

Primary Source Interview Excerpts

Family, Food, & Farmwork

Interviewer You mentioned the Depression. How did the Depression affect your family?

Hendon Other than nearly starving to death, I guess...you know, it's strange. Back then nobody had anything, but you didn't lock your doors. Nobody stole anything because they were as bad off as you were. People helped one another. Now, I don't even know the names of the folks next door.

Interviewer How did the Depression affect your family income?

Hendon (Chuckle) Well, we were sharecrop farmers, so we never had any income. In 1934, my father borrowed **\$50.00¹** and made a crop. We had at that time four kids in the family and my mother and father and made a crop on a sixty-acre **leased²** placed. ***I shudder to think³*** that now I wouldn't even go downtown if I didn't have more than \$50 in my pocket.

Interviewer What about food? How was your food affected?

Hendon Our food...really if it hadn't been for an old uncle who was sheriff of Grayson County at the time...and he'd buy day-old or week-old bread for a penny a loaf. We lived on what was called Hendon's Ranch 84, which is now under Lake Texoma on Big Mineral Creek. He'd bring that bread out to feed the hogs. Well, if it didn't have mold on it, we ate it. We ate a lot of watermelon. Strangely enough, my father had a fish trap in Big Mineral, which was illegal. He baited it with swamp rabbits, and if you got the fish out before the turtles got in and ate the fish up, you were doing well. I know good and well the game warden there knew that my father had the trap, but he never said anything to him. As a matter of fact, I suspect that my father gave him fresh fish from the trap, you see.

¹ **\$50.00** in the 1930s is equivalent to about \$1,230 today.

² **Leased:** Rented

³ ***I shudder to think:*** A phrase that means something is so bad that you don't want to think about it.

Primary Source Interview Excerpts

New Deal Programs

*The Civilian Conservation Corps, the National Youth Administration,
and the Works Progress Administration*

Interviewer During the Depression, did it help you and your family knowing that everyone else was in a similar situation?

Hendon Well, really as I remember we didn't think a lot about that. It was just something you didn't have any control over. May I tell you about the government? See, all these programs, NYA, CCC, WPA, and all – were made by the Democratic administration under Franklin Delano Roosevelt. I first voted when I was twenty-one, and I voted Franklin Delano Roosevelt. When he died in 1945, I had tears in my eyes because he was kind of like a father to me because, actually, if he hadn't come up with some of these programs, I don't know what [would have happened.] We would have had to go west, I guess, with the rest of the **Okies**⁴ and **Arkies**⁵ and Texans to California.

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Interviewer How did you learn about the CCC?

Hendon Well, I finished high school in the mid-term. I guess I heard about the CCC when we lived in Whitesboro, which was only 18 miles over to Sherman. When I went in, we made **\$30.00**⁶ a month - **\$6.00**⁷ went to me, and **\$24.00**⁸ went to my folks. I don't know how long I been in, but I assume I only stayed 2 years because, as well as I can reckon, I went in in the mid-summer of 1939, and I came out in the mid-summer of 1941. If it hadn't been for that \$24 that I sent to my family, my sister in Saint Louis says sometimes in a **nostalgic**⁹ sort of way that I kept them from starving to death.

⁴ **Okies:** People from Oklahoma

⁵ **Arkies:** People from Arkansas

⁶ **\$30.00** in the 1930s is equivalent to about \$700 today

⁷ **\$6.00** in the 1930s is equivalent to about \$140 today

⁸ **\$24.00** in the 1930s is equivalent to about \$570 today

⁹ **Nostalgic:** Remembering the past in an emotional way

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Living Quarters at the Civilian Conservation Corps

Interviewer When you got to the camp, first of all, what was the designation or number of the camp? Who ran it?

Hendon Mr. Williford, I think, is the man. He was the company commander of the camp. They had two supervisors out in the field, and we had a chaplain. We lived in little huts with about six men to the hut. They were scattered kind of like sharecroppers' cabins over the thing. I don't remember how many people were in the camp, but I imagine there was somewhere around possible 200.

Interviewer What kind of *furnishings*¹⁰ were in your *barracks*?¹¹

Hendon A bed, a bunk, and a *pot-bellied stove*.¹²

Interviewer Was there any electricity?

Hendon Oh, yes, there was electricity, but the lights were out at about 10:00 or so.

Interviewer Was there a recreation hall?

Hendon Yes, and a library. We had a church and a chaplain. We had all of the facilities because some of the people in some of the camps would be thousands of miles from home. I was just lucky enough to be within 18 miles of my home, so I could go home on the weekend or whenever I wanted to go home. But some of them didn't get to go home but every six months to a year or whatever.

In the recreation hall, you could buy toothpaste and soap and needle and thread. Then you could go downtown and buy whatever you wanted if you had the money.

¹⁰ **Furnishings:** Items in a room, including furniture.

¹¹ **Barracks:** A military term for a dormitory for a large number of people.

¹² **A pot-bellied stove:** A small, enclosed stove made of cast iron that burned wood or coal. It was shaped like a little barrel. It had a small door in the front to put in the coal or wood, and a large pipe leading up the top of the stove and through the roof like a chimney for the smoke.

Primary Source Interview Excerpts

The Soil Conservation Service

Interviewer What organization or *government entity*¹³ ran the camp?

