



Mt. Horeb CCC camp about 1938. *Courtesy of Louis Roedell.*

Building the Spillway

Overview

The spillway on the Pope Farm Conservancy Property is special due to the level of care it is getting. Other “soil saving” dams of the Great Depression era are quietly deteriorating in farm fields all over Wisconsin. Still others have been removed. This structure on the Pope Farm Conservancy site is the only one in south-central Wisconsin (and perhaps the entire state) that is being protected as an historic landmark.

The dam is a segment of a long-forgotten piece of Dane County history. However, newly discovered photographic evidence brings to life the activities of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) on this site. That, combined with the ongoing efforts of the Conservancy to protect the structure, has elevated the importance of the work that the CCC did in Dane County.



Mertin Dauck (left) and Detroit, MI friend Johnny Rondo, about 1938 at the Mt. Horeb camp. *Courtesy of Mary Dauck Nelson.*

The Mount Horeb Camp

Builders of the Pope Farm spillway came from a camp at Mount Horeb (the other Dane Co. camp was located on the grounds of the UW-Madison Arboretum). Each camp consisted of about 200 enrollees and was administered by two military officers. The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) was in charge of organizing the erosion control jobs of the Mt. Horeb camp. This dam design, called a head flume, was suggested by UW-Madison soils and agriculture professor Otto Zeasman. It was simple because the intent was merely to slow the flow of water during times of heavy rain and runoff. Whenever possible, projects were directed by local engineers and built by young men from the geographic region or statewide area. That was certainly true of the CCC base camp at Mt. Horeb. The dozens of erosion control projects by this camp and other like it, helped preserve countless acres of valuable topsoil in southern Wisconsin.



An end-of-project snapshot of the construction crew, 1938. *Courtesy of Mary Dauck Nelson.*

The Boys

Construction of the dam began in late summer 1938. A CCC crew of about a dozen young men needed about 2-3 weeks to finish the project. The identities of most the young workers on this spillway have been lost. However Cross Plains, WI resident Mertin Dauck was part of the construction crew, and like many enrollees he occasionally brought his camera to work. His local ancestry was tied to the German emigration of the 19th century, including the Mecklenburg clan that settled the farmland around you (see German immigration interpretive signs).