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# California State Forestry Labor Camps For the Relief of Unemployed Men During the Winters of 1931-32, 1932-33

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Department of Conservation, Division of Forestry

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# CALIFORNIA STATE FORESTRY LABOR CAMPS

For the Relief of Unemployed Men During the Winters of 1931-32, 1932-33

*By Walter D. Winters  
Deputy State Forester, Retired*

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THE RESOURCES AGENCY  
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION  
DIVISION OF FORESTRY



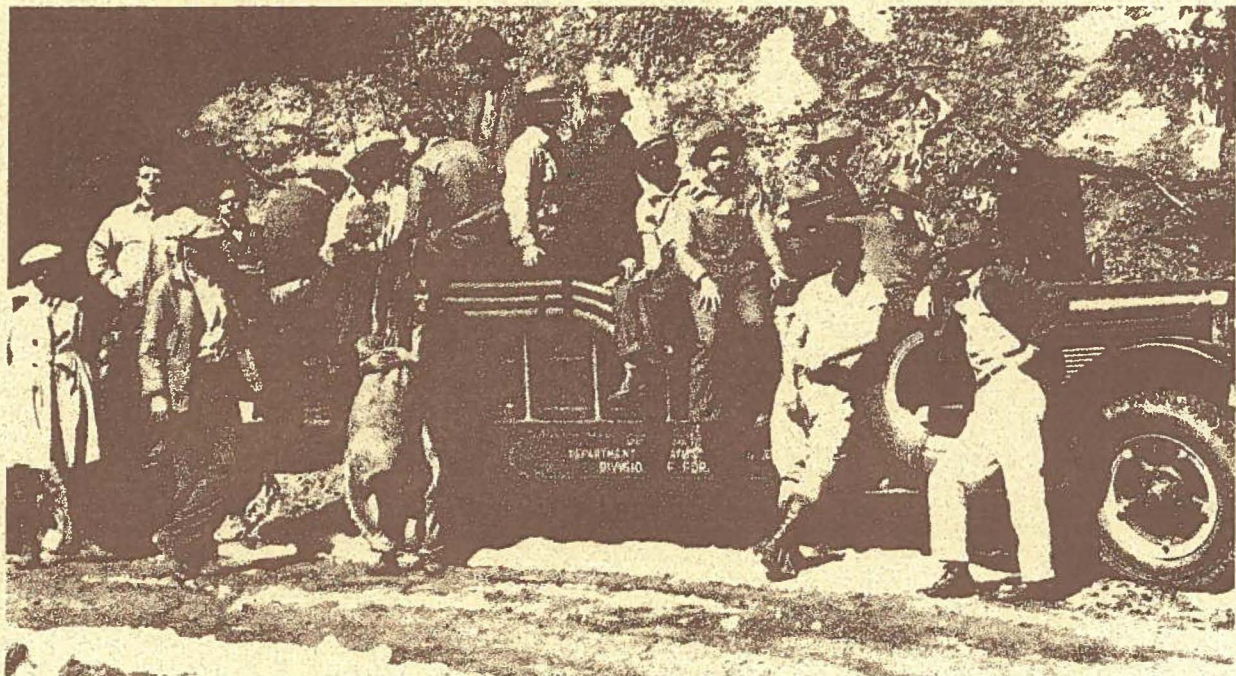
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## CALIFORNIA STATE FORESTRY LABOR CAMPS

For the Relief of Unemployed Men  
During the Winters of 1931-32, 1932-33

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By Walter D. Winters  
Deputy State Forester, Retired



These personal reminiscences were set down from memory by the author in 1968 after he had participated with other veterans of the "labor camp" program in recording experiences upon tapes now deposited in State Archives. Winters' very active career with the California Division of Forestry covered a period of 35 years.



*This article was presented in 1972 essentially for the information of employees of this department. However, because of its historical value, demands for copies from libraries and educational institutions led us to believe that this reproduction would be truly justified.*

**Office of the State Forester  
1416 Ninth Street  
Sacramento, California 95814**

**1973**





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## FOREWORD

I have known the author as a close personal friend since the Fourth of July in 1929 when I was dispatched from a mapping job to assist him during a serious siege of wildfires in Madera County. In truth, I was not much help as a firefighter. I was there again two and a half years later, when Fresno Crossing and Grub Gulch Labor Camp were opened. In fact, I distinctly remember constructing those "cloud-like" bunk springs out of chicken wire for the crew men.

A decade later, political circumstance and the attack on Pearl Harbor caused a heavy administrative burden to be placed upon me in my capacity as chief deputy state forester. One of my earliest executive actions was to obtain the transfer of Winters from his ranger unit to division headquarters where he assumed supervision of the rapidly expanding statewide fire control office.

Author Winters asked me to "clean-up" some 80 pages of this handwritten manuscript involving his personal and intimate view of on-the-ground management of several of the so-called Forestry Labor Camps of the Depression era.

I was glad to assist in changing a few tenses, shortening a few sentences, and generally doing as little damage as possible to the honest, guileless style of the author. When I asked him if I might prepare a foreword to this work, my own intention was certainly honorable, but not so sophisticated as it should have been. I had intended to reveal something of the author's childhood of poverty and hard work, of his restricted opportunity for formal education and of his dedicated service to the people of California. By the time my editing chore was con-

cluded I was well aware that every serious reader will be able to discern the firm character of this man without my gratuitous assistance.

I believe that this treatise is deserving of the wide attention of students of the nation's social and economic history. It deals with a fulcrum point in the massive change in political and social philosophy which, in the opinion of some scholars, could easily have occurred with violence instead of yielding to such sensible processes as the example described so aptly by this author. As he declared with such earnest meaning several times: "These men were American citizens."

A corollary reading for scholars with further interest in these unemployment relief camps is my *California Government and Forestry - II: through the Young and Rolph administrations*, published by the State Board of Forestry in 1969 (O.S.P.).

C. Raymond Clar  
California Division of Forestry (retired)



**CALIFORNIA UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF CAMPS**  
**"State Forestry Labor Camps"**  
**1931-33**

By **Walter D. Winters**  
Deputy State Forester, retired

The great depression which began with the stock market crash in 1929 was having its first impact in the agricultural areas of the great San Joaquin Valley in early 1930.

I was the state forest ranger for Madera County at the time and although my salary was not large it was sufficient to feed my family and pay the rent.\* I was one of the fortunate few of the times to have a steady employment and I did not have to worry about losing my job and going on welfare as many others had to do.

The depression was a very sad and depressing experience. Madera was a small city in the center of an agricultural area and I knew personally almost everyone in the city and throughout the county.

Many of the rural residents during the boom years had purchased small farms, raising grapes and other fruits, and had made small down payments at the start. With the depression now in full force they no longer had a market for their products and therefore could not keep up their payments. They were being evicted almost daily through foreclosure.

There were a few owners of large orchards and vineyards who, although unable to pay their taxes, did manage to hold onto their land. Some trouble did occur, however, between them and the San Joaquin Light and Power Company. These orchards and vineyards had to be irrigated and this was done by pumping plants operated by electric power. When the farmers could not meet their electric bills,

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\* Some 30 counties of California enter formal agreements with the State wherein the State Division of Forestry furnishes fire protection outside of cities and federal lands.

the power company threw the switches at the pumping site and sealed them with notices posted to the effect that broken seals would bring prosecution by the company.

When the farmers saw their vines and trees dying from lack of water they formed a shotgun squad and broke the seals and started the water flowing. They defied the power company to start action and warned that any company employee coming on their land to shut down the pumps would be met by the landowner with his shotgun which he would not hesitate to use.

The two sides finally got together and it was agreed to let the farmers irrigate as necessary and delay payments to some future time.

The dry farming such as barley and wheat and the grazing and cattle farmers had no irrigation problems; but they were hard hit because there was virtually no market for their products.

In the area where the small farmer was being evicted we had a number of mysterious fires which burned the farm dwelling and out buildings. I spent most of my nights responding to these fires. Since water was usually shut off the losses were total.

Insurance companies suspected arson, and I also believe that in desperation these poor folks were trying to salvage something out of their hard work and effort. Anything they might collect through insurance would in some measure tide them over until they could get settled again.



The City of Madera depended largely on its surrounding agricultural areas. By way of industry it had a few grain warehouses and fruit packing sheds, all now closed down. It also had a lumber mill owned by the Sugar Pine Lumber Company which normally employed about fifty men. That also was now closed for lack of a lumber market.