Hendon The federal government.

Interviewer Was it the Soil Conservation Service?

Hendon This was a Soil Conservation Camp. You can hear of the CCC as being the “Tree Army.” That was when they worked in the mountains and did *logging*.¹⁴ Actually, they built Lake Murray, which, strangely enough, is just over possibly in *Carter County*,¹⁵ just over the river there in Oklahoma. It’s the most *frequented*¹⁶ state park in the state of Oklahoma, and it was built by the CCC boys. They had little cabins or huts. Rock was *ample*¹⁷ there, so they built them, and there’s still some of them there.

I eventually wound up running the *survey crew*¹⁸ on a soil conservation project. The camp that we were in was basically interested in sodding waterways to outlets for *terraces*.¹⁹ When you didn’t have that to do, they built fences. The farmers or ranchers that we were...it was strictly a farming operation, so they didn’t raise cattle like they do now. If they had enough money to buy a fence post and wire and stuff, we just would either *sod their waterways*²⁰ or build terraces... my wife said, when she came to this country in 1946, “I have seen more erosion in one square mile of Oklahoma than all of the United Kingdom because they just don’t tolerate erosion, period.”

The Lord only makes so much of it, and when it’s gone, it’s gone. A majority of all our good bottomland is either under some lake somewhere, or else in the Mississippi Delta.

¹³ **Government entity:** An organization, department, or branch of the government.

¹⁴ **Logging:** Cutting down trees for lumber

¹⁵ **Carter County:** A county in south central Oklahoma directly north of Fort Worth.

¹⁶ **Frequented:** Attended

¹⁷ **Ample:** Abundant; Found in large quantities

¹⁸ **Survey Crew:** A group of people who measure and map out features of the land.

¹⁹ **Terraces:** Shaping the land like stairs to prevent water runoff and erosion when planting.

²⁰ **Sod waterways:** Plant grasses with deep roots around water to prevent erosion and runoff.

Primary Source Interview Excerpts

A Typical Day in the Civilian Conservation Corps

Interviewer Why don't you take me through what a typical workday was like? What time was *reveille*?²¹

Hendon You got up in the morning at 6:00. Then you went and showered. We didn't have a bath; we had a shower. Then you ate breakfast, and you gathered at the yard down there where the trucks were. You went out in *bob-tail trucks*²² with benches on them. You were on a work detail either building fence or *sodding*²³ or whatever your detail was. You reported there at 8:00, and then you went out to work until whatever time you got off.

We only worked five days a week, and we had the weekend off – Saturdays and Sundays. You could either stay in camp, or if you were close you could go home or do whatever you wanted to. I imagine they had a bed check, but I don't know. You weren't chained down or anything, you just (chuckle) was glad to have a job even though your folks got the money. But you got enough to live on. You knew – well that there wasn't anything else going on.

Whenever the sun went down, you were tired; you didn't go out and raise hell. You just were glad to go to bed and wake up the next morning – hope you wake up the next morning – and do it all over again. But again, that was a different time, and I don't think these kids today would tolerate that. They'd have a rebellion.

²¹ **Reveille:** (re-vuh-lee) a short, quick melody played on a bugle horn at sunrise to wake up people in the military.

²² **Bob-tail trucks:** Semi-truck tractor operating without the attached trailer on the back, only having the flatbed truck attachment.

²³ **Sodding:** Laying down and planting mature tracks of grass in an area, including soil and a layer of grass roots.

Primary Source Interview Excerpts

Working as an Assistant Leader in the CCC

Interviewer What was your job as an assistant leader like? What duties did you have?

Hendon Well, I ran the *survey party*.²⁴ We ran terrace lines. You'd *stake it out*²⁵ first, and then you'd walk the line, and the farmer would come by with his tractor or his team and turning plow and make a line. Then they'd work with that, and then they'd make *terraces*²⁶ for him. You'd lay out tanks or *diversion terraces*²⁷ if you wanted to keep water off a field or something, after the found out that you had enough sense to set up a *transit*²⁸ and do that sort of thing. We just used a *dummy level*.²⁹ We didn't use a transit, as a matter of fact. We just had a level and a *Philadelphia rod*.³⁰

Somebody had to be in charge. Of course, the superintendent or the man running the program would be around there, but whenever he found out that you had enough sense to do the job, he just let you get on with it. He had to go between you and the farmer, you see, and you had to keep the farmer happy because a lot of them didn't like terraces because it went like that and they were used to going like that [gestures]. The secret of it was that once the government came in and terraced your property, you had to go with the *contour*³¹ of the land.

²⁴ **Survey party:** A work group to measure and map land and its physical features.

²⁵ **Stake it out:** Put wooden markers in the land at specific points after measuring.

²⁶ **Terraces:** A series of raised steps made into the land for planting. The steps helped reduce erosion and water runoff.

²⁷ **Diversion Terraces:** Steps built into the land with an added channel to direct water into ditches or ponds.

²⁸ **A transit:** A specialized, precise tool to measure horizontal and vertical angles to determine elevation.

²⁹ **A dummy level:** A tool used to measure how flat, or level land is.

³⁰ **A Philadelphia rod:** A basic tool to measure the elevation of land. It looks like a measuring stick.

³¹ **Contour:** The shape of something