail, but also the residence of one of the camp's commanders, Captain Reed, whose photographs provided glimpses of life in the camp and town.⁴ The current owner kept archives and materials in the General Store and shared these with the students.

We also began to examine the landscape surrounding the site. The road the enrollees built to get trucks into the camp – a critical element in their charge to serve as firefighters for this area – was found largely intact on its original route, including the creek crossing. We found a trail up the hill across the stream from camp; oral history confirmed it was the daily route of the Corps bugler. We could almost *hear* reveille and taps and thought how this might add to a visitor's experience of the site. Another amazing discovery was the "munitions cache" where the men stored blasting supplies like dynamite. This natural cave, to which the men had added a secure door, was sufficiently distant from the camp to avoid damage if it caught fire. Couldn't it be part of a walking tour narrative? We grew more excited. Perhaps our most revealing moment came when, walking the woods, we noticed even rows of mature evergreens – the first of such planted nationally by the CCC, a tangible presence of New Deal conservation efforts (Fig. 6).

Our time at ANF-1 led to the production of documents in our last weeks of the studio back in Denver. Students designed and published the information as a booklet, with the layout resembling a CCC Camp Yearbook. This allowed the team to consolidate all facets of our work. The document presented a detailed history of the site from the nineteenth century to the period of significance and



Fig. 6. A red pine plantation done by CCC ANF-1 in the early 1930s is seen as rows of trees in this aerial photo taken in 2008. Fieldwork verified the planting, which is currently threatened with removal, as the stand is mature, and ANF management practices require clearing for new growth (Photograph courtesy Allegheny National Forest Marienville Ranger Station).

its recent history. While it emphasized facts and figures about the CCC in the area and nationally, it also addressed the extended period of significance, which included five years when the site was a WWII prisoner-of-war camp for German soldiers. Sections of the document addressed each building on the site, such as seen in Fig. 7. Ink-on-mylar measured drawings of the site plan showed extant and no longer preserved buildings. A separate binder contained Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS) Level 1 photographs (large-format black-and-white negatives and prints), as well as additional field photos in color. Preliminary condition reports for the extant buildings led to assessment of integrity and a matrix for actions needed to deal with the site's features and landscape, along with recommendations for future uses and degrees of preservation, restoration, or adaptive reuse. We were careful not only to celebrate the history of the site but also to acknowledge its current use as a riding camp and the economic balance needed for the owner to manage change on the site.

At the end of the summer session, the students presented the HALS documentation and preliminary development and interpretive master plan to a group of Denver preservation specialists. Copies of the studio's sixty-page color booklet documenting our

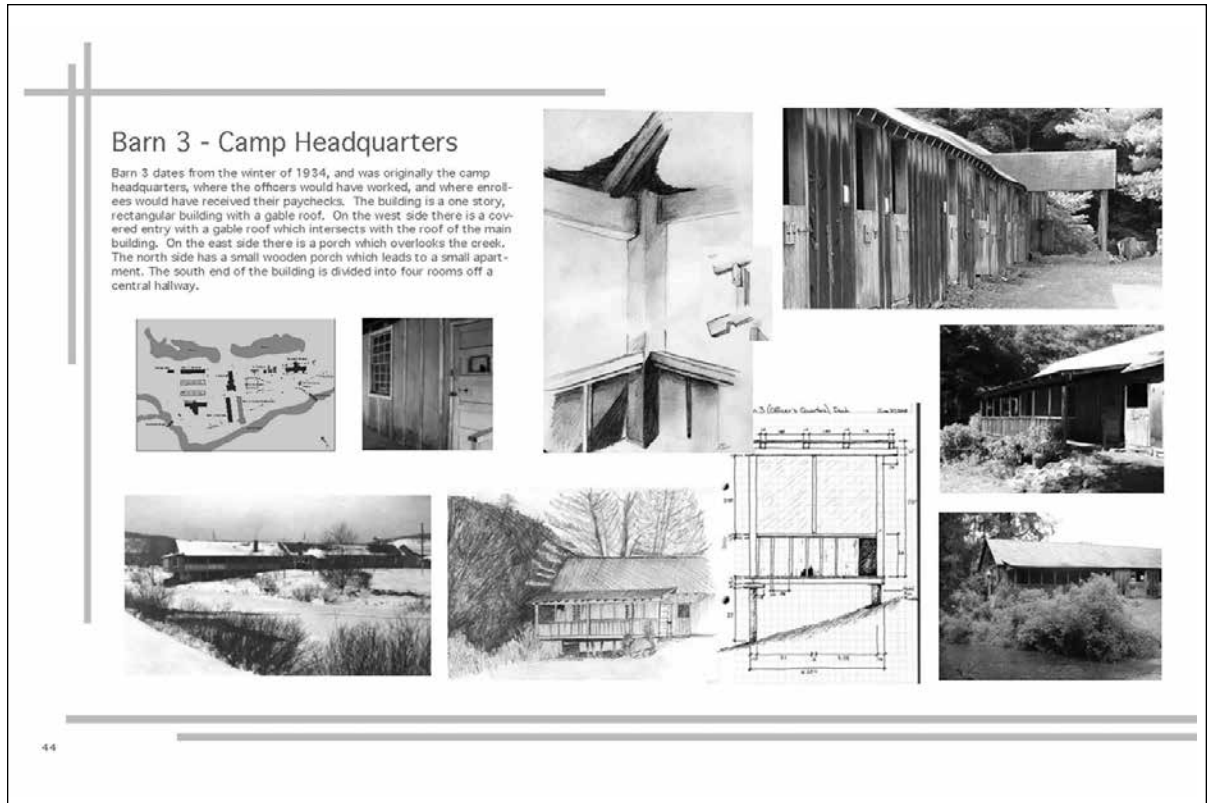


Fig. 7. A typical page from the studio document incorporated many aspects of the site work and research, including location maps highlighting the respective building, historic and contemporary photographs, and field sketches (Document design and layout by Shelby Scharen).