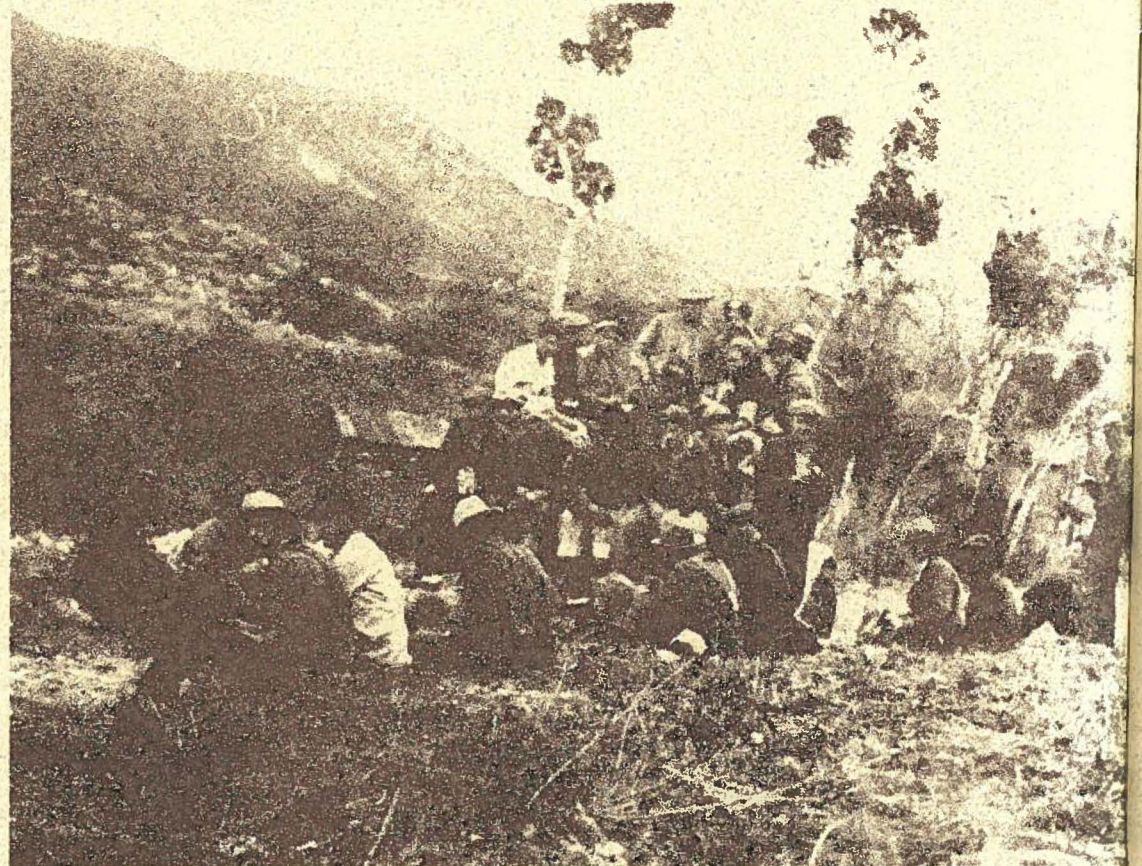
As the condition worsened the banks would no longer extend credit. These city and rural folks, who had always before been able to make their own way, now found it necessary to turn to the county welfare department for help. With the problem of taking care of their own residents there was little sympathy for those that drifted in from the outside.

It was not uncommon to see trains going through town with literally hundreds of men riding on top of the cars. The railroads had long since accepted the fact that they could not prevent these unwanted riders on their trains and made no effort to discourage it. Whenever one of these trains stopped in Madera the police chief and the sheriff met it and those who got off were either put right back on again or hauled to the county line and told to "git".

Probably the most tragic cases of itinerants, and the most difficult to refuse were those who came from the Dust Bowl area of the mid-west. These were always large families with sad-eyed youngsters traveling in an old jalopy which was about to give up and quit. Because of the children, the welfare department did give them some food supplies and enough gasoline to get them into Fresno County twenty-two miles down the road.

I believe the group that got the least and probably the quickest escort out of the county was the Hunger or Bonus Marchers. This group was on

its way to Washington, D. C. to demand a bonus for their World War I activities. Although some of this group were actual veterans many were not and were just going along for whatever advantage they might get. They usually had a truck carrying their bedding and other belongings and rode to the city limits and marched into town from there. Usually cities or church organizations gave them a meal for the night and their breakfast next morning and a place to bed down for the night.





As is usual with a group of this kind there is among them a few agitators who try to stir up sentiment for their cause.

The first group of marchers who came to Madera were given meals and a place to sleep. However, there were some robberies and thefts attributed to them, and thereafter each group coming through was met at the county line by the sheriff and escorted into the next county and told to never come back.

This may seem to have been harsh treatment to those unfortunates but the City and County of Madera were becoming hard-pressed to care for their own.

In addition to the money crisis the state as a whole was in a period of extended drought which had a considerable effect on the forest fire conditions during the summer of 1931. While it was assumed that those losing their farms were burning the buildings to collect insurance the same problem existed where grain and range lands were involved. The state was paying 25 cents per hour for firefighters, and throughout the summer we had plenty of unaccountable fires start with plenty of help to fight them at the 25 cent hourly wage.

I believe that the summer of 1931 should go down in history as a year that buildings, range, grain and forests were deliberately burned to collect insurance and wages. I know of no other situation like it before or since.

Relief came, however, on November 14, 1931, with the first soaking rain of the season. That ended the fire problem in the pasture, grain and forest areas of the county. There were still some building fires, however.

I had begun to rest up a bit from the long summer's work and even thought of a few days vacation with the family during the Christmas school vacation time. But I was relieved of that happy thought when on November 29, 1931, Burnett Sanford from the state forester's staff in Sacramento came to my office.

Sanford said the state was going to start Labor Camps and take unemployed men who had now congregated in the cities to put them into these camps. He said it had been decided that forestry would have camps supervised and operated by state rangers, and the men were to work eight hours per day cutting fire trails or building roads. They would receive their board, clothes, tobacco and a place to sleep in return for their labor.





He said, "We have decided to send you 50 of these men on December 15 and another 50 by January 1. Then on January 15 you will receive another one hundred which will make your quota 200 in all; and with that number of men you should get a lot of fire trails built."

I could readily visualize the many places where fire trails could be built and how handy they would have been if they had been there during the past fire season. After this short flight into fancy I asked Sanford for more details as to housing and supply.

He said my first supplies would be sent from Sacramento but they would set up warehousing in Fresno for subsequent supply. He said the state had only limited funds to undertake this operation and only enough to supply food, clothing and blankets, and possibly some tobacco.

I asked if there were funds to rent housing or were tents available. I was informed there were no tents and no money for rentals and the problem of housing was mine to solve; and since time was short I had better get at it.

I replied that I would do my best, and he said we expect you to be ready to receive and house these men when they arrive here on December 15. With that information and instruction he left for Sacramento, leaving me with the feeling that I was somehow left holding the bag.

After Sanford had gone I called my district supervisor, Inspector Roger Wood, in Fresno to discuss the problem with him. I found him in not too favorable frame of mind as he resented Sanford's direct contact with me and not observing channels, which if observed would have first been taken through him.

As a result Wood said, "You have your orders, so do the best you can but keep me informed." I surely got no help or encouragement from that quarter.

I now sat down to think my problem through. There were vacant stores and warehouses in Madera of a size to accommodate the number of men. But the town was too far from the work projects. So that idea was out.

There were the small settlements of Ahwahnee, Oakhurst, Raymond and Coarsegold located in the areas near the work projects. But none had buildings of a size to house the men. The only possible places that might do were a residence and a dance hall on the Fresno River about midway from Raymond to Coarsegold, and an abandoned mining camp of a few run-down buildings at Grub Gulch located about midway from Raymond to Ahwahnee.

I knew the Fresno Crossing buildings were owned by a Mr. Gamen but could not locate anyone who knew the owner of the Grub Gulch property.

The morning after Sanford's visit I went to Fresno Crossing to look over the buildings and see if I could make some kind of a deal with Mr. Gamen. Since I had no money to offer for rental I was at a loss as to what kind of deal could be made.

Now, Mr. Gamen was one of those who took a dim view of any person in an official capacity, and especially anyone working for the state. He had shown his dislike for me on numerous occasions before, intimating that anyone working for the state was both a burden on the taxpayer and a crook. He owned 320 acres of marginal pasture land which he rented to an adjoining cattle rancher for a small per acre fee. This was his only income as far as anyone knew and he lived a kind of half-starved existence.



Gamen was a tall thin person and reminded me of Ichabod Crane in the *Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. He chewed tobacco incessantly and most of it ran from the corners of his mouth, forming droplets on his chin which he wiped off with the back of his hand now and then. Not having any kind of occupation he spent most of his time roaming from one ranch to another to visit and get a free meal. He wore an old blue denim shirt and overalls which were never washed. And I believe he never took a bath himself.

On this day, however, I was fortunate to find Mr. Gamen at home and we talked for awhile about the bad fire season and the hard times ahead for those whose pastures had been destroyed by fire. He then told me of the hard time he was having. He had not been able to rent his pasture this year and was concerned about how he would make it through the winter.

This gave me the opening to inquire about using his buildings. I explained the proposed camp program. He immediately became interested and in anticipation of getting a rental income named a figure. I told him there was no money for rentals and countered by offering him board, clothes and tobacco for the use of his buildings for the period December 15, 1931 to May 15, 1932.

We dickered back and forth for about an hour and he finally agreed to my proposal with the exception that his bedroom in the residence would be kept for his private occupancy. I really believe it was the thought of his getting his chewing tobacco free for the next five months that caused him to agree to the deal. We proceeded on nothing more than this oral understanding for he would under no circumstances sign any written agreement, saying all such documents were crooked.

For me time was of the essence and I was desperate to meet the deadline Sanford had set. I therefore settled for this oral understanding. There were, however, numerous subsequent arguments about just what was discussed and agreed on that day we dickered at his place. Regardless of this method of doing business, I doubt that he would ever recognize any written agreement because he was so suspicious of the State and its agents. Also I am not sure he was capable of reading and comprehending any written matter.

Now that I had the buildings for one camp there was much to do to get it ready. There was need for stoves for heating and pipe for water; and no money to buy them, so it was necessary to call upon my friends for help. Jay Bondesen who ran the Shell Station in Madera, gave me some fifty-gallon oil drums. These I took over to Jim McKee who ran a local garage. Jim, using his cutting torch, cut out a door in one end and welded a stove pipe collar on the other. By laying these drums on their side on rocks, they made an excellent wood burning heating stove.

For the water pipe I went to see Charles Clark, chairman of the County Board of Supervisors, to ask if the county would supply it. Up to this point I had not thought about any problem of acceptance of the camp program by the local people. Nor do I suppose the state forester had considered it either. I found out, however, when I asked Mr. Clark for the pipe. It was the first he had heard of the program and he exploded. He informed me in no uncertain terms that the county had enough trouble keeping the bums out of the county, and he was damned if he would agree to bringing them in and housing them here, State or no State program.



I tried to explain the purpose of the program and that the men would be kept in camp when not out on work projects, and that both camps were in the mountains away from town and there should be no trouble with men coming into town or causing any disturbance.

He declared that any men who would agree to go into camps and work only for board, clothes, tobacco and a place to sleep must be unstable characters and just the kind which, once got away from the cities, would drift away and rob and steal from the farmers as well as come into town to steal and beg.

There had been numerous stories going around about train men being murdered by transients riding the trains who were ordered off by the train men. I was getting nowhere with Mr. Clark and suggested that we call the county committee together and present the problem to them. And to this he finally agreed.

The Madera County Fire Prevention Committee was well representative of the city and county. It consisted of the five county supervisors and two men from each supervisorial district. There was also a representative of the American Legion, the Farm Bureau, Business Men's Association, Chamber of Commerce, Cattlemen's Association and the forest supervisor of the Sierra National Forest.

This committee had been formed as a result of a bad experience the county had with a previous state ranger. Its sole purpose was to keep informed on my activities and review and pass upon my proposed programs.

In the two years I had been in the county, I experienced no difficulties in working with this committee and, in fact, found it quite helpful in getting acceptance of projects I proposed to undertake. They had come to place confidence in my judgment and I had a great respect for them, both as a committee and as individuals.

Mr. Clark agreed to call the committee together the following Monday. Since the time did not permit the mailing of notices he made the contacts by phone, expressing the urgency of full attendance. He at the same time warned me that whatever the committee decided would be final and I must be prepared to accept it as such. While I had been accustomed to meet with this committee on my own many times, I felt that in this case I could use some support from my state organization.

I called Inspector Wood in Fresno and asked him to come to Madera and attend the meeting with me. He was still disturbed that Sanford had bypassed him when the latter instructed me to start the camps. And as yet Wood knew very little about the program except he had just been informed that a warehouse would be established in Fresno and he had been instructed to find a building suitable for it. Because he was having difficulty in finding a building he could not spare the time to come to the meeting. He suggested I call the Sacramento office, since it appeared they were running the whole affair. They should be able to send someone from there to sit in with me.

I then called State Forester M. B. Pratt and presented my problem to him and asked that he come down to support me before the committee; and if it were impossible for him to come, could someone else from his office familiar with the



program come down. Mr. Pratt said he couldn't come as he was leaving to attend a state forester's meeting (as I remember in Florida), also he had no one else he could send to help me. As a consolation he said, "You know your committee pretty well and I hope you are able to put the program to them in such a way they will accept it." So all my official support went out of the window.

Monday came and there was full committee attendance. I explained the camp program as I then knew it and what I had done so far in obtaining camp sites and steps toward preparation.

The committee reaction at once was negative. The city chief of police and the county sheriff were called in for their opinions, which certainly didn't help matters any. Both cited their problems with hunger marchers, Dust Bowl itinerants, and door-to-door beggars. There had also been some recent robberies in the city.

Sheriff Welton Roads painted a rather gloomy picture of these men straying from camp and breaking into farm homes, robbing the countryside, and even killing those who resisted. He cited incidents where train men were killed by itinerant travelers. He closed his argument by stating that if the camps were allowed in the County he would request the Supervisors to double his forces. Logan Wells, the city police chief, also stated he would ask for increases to his city force. These suggestions brought an angry and negative response from both the county supervisors and the city fathers.

The meeting went on for most of the day and I was getting pretty well out of arguments for my defense. I was, however, beginning to get some support from Forest Supervisor M. A. Benedict who

had recently learned that the Forest Service was also to have some of these labor camps. One was scheduled for his Sierra National Forest.

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By late that afternoon O. B. Price, president of the Cattlemen's Association and chairman of this committee, took the floor to be heard. He said, "Look gentlemen, Winters here has always done us a good job and has lived up to all of his responsibilities. I would therefore recommend that we give him the go ahead with this Fresno Crossing camp and see what happens. If he can't control the men in camp and on the work projects we will move in and shut the damned thing down and run the men out of the county, and Winters right along with them."

This drew some hearty laughs and a few jibes in my direction. But Mr. Price's suggestion was put into a motion and carried by unanimous vote. It was a hard day's work but the end was rewarding. To get a unanimous vote was more than I expected.

The next few days were busy ones. The oil drum stoves were ready and the county supplied me with the needed water pipe. The Sugar Pine Lumber Company gave me some lumber to patch up the buildings and to build a shower house and a "Chick Sale" outhouse.

The truck from Sacramento came and left me some old beat-up pots and pans and some tin plates,



tin cups, knives, forks and spoons. There were cases of canned vegetables, some hams and sides of bacon, flour and beans, and a dozen loaves of very stale bread. There were also 30 Army issue blankets, but no cots or mattresses. The driver informed me there were no cots or mattresses in Sacramento and only enough blankets to provide two to each man. He didn't see how I was going to make out without cots or mattresses.

It was obvious that without these sleeping conveniences the only thing left to do was scatter straw on the floor and sleep with one blanket on the straw and cover with the other one. To get straw, I went out to the Speedy King Ranch and told him my problem. He gave me 12 bales of straw to use for the bedding.

The weather had now turned cold and rainy and it was obvious that with the scant amount of bedding, and sleeping down on the cold floor, it would be necessary to keep a fire going in the oil drum stove throughout the night.

I have often been asked since those labor camp days what they were like and what was the attitude and behavior of the men that came to them. I will admit that while getting the first camp ready to receive the men I had many thoughts about what to expect. Would men work eight hours per day for six days per week for only board, clothes, tobacco and a place to sleep under the most primitive conditions? Surely it had never been done before. And I wondered if they would rebel and refuse to work, or would they run away and rob and kill as the sheriff thought they would?

How would I handle a riot or a rebellion if one occurred? I spent some sleepless nights thinking on

these things prior to the arrival of the first group of men.

However, having spent two winter periods living in and supervising these camps, I can say that it was one of the most gratifying experiences of my life. I came to have great respect and admiration for those who, through unfortunate circumstances not of their own making, were forced to accept this type of welfare.

Those who came were all American citizens. They were men who had always made their own way in life and were capable and willing to do so again if they could only find a job, and any job at that. There were men who today would be classed as blue collar workers, clerks, accountants and teachers. Then there were the heavy labor workers, including loggers, farm hands and factory workers. There were also some youngsters 14 to 16 or 17 years of age. I heard that one camp had a former banker, but none such ever came to any camp of mine.





For one thing, the professional hobo who drifts from town to town getting his hand-outs through back door begging or from garbage cans, avoided the camps like the plague. This type was always allergic to work, and the thought of a labor camp surely had no place in his scheme of living. His idea of the good life was to beg his food and sleep under bridges or in culverts, covered with old newspapers to keep out the cold.

December 15, 1931, came. I had been notified from Sacramento that 15 men would arrive in Madera by train about noon.

I had two trucks waiting at the station so there would be no delay in moving the men immediately out to camp as they got off the train. I was not alone in waiting, however, as the sheriff, the chief of police and many curious citizens were there also to get a first-hand look at what kind of men would willingly come to camp and work for no pay.

When the train pulled in and the men got off and started toward the truck, they were led by a big burly fellow who looked like the leader of a mob of gangsters. I thought, oh-oh--here comes trouble. Instead, however, this big fellow walked up to me and said, "You de ranger?" I said I was, and he said, "I got me here 15 men and here is the list of our names." He also asked, "Where de camp we go to? My name is Butch, and I work like hell." This brought a chuckle from others in the group. Some said, "You tell em Butch."

I found later that Butch was of Portugese extraction, and contrary to his swagger and appearance was a most likable and cooperative person. And as he had said, he did work like hell.

One of the other men told me that at their point of departure from San Francisco Butch had talked so much and asked so many questions that as a joke they gave him the list of names and told him he was responsible for delivering the group to the Ranger at Madera. The men thought it all very amusing.

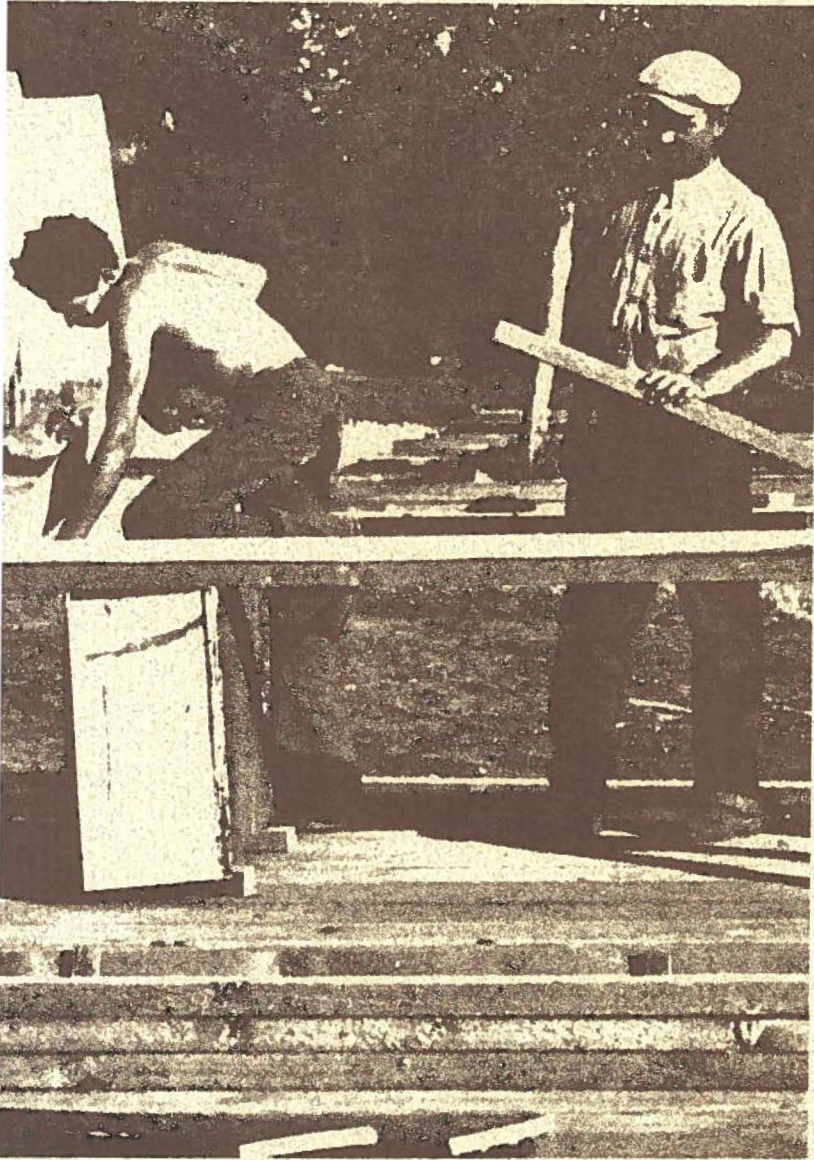
After getting the list from Butch and regaining my own composure, I called off the names of each as he loaded into the truck, and we left for camp, much to the relief of the sheriff and the chief of police.

We arrived at the camp about 2:30 p.m. and I explained to the group that accommodations here were not what one would expect at the Hotel Biltmore, and there was much to be done to make it into a camp that would be both livable and to some extent comfortable.

I was both surprised and gratified in the way the men responded to the situation and the pioneer spirit each showed in the making of the camp. Two men stepped forward, and one said "My name is Blackie and this is Sam, and we are cooks." I sent them to the residence to organize the kitchen and to cook the dinner. Others volunteered as carpenters, plumbers, and there were those who just came to work.

Some set up the stove in the dance hall, others began cutting wood and digging the hole for the latrine. The plumbers started the pipe line for the bath house and the carpenters began cutting up the lumber for the buildings. The industry of these men was surprising. Obviously they were craftsmen and men who were used to working. They required little supervision. All that was necessary was to make known what I wanted and it was done without further concern on my part.





After getting things going on the outside, I went up to the residence to see how the cooks were making out. Gamen's stove was a small four-lid wood burner, certainly not designed for cooking for the large numbers of men we would now soon have to feed. It was later replaced with a larger second-hand wood burning range supplied from the Fresno warehouse.

I found Blackie and Sam busily getting supper, and although they thought the stove was pretty small assured me they would make out all right.

That first night they did have a fine evening meal for the men. They ate as anyone would who had been living for some time from the soup lines in San Francisco. Probably this was the first meal of solid food they had eaten for several months.

After dinner, straw was scattered over the floor of the dance hall and each man was issued two blankets. They prepared to spend their first night in camp. There was no electric power and we used gasoline lanterns for lights (and ice when we could get it for refrigeration).

The nights were now extremely cold and it was obvious that with just two blankets and a thin layer of straw over the floor, that the stove had to be kept going all night to keep the place reasonably warm. It was not a very successful arrangement as those nearest the stove got too hot, while others farther away were cold. The only solution resulted in shifting positions when conditions became intolerable.

For the night job of keeping the fire going I had selected a rather happy-go-lucky Mexican lad whose name was Manuel Gonzales. Manuel was willing



and did a fine job of keeping the fire going. However, one cold night he had to urinate, and not wanting to go out in the cold decided to use the hot stove to wet against. Sometimes such great ideas have the reverse effect, as did this one. The odor of the urine on the hot stove spread over the room bringing the whole crew to their feet. They stood around shivering while the place was being aired out and Manuel caught it from all sides. He never tried *that* again.

The camp was now a beehive of activity and the men look great pride in each project as it was accomplished. Mr. Gamen gave us some trouble since he took the position that because he owned everything around there, he should also be the camp supervisor.

Most of the men ignored him but others were irritated by his interference. When his orders were ignored he would go back to the house in a huff and pout for awhile and then accuse me of not living up to our agreement.

By now the different personalities of the men began to show up. All, however, were cheerful in spite of the crude living conditions of the camp set-up. All agreed it was preferable to that which they had experienced in the cities and soup lines before coming out here.

It was interesting to observe the individual peculiarities of the men. For instance, there was the one that they called the "loner." He was small and stooped, obviously a man who had labored all of his life. He was about 60 and never entered into conversation with any group. When spoken to he answered yes or no, and that was the end of any conversation on his part.

He built a lean-to out on the riverbank, and with a little straw on the cold ground and his two blankets made it his sleeping quarters. I asked him why he preferred it to the warmer sleeping quarters of the others and he said he once froze his feet and a warm room made them ache during the night.

Then there was Blackie the cook. It developed that he had for years been a mess sergeant in the Marine Corps. This I could well understand as he knew how to prepare meals and serve them well.

And there was Manuel, always happy and full of song, and keeping his fires going throughout the night. And there was good old Butch swinging an axe and working like hell, as he said he would.

The National Guard had now assigned Captain Shearer and Sergeant Sid Lamerton to supply. The warehouse in Fresno was being stocked with food supplies and clothes, and these began coming into camp on regular supply days.