work made its way to the owner and our local partners, the Allegheny National Forest, the Forest County Historical Society, and the Lumber Heritage Region headquarters, as well as to members of the Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy, the national alumni group. In fall 2008, the professor gave a public presentation to the community and in 2009 presented the studio's work at the Pennsylvania Preservation Statewide Conference. Two of the students elected to continue working on the project. One pursued it in a master's thesis and strengthened connections with the national CCC alumni group.⁵ The other student worked on a nomination package for the camp; as a result, "ANF-1 Pebble Dell" was awarded a Determination of Eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.⁶

Thus, one intense field school working in the forests of Pennsylvania fascinated a group of students and catalyzed a community. Elevated awareness of this significant cultural landscape led to conversations

about viable actions for conservation and adaptive reuse. The site continues to be exposed to the ravages of time, and additional work remains to be done. In the future, we will expand the story and document some of the sites that the men of ANF-1 built – places like Twin Lakes Recreation Area and some of the nearby stream weirs and drainage structures installed in the forest to mitigate flooding and soil erosion. More can always be discovered. Lessons learned in the woods? Looking at a site and learning to "read" a site are not the same thing. Intensive research and careful visual assessment go hand-in-hand in discovering traces in a landscape. Our conclusions? As shown in one of the student's "reflective collages," the site is rich and layered (Fig. 8). Camp ANF-1 is the nexus for interpreting the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps in the area; it contains multiple layers of history and helps us understand the interaction of people and place over time – a broad and rich narrative evident in the cultural landscape.



Fig. 8. Collage by Fanny Lee, produced after our return to Denver from the site, in which she explored the layering and ideas of our time and the place (Courtesy Fanny Lee and the University of Colorado Denver College of Architecture and Planning).

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Ann Komara is associate professor and chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture in the College of Architecture and Planning (CAP) at the University of Colorado Denver (UCD). Her research and publications focus on cultural landscapes -- particularly public parks and landscapes -- and their respective creation, history, and reception. Her work is typically interdisciplinary, often merging landscape architecture with civil engineering, history, and the humanities. Understanding the built environment as a cultural product led her to explore reception history and landscape, where her work emphasizes the interaction of image, text, and site in the construction of place experience. In addition to her reception studies of the Parc des Buttes Chaumont (Paris, 1867) and Rocky Mountain National Park, Professor Komara studies and writes about cultural landscapes and pursues HALS projects including Halprin's Skyline Park (Denver, 1973) and Civilian Conservation

Corps Camp ANF-1 in northwestern Pennsylvania. A Fulbright Scholarship, Dumbarton Oaks Fellowship, and Graham Foundation grant have contributed to her scholarship in landscape history. She trained at the University of Virginia (1984 M.L.A.; 2001 M. Arch. History).

ENDNOTES

1. *In memoriam*. Doug Futz (June 1959 - November 2011) cared passionately about this project and all things CCC. His warmth and interest elicited detailed stories and poignant memories from the enrollees he interviewed; he mourned the passing of the last generation of men from the camps. I dedicate this essay to the men of the CCC and to Doug, and his work on their behalf.
2. For supplemental information on the CCC, refer to Schultz 1997, 2011; Schultz and Schultz 2008.
3. AmeriCorps is a national network of programs that engages more than 70,000 Americans each year in intensive service to meet critical needs in communities throughout the nation (see <http://www.americorps.gov/about/overview/index.asp>). Based on our outreach in the local Pennsylvania community, AmeriCorps provided scholarships to our studio students as tuition assistance credits earned through contracted volunteer hours.

4. Photographs by 1st Lt. Malcolm F. Reed, the second U.S. Army officer to be called to active duty to serve with the Civilian Conservation Corps. Reed moved his family to Duhring, where he was charged with establishing Camp ANF-1, which was operative with temporary emplacements by April 25, 1933. His photographs are courtesy of his son, Robert H. Reed, Pfafftown, New York.
5. Futz 2010. This thesis developed and tested a “value-based” approach for assessing the economic and cultural values associated with ANF-1. The approach was designed to elicit a full range of tangible and intangible values ascribed by various stakeholders.
6. Martino and Komara 2009. A letter to Ann Komara from Andrea L. MacDonald, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Bureau for Historic Preservation, dated February 6, 2009, notes that Camp ANF-1 “Pebble Dell” is “... locally significant for its association with the New Deal-era civilian conservation corps and for its association with the World War II prisoner of war camps,” for the period 1933-1946.

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