Our first big problem occurred when we found that some men, through the lack of sanitary facilities around the cities, had become lousy and carried the pests into our camp. To delouse the place we removed the straw from the sleeping quarters and burned it. Sulphur was then burned in the building to fumigate and kill any lice that might be in the cracks of the boards. I got more straw from the King Ranch and another issue of blankets from the Fresno warehouse. They did not, however, have clothing to issue. So I had each man boil his clothes in a hot lye soap solution while he took a hot shower and then went to bed until his clothes dried. The whole place took on the aspect of a nudist colony while this operation was in process. But we did manage to rid the place of lice.





Because of this experience, I made it a rule that each new man coming into camp had to first shower and boil his clothes before being allowed in the barracks. Our washing facilities consisted of five-gallon coal oil cans set up on rocks and a wood fire for heating the water. To get a plunger action, tomato cans were nailed to sticks and plunged up and down on the clothes to beat out the dirt. Although this method was somewhat crude it was effective.

The Fresno Crossing Camp was well on its way, and time was pressing to get the Grub Gulch Camp ready to receive the men by the first of the year. Ranger Charles Wilcher was sent in to take over supervision of Fresno Crossing and I went on to Grub Gulch.

Wilcher brought with him a cook called Tiny, who from height, width, and breadth, looked like Two Ton Tony.\* Wilcher insisted that Tiny was the ultimate in the art of cooking and put him in charge of the kitchen.

This was too much for Blackie and Sam, the regular cooks there, and they left camp and walked the ten miles to Grub Gulch and asked to be placed as cooks there. I was more than glad to have them and they stayed until we closed the camp in May. Tiny didn't last very long, as he couldn't seem to stay within his meal cost allowance.

While Wilcher was now in charge of Fresno Crossing, I still had over-all accountability for its operation. We had to submit to the Fresno Headquarters each week a record of meal cost. We were allowed twenty-five cents per man meal and the former cooks seemed to have no difficulty in feeding well, yet staying within the allowance. Tiny, however, was running considerably over the amount and I soon was asked why by Captain Shearer. I talked with Wilcher and he told me that Tiny was the best and not to worry. Meal costs still ran high, and after eating a meal or two I became suspicious that all the food was not going to the men.

In order to investigate, I drove into camp one early morning and found Tiny and a local farmer loading cases of canned foods into the farmer's pickup truck. Tiny had been selling for a small price canned goods, bread, butter, etc. Caught in the act, the farmer unloaded his truck and left, never to appear around the camp again.

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\*At that time a certain heavyweight boxer was popularly known as Two Ton Tony Galento—Ed.



I took Tiny into Wilcher and he confessed he had been selling out a little at a time for the last two or three weeks. With this confession I hauled Tiny into Madera and told him to get on out of town, but fast. Wilcher was highly incensed about it all, claiming I had interfered with his camp management. He got in his car and took off for Sacramento very, very mad about it all.

After Wilcher's departure, Inspector Wood sent in Ranger Arthur Moberg to take over the camp, and from then on to its closure he did a fine job of management and project accomplishment. Incidentally, Tiny became the chef of the Lenhart Hotel on the corner of 9th and L Streets in Sacramento.

The old mine buildings at Grub Gulch were in a deplorable state of dilapidation. But with more donations from the lumber company we began patching them up enough to provide for reasonable occupation, that is, if one was not too particular about lying in bed and looking out through the cracks in the wallboards and seeing the stars through holes in the shake roof.

There was no water at this camp and we trucked it in from a farmer's well about a mile down the road. When the camp reached its full complement of one hundred, two trucks worked twenty-four hours of each day to keep the water tank filled.

On December 31, 1931, 60 men came into Madera by train. Thirty-five were sent to Fresno Crossing to fill their quota of 50. The remaining twenty-five came into Grub Gulch and on January 15, 1932, seventy-five more came to fill this camp to its one hundred man capacity.

I had been informed that there was to be another 100-man camp near Ahwahnee to be administered by the U. S. Forest Service. Since the Forest Service had no old buildings that could be used, this camp would be constructed with new lumber from the Madera Mill. Also that it was my responsibility to supply the trucks and drivers to haul the lumber from Madera to the Ahwahnee site.

I thought this a bit ironic, for here I had been told there were no funds for my use to get my camps established, and I had begged and borrowed and patched up old rundown places to make do. And now I am told that a brand new camp was to be built to be run by the Forest Service, with me as well nurse to supply the material. I felt like saying to hell with it all. I didn't though, and selected truck drivers from the camp complement, and they worked long hours as diligently as though they were getting paid in wages rather than just board and clothes. I also supplied the carpenters and hauled them back and forth from my camp until the Forest Service put up some tents. When their first shipment of men arrived they took over on their own.\*

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\*This very tired State Forest Ranger had plenty of reason to feel put upon. Yet some of his feeling had surely been generated by the condescending attitude always displayed by U. S. Forest Supervisor Benedict toward his poor State neighbor. More important, Winters could not know of the continuing desperate maneuvering in the upper echelons of Federal and State government to meet this serious national economic crisis.—Ed.



### Fresno Crossing Camp

Down at Fresno Crossing Ranger Moberg now had his full complement of men and everything nicely organized. The camp was neat and orderly, and the men were quite proud of their new home.

The ranger's quarters were in what Mr. Gamen called his "settin room," which was not very large; and in addition to his bed, room had to be found for storage of clothes, tobacco, medical supplies and first aid equipment. After working hours the place resembled Grand Central Station with men coming in for clothes, tobacco, medicine and first aid patch-ups. Probably the best feature of the room was the fireplace which was in some measure cheerful.

Although Moberg maintained harmony among the men in camp he began having problems with Mr. Gamen. He had given numerous hints that the showers were in good working order and Gamen should use them. The old man completely ignored the whole idea. He sat before the fireplace at night and perspired, giving off the odor of an unwashed body. The odor seemed to precede him wherever he went. Deodorants were not part of the camp supply and I doubt if he would have used them if they were.

Exercising his right of ownership Gamen would tell Moberg that my agreement with him entailed certain conditions he wanted met. Since my deal with him was verbal, Moberg was at a disadvantage and had to call me to settle the arguments. For his guidance I put in writing the understanding Gamen had verbally agreed to and Moberg followed this when differences of opinion arose.

One day Moberg heard a loud disturbance in the kitchen, and shortly thereafter Mr. Gamen came

bursting through the door on the run with the cook in hot pursuit with a meat cleaver in hand. It seemed the trouble was caused by Mr. Gamen not showing up for his meals with the men and coming later and demanding that he be served his hot meal separately. Apparently the cook had been obliging in the past, but on this day decided he had had enough.

Gamen thereafter stayed clear of the kitchen, taking his meals with the men, except his breakfast which was served earlier than he cared to get out of bed. Moberg would bring in bacon and eggs from the kitchen for him to cook for himself over the fireplace. Gamen claimed the cook could not make decent coffee so he brewed his own at the fireplace in a little old dirty coffee pot. He thought it strange that no one ever accepted his offer to have a cup with him.

One other aggravating habit he had was to pick up the saws and hammers laid down by the workmen. These along with his pilfering of tobacco and clothes when he could catch Moberg out of the room were stashed in his private bedroom under the mattress. It must have been lumpy and difficult to sleep on the heaps he collected.

Moberg was aware of his game and when he went out Moberg would go in and raid his room, taking all of the loot back again. This pilfering back and forth went on for the entire time the camp was there, yet neither side ever gave any indication that they were aware of what was going on.

An amusing incident happened on one of my trips to the camp to go over Moberg's weekly records with him. It was about eight in the morning and as we sat there pouring over the meal cost sheets, Mr. Gamen came out of his bedroom. Obviously he had just got out of bed.



It was a sight one would have to see to appreciate; this weird character. He was wearing a union suit or "long johns" which had no buttons on the rear flap, and it dangled down exposing his rear end. His feet were large and his socks had been too short so about half of his feet were slicking out. His long johns were black with dirt and his sock soles crusted with dirt. Apparently he slept in this outfit.

Gamen was in a bad mood and gave me quite a lecture about arriving so early and disturbing his rest. He then turned on Moberg and gave him a good dressing down about things in general. He then filled his coffee pot and set it on the coals in the fireplace and went back in his bedroom.

Moberg was a little disturbed about the lecture and said, "Dammit, I'm going to fix that old bird but good." He then went to the medicine supplies and brought out a bottle of Compound Cathartic pills, "The Little Black Devils" as they were commonly called. He then dropped three or four pills in Gamen's coffee pot, then said, "Hell, that won't faze him." So he cupped his hand and filled it with pills and dropped them into the pot.

The pot boiled and boiled and when Gamen came out he scolded Moberg for letting the coffee boil for so long. He poured a cupful and blew on it until it was cold enough to drink. He took a big swallow. Shaking his head he said, "This coffee tastes like hell this morning." Moberg suggested he must have a bad taste in his mouth this morning.

Gamen drank two or three cups all the while contending that the reason the coffee did not taste right was the cheap brands supplied by the state. There was no inside plumbing in the house. The outhouse or "Chick Sale" was some one hundred yards to the rear

of the house, with the path to it slightly downhill. We knew he would be using it before long so we waited.

Gamen sat gazing into the fire for a few minutes after the last cup was emptied, but began to shift about on his chair. After a few more minutes he suddenly leaped from his chair and went out the back door in long strides that turned into a fast gallop. He already had his pants down as he reached the toilet door and disappeared inside.

Moberg remarked that it was a tight race and if the path had not had that downhill slant, he didn't think Gamen could have made it in time. Well, that got rid of the old man for the day. Occasionally he would venture out and start for the house then suddenly turn and run back again. He finally came back to the house about dark looking like he had just emerged from the sick bed.

Moberg, with tongue in cheek, asked him where he had been all day as he had missed him at the table during dinner and supper. Gamen replied he must have et something that gave him the trots and he spent the day in the toilet. He never discovered what really was the cause of his day of discomfort.

### Grub Gulch Camp

We now had the Grub Gulch Camp in full operation with crews busily cutting brush and clearing fire trails. It was obvious that the men we got at Grub Gulch were not so thoroughly screened in respect to health conditions as were those that came to Fresno Crossing. I asked the men what kind of a physical examination they were given and was told that the examining physician said, "open your mouth and say Ah," and that was it.



We had some cases of syphilis and gonorrhoea, and one bad tuberculosis case. The state had made arrangements with Madera County to treat the sick cases at the county hospital. I was told to take any such cases to Dr. Dearbourn, the official county physician.

Dearbourn had his own private practice and I took my patients to his office, never to the county hospital. In fact, there was never anyone from the camps put in the hospital, they were either treated in camp with medicine prescribed by him, or sent on their way by the first freight train through town. The chief of police or the sheriff was there to see that they moved on.

Dr. Dearbourn, after examination and diagnosis of the syphilis, gonorrhoea and tubercular cases, said he would not expose patients in the county hospital with these transient cases. He advised me to send them back to San Francisco. This left me with no other alternative than to set these poor unfortunates adrift.

This treatment of human beings was very depressing to me and I asked Sanford to see if the examinations could be more thorough, and in that way not send to camp men who were sick or had incurable diseases. Sanford informed me that my job was to run the camps and if I got men that were unfit, just kick them out.

We had one case of scabies and on instruction by Dr. Dearbourn I covered his body each day with lard mixed with sulphur and wrapped him in a blanket. Each day the process was repeated and the blanket boiled and dried, ready for the next day's operation. This process was kept up daily for about six weeks, but it worked and the patient came out cured but with a few scars.

We were a little better equipped for sleeping facilities at Grub Gulch. The lumber company gave me 2 X 4's and other lumber and the carpenters built double bunks. The County supplied me with some rolls of chicken wire which was nailed on the bunk frames for bed springs. The Fresno Supply Depot sent up some six foot burlap wool sacks which stuffed with straw became a mattress.

Double bunking I learned had some drawbacks when one night, I hear a loud disturbance in the bunkhouse. On investigation I found that the man in the upper bunk had to go to the toilet and, it being cold outside and the toilet some distance away, decided he could hold it until morning. He fell asleep however, and wet the bed. The straw not being water absorbent, it dripped down into the face of the occupant of the lower bunk. He was mad as a wet hen and when I got out there he was about to haul the culprit from his upper bunk and give him a good trashing. The upper bunk man disappeared sometime before morning and was picked up down the road by the lumber hauling crew and taken into Madera. We never saw him again.

This was the only man that ever ran away from any of my camps during their operation. Whenever one gets together a group of men, especially under those circumstances of economic depression, there are bound to be some characters in the group.

Such a character was Paddy, a little old shriveled-up Irishman who was simple-minded. He came into camp with a few replacements under the watchful eye of a big burly Swede who answered to that name. The "Swede" explained to me when they arrived that as they were being picked for camp out of San Francisco, Paddy was being bypassed and was heartbroken. The Swede volunteered to look af-



ter Paddy if they would just let him come along. And look after him he did, much like a mother hen over one of her brood. And Paddy responded much like a child.

The only argument they had was getting Paddy into the shower, which he obviously detested. The question of what to do with Paddy puzzled me as he obviously could not be put out with the men on the projects. He spent his time laughing and mumbling to himself, and singing the words "twenty-five thousand dollars" to a little mournful tune over and over all day long. I finally hit on an idea for a job he could do all by himself, and that was to wash down the toilet seats. It turned out that he did that well.

Each morning the Swede, before going to work, would take Paddy and a bucket of hot water and scrub brush to the toilet and start him washing the woodwork. He would also tell the cook to get Paddy out at noon, wash him up and give him his dinner.

Paddy would scrub and sing his little money song and laugh to himself all day long. When the Swede came in from work at night he would get off the truck and go straight to the toilet and get Paddy and wash him up before taking him in to supper. After supper he would take Paddy back to the bunkhouse and him on a bench in a corner to laugh and sing to himself while the Swede played cards with the other men. At bed time he would put Paddy to bed and cover him. The Swede slept in the bunk below.

One day I had been out on the work projects and came into camp early in the afternoon. As I drove in the cook came running out of the kitchen and told me all hell had broken loose, and that they had Paddy tied to a tree. My first thought was that

he had finally completely flipped his lid and was now a case for the insane asylum.

After the excitement died down I learned that the cook had given Paddy some milk to take out, thinking he wanted to drink it during the afternoon. Instead, Paddy had mixed it with gasoline from our supply and got gloriously drunk and proceeded to take on all comers in a free-for-all fist fight. The camp crew roped him and tied him to a tree where he was sleeping it off when I got to him.

I then carried him and put him in his bed, and when the Swede got in from work he woke him up and gave him hell for getting drunk, especially on a gasoline and milk mixture. This evil concoction was referred to as "smoke". It was possibly the worst of the Prohibition substitutes for whiskey. It goes without saying we put padlocks on the gas drums.

The carpenters had fashioned a barber chair from old lumber which was a masterpiece of perfection and utility even if it was just made of old boards. One of the barber shops in Madera, as a donation to the cause, supplied shears, comb, a shaving mug and a straight-blade razor and strop. One of the men proved to be an excellent barber and he worked at night by gasoline lantern light and on Sunday when the men were available to patronize him. It wasn't long before he had all of the men shaved and with haircuts, neat and trim.

There was an incident concerning this barber that I shall never forget. One of our cooks, during the afternoon, had gone for a shave. The barber seemed amiable and like most barbers, talkative. He had lathered the cook's throat and was shaving in the vicinity of the adam's apple when he let out a wild cry, threw the razor across the room and ran out the door, and climbed an oak tree nearby.





The poor cook came running to my office ghostly white, and with trembling voice told me what had happened. I went to the tree where the barber was sitting out on one of the limbs. His face was distorted and his eyes blazed angrily. I began talking to him quietly but he kept drawing away saying, "Don't hurt me." In moving away from me he lost his balance and fell to the ground where I held him down by pinning his arms back and sitting on him.

He kept insisting that they were after him and he had to get away. It took some time to convince him that I was not one of his enemies but a friend and would take him away where he would be safe. I got him in the car and into Madera where I left him. He had talked some on the way and had realized that he had been temporarily off balance. He conceded it best that he go back to San Francisco where hospital facilities were available for cases such as his.

I never found out who he feared or why. And as I drove back to camp I was much relieved that the ordeal was over and that no one had been hurt. The cook could have very easily had his throat cut.

It was my practice in all of my camps not to post regulations regarding what and what not to do. I would, however, when all were present for their supper in the messhall explain that the camp was set up for their benefit, and although we did not have all of the conveniences which they may have enjoyed elsewhere, while here they would be expected to respect the rights of others. And their conduct here should be just as it would be in their homes with their own families. Any quarrels or misbehavior by anyone would leave me no other choice than to send them on their way.

The men seemed to respond to these verbal guidelines. In only one instance was it necessary to oust two of the men from camp during the entire time it was in operation. One was a rather vocal individual with a broad southern drawl. He was nicknamed "Alabam." He was always provoking an argument and could take either side of the subject with ease.



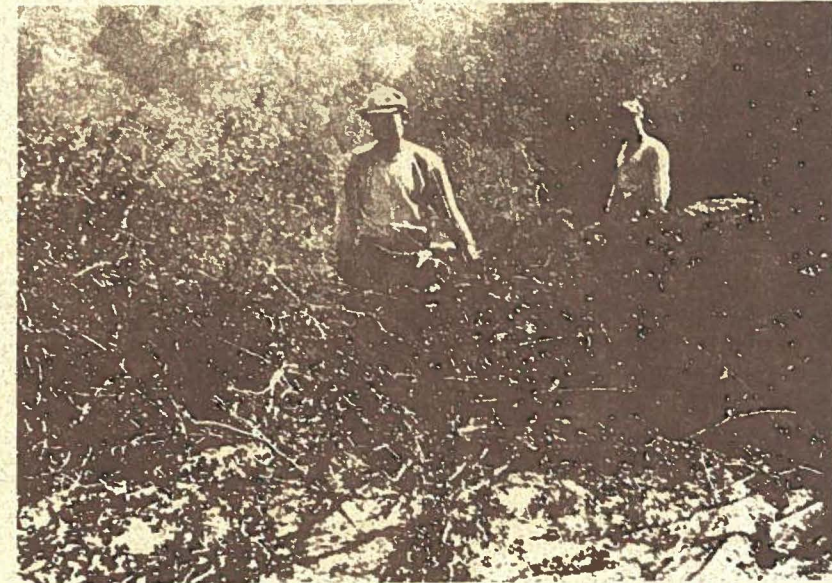
I had warned him on several occasions when he had provoked one or the other of the men in his bunkhouse over some silly detail. But he would only laugh and say it was all in fun. Because of his incessant arguing he was not popular with the rest of the men.

One day I went out on the project where the men were cutting brush, and as was my practice, I would walk from one worker to another and chat a bit with each. As I approached Alabam he kept turning away exposing only his back, although he kept up a conversation with me. I finally asked him to turn around, and as he did I could see that he had the most beautiful black eye one could imagine.

I found out who hit him, and without further delving into the cause of the fight pulled both off the job then and there and hauled them into Madera and suggested they take the first freight train that came through or they might find themselves in jail.

This had its effect on the other men, as they now knew that what had been said about camp conduct was not an idle statement. When the infraction occurred the rules were enforced.

The members of the County Committee who were so concerned about the camp program at its start and had reluctantly given their approval had been to both the Fresno Crossing and Grub Gulch camps to observe their operation. They went away pleased at what they saw. Nearby farmers, who at first feared for the safety of their families and property, now visited the camp regularly, bringing vegetables and fruits for the men. Many of them would stop out on the work project and talk with the men. All became boosters for the camp program and commented on how they found the men a hard working and gentlemanly group and not the hoodlums they had feared.



We accomplished much in the way of removing brush, in making fire trails. And the men entered into the spirit of the job with pride and enthusiasm. I can truthfully report that they were happy with their lot and appreciative of the opportunity to work. In so doing they had the feeling they were not charitable cases, but earning their keep.

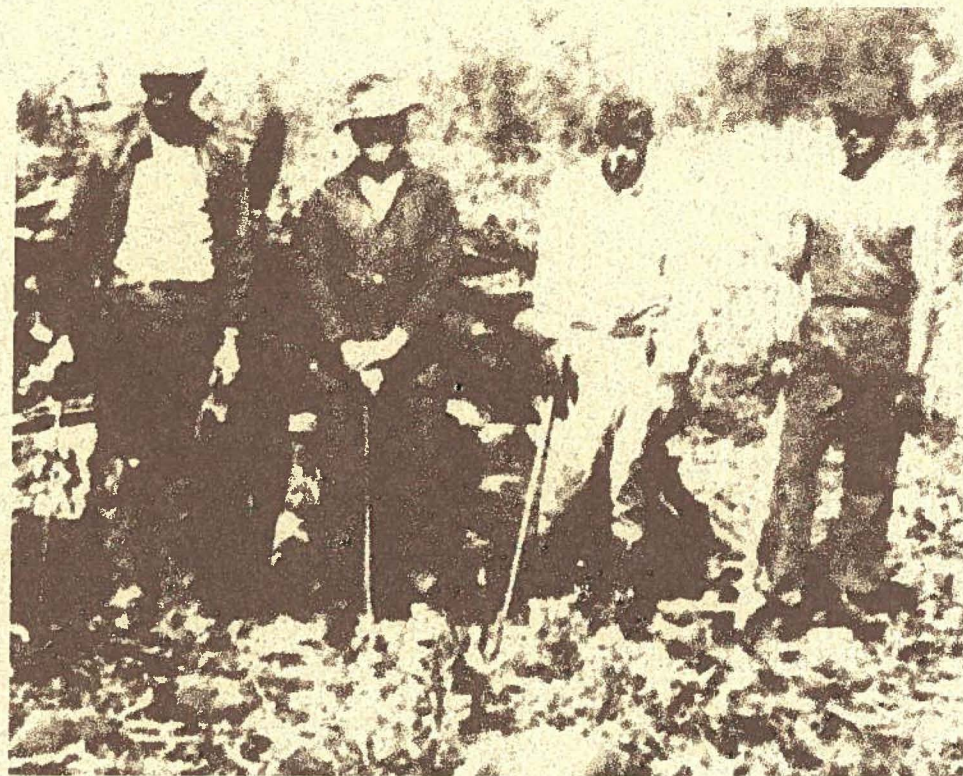
All things must come to an end, however. We were notified the camps were to close on May 15, 1932, and there was a deep silence and an expression of disappointment on their faces when I made the announcement at the dinner table. On May 14 Captain Shearer and Sergeant Lamerton came to camp and each man was given a five dollar bill so he would at least have a little pocket money when he left. The following day we hauled them into Madera so they could catch a freight train out of town, going who knows where.



It all went off very well except for Paddy, who somehow got away from the Swede and got some milk and gasoline and got gloriously drunk. In that state he wandered into Potter's Pool Hall and decided he could lick all of those there, either singly or together. Paddy wound up in jail to sleep it off. He remained in jail for two days and then was escorted to the depot and loaded on the first freight train that came through.

For my own part it was an experience of a lifetime, and I learned much about human nature and how to appreciate it. I had a great respect for these men and they for me. I learned that in dealing with individuals one must be sympathetic to their needs, yet firm in administration. I did my best to recognize these needs and to meet them fairly.

The fire season of 1932 was ready to begin. Practically no one in the California Division of Forestry had been permitted to take any earned vacation for the calendar year 1931. Many of the field men had been required to spend most of the winter season away from their homes and families. Part of their salaries was paid by state warrant rather than cashable check because of the deficit of the state treasury. Yet they had jobs.





## CHAPTER TWO

### State Forestry Labor Camps

#### The Second Winter, 1932-33

It was not long after closing the labor camps on May 15, 1932, at Fresno Crossing and Grub Gulch that the fire season was on again.

This season, unlike that of 1931, was relatively mild in respect to adverse weather. Yet because of the unemployment problem, there were many fires which we were sure were set deliberately so those fighting them could be employed and paid. When one is hungry he will do most anything for a meal, and the 25 cents per hour we were paying pick-up firefighters was much better than nothing at all.\*

To prevent a recurrence of the obvious incendiaryism of 1931 the State made it known that no transient or local people would be hired to fight fires in 1932. Instead we were hiring crews of fire fighters who would be on twenty-four hour duty. Their efforts, plus the voluntary efforts of local landowners, would be the extent of the fire fighting forces for 1932.

I had been allotted a 12-man crew which was housed in the old Indian mission near Coarsegold. They were the only ones paid for fighting wildfires in the county that year. Their salary was \$25 per month plus board. They were on duty 24 hours for seven days per week. We had no difficulty in getting and holding the crew for the salary and conditions of employment. Such units came to be called sit-tight crews or suppression crews.

As I recall, the first rains came about mid-October and the suppression camp closed. Some time later and before the end of that month, Inspector Wood called requesting that I come to his office in Fresno. Chief Deputy State Forester William B. Rider was there and wanted to see me.

Rider greeted me in his usual gruff manner and asked if I was ready to start another labor camp for this winter. I replied, "O.K. When and where?" He went on to say what they had in mind for me was a proposed labor camp near Modesto. It would be an agricultural camp and work on agricultural projects instead of forestry work.

The program was to be a three-way cooperative affair involving Stanislaus County, which would provide the camp housing and process the men to camp through their welfare department. The Modesto, Turlock and Oakdale Irrigation Districts would provide trucks to transport crews from camp to projects and return. The work program which they would supervise consisted of clearing grass and debris from their irrigation ditches.





The Division of Forestry's part of the deal was to manage the camp, feed and clothe the men and have them ready for work. Rider then went on to say that the Division felt there may be some problems arise where three different agencies were involved in this single effort. It would take someone with the ability to compromise and coordinate with all concerned to prevent conflict and confusion. He said that after he and the State Forester had talked it over they had come to the conclusion that I could handle the job.

The date for starting the camp had not yet been set as some details were yet to be ironed out and agreements finalized. I requested of Rider that since the arrangement could present some problems and misunderstandings, and since I was supposed to be a referee of a sort, that someone from the state forester's office provide me with the necessary information as to forestry's part and my authority to carry it out.

This, I felt, would give me equal status with the representatives of the county and the irrigation districts. Rider agreed and assured me that it would be done. It was only a few days later that those instructions and information which Rider assured me I would have come to me in a telegram from the state forester and read something as follows: "Report at once to Agricultural Commissioner Hamlin in Modesto who will instruct you regarding the labor camp there."

As I read this wire I could not help but have the feeling that my own organization had not only let me down, but had virtually put me in the minor role of taking my instructions from another agency. And this error in proper procedure by my own people did result in some minor clashes between Mr.

Hamlin and me until each found the level of our individual responsibilities.

On that day the telegram arrived I packed and drove to Modesto and stayed that night at the Hotel Modesto. The following morning I went to the agricultural commissioner's office to meet Mr. Hamlin.

He was a tall vigorous man, and introduced me to another occupant of the office, a Mr. Tucker, the county sealer of weights and measures. (One item of interest here is that Mr. Tucker subsequently was appointed state director of agriculture, I think by Governor Knight). Mr. Hamlin, after the first courtesies, showed me a telegram he had received from the state forester to the effect that I was to contact him (Mr. Hamlin) and from him get my instructions on the camp program. I did kind of a slow burn but I don't think it was noticed.

We sat in his office until noon while he told me what they had decided about how the camp was to be run, and the work projects that the crews would work on. It was to be a 125 man camp and would be housed in a warehouse the county had rented for the purpose.

### Camp Gilman

After lunch we drove out to the proposed camp site. It was about ten miles west of the town of Ceres and on a railroad siding called Gilman. The warehouse was a large building about four hundred feet in length by about thirty feet or so in width. It was set up about four feet above ground level with corrugated metal sides and roof. There was a loading platform on the railroad track side. As we opened the door and went inside it was like walking



into an ice box. There were cracks in the floor and it was eighteen feet from floor to eaves.

There were also farmhouses near and I could see that camp limits for the men would have to be set so there would be no interference between the men and the adjacent farm residents.

Hamlin said the county would supply the lumber and provide carpenters to partition the building and we laid out with chalk marks on the floor partition locations for the kitchen, messhall and my sleeping quarters in the storage room for clothes and tobacco.

It was at this point that Mr. Hamlin and I had our first disagreement. The partitions were to be seven feet high, and where the roof was 18 feet there left a considerable overhead space opening. Mr. Hamlin wanted to locate the shower room up against the kitchen partition wall. To this I objected on the grounds that steam from bathing bodies would permeate the kitchen and be unhealthy for the food preparation.

I suggested a better location would be to house in a portion of the loading platform and thereby let the steam exhaust to the outside of the building. Hamlin said this would add to the cost for the county and anyway, he, as their representative, would make the final decisions.

The argument was finally settled when I suggested that if he were making all decisions that he also move out and run the camp and I would return to my home in Madera. As a result the showers were put out on the platform, and from that time on until the camp closed Mr. Hamlin and I were the best of friends and worked in close harmony on all problems that arose.

I stayed at the Modesto Hotel and went each day to the camp to direct the carpenters.

About the third day the supply truck came in from Sacramento with the kitchen range, food supplies, and cots, mattresses, and blankets. It was good to see cots and mattresses. We could provide the men with beds and not require them to sleep on the floor covered with straw, as was our lot at camps the previous winter. The truck did not, however, bring heating stoves except one small sheet-iron stove.

Since there were no locks for the doors, with delivery of the supplies I gave up my hotel room and moved out to the camp. Mr. Hamlin also brought out three men from the welfare department to help me.

The winter of 1932 was one of the coldest that had so far been recorded. In fact, it was so severe that it froze most of the citrus trees in the valley. That first night was pretty tough for it was cold. We set up the small stove, but with 18 feet or so of stove pipe with no damper, the heat all went up the chimney. In any event such a small heating unit could make little impact in a sheet-iron covered building of that size. The four of us huddled around the stove eating our supper of cold canned beef and crackers, then set up our beds and crawled in under all the blankets we could pile on.

Next morning I went to Mr. Hamlin's office and phoned the Sacramento supply warehouse to rush me some oil drum stoves. Fortunately, they had a truck just leaving for Fresno, so we got the stoves delivered and in operation that day.

With the effort of my small crew the camp was beginning to take shape so more men could be received. Much to my surprise Mr. Hamlin came into camp and with him was Blackie, my old cook



from Grub Gulch. He had contacted Inspector Wood in Fresno to find out where my camp was and as he said, he caught the first freight train out of Fresno headed north. In Modesto he went to the welfare department and asked to come out to camp. They in turn contacted Mr. Hamlin who brought him out.

Blackie took over the kitchen and selected from the men who came to camp two cooks and two bakers. The cooks prepared and served the meals and when they were finished at night, the two bakers moved in to make the bread and pastry. They ended their shift as the cooks came in the morning.

The smell of the baking wafting through my quarters at night made me so hungry that I often got up and had midnight snacks of hot bread, doughnuts, cookies or pie and coffee. I got a little excess roll around the midsection too.

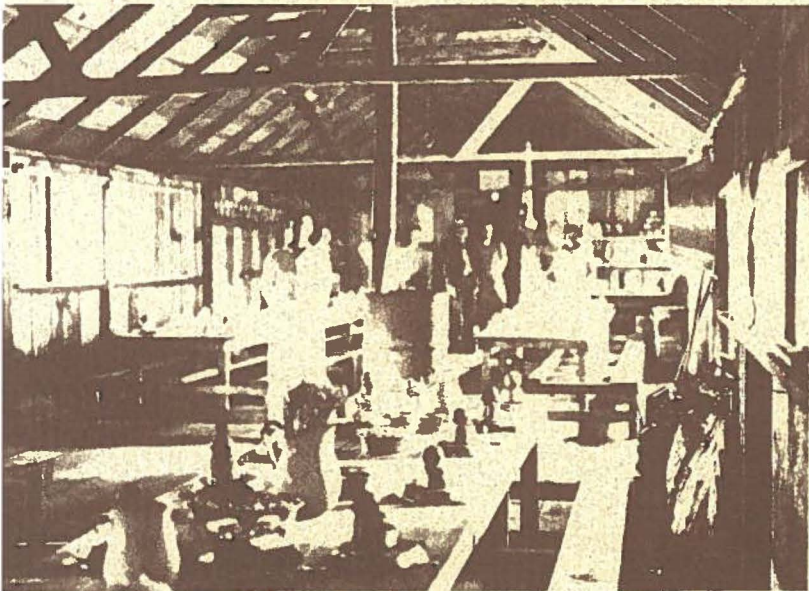
I learned something about a cook's method of feeding large groups of people and not going over his meal allowance. I had noticed that each time a new group of men came into camp there were increased amounts of cake, cookies, doughnuts and pies on the table and the newcomers ate heavily of these sweets. I inquired of Blackie why he put the extra sweets out as new men came in, and he explained that it helped him keep his meal costs from running over allowance.

He said these men have not been eating regularly and what they had eaten was most likely soup and crackers or stale bread handed out by some charitable organization. Because of their not having the proper food they acquired a craving for sweets. So, he said, cookies and doughnuts and pies and such were cheap food, and the men would fill up on it and not eat so heavily of the more expensive foods such as meats, bread and potatoes, thereby helping him to keep his meal costs down.

We were now ready to provide crews from the camp for the work projects. I felt, however, before the men were assigned from camp to work that it was necessary that each agency involved be fully aware of the responsibilities to be shared.

I knew Mr. Hamlin but had never met anyone from the irrigation districts. I therefore asked Hamlin to call a meeting in his office of the three of us involved so we could establish the position and responsibilities, and thereby preclude any misunderstanding which could involve the work crews out on the job. At this meeting we went over in detail that which was expected of each in representing our various organizations in the camp operations.

Mr. Hamlin stated his part was to provide the housing facility and supply the men, who would be





processed through the county welfare department. The representative for the three irrigation districts involved said they would provide trucks to transport the men from camp to projects and return them to camp. Work time would be eight hours portal to portal six days per week. They would also have one of their paid foremen drive the truck and supervise the crew on the project.

It was agreed the crews would be 15-man size. I suggested and it was agreed that I would designate one man for each crew to be its foreman and spokesman, and their paid foreman would work through him on all matters pertaining to the crew. If any problems arose on the job their man, regardless of time of day, would bring the crew back to camp and present the problem to me for solution. In no case were the irrigation people to undertake disciplinary action or to debate issues with the men. (This action proved to be a sound approach, for throughout the whole period of the camp all worked harmoniously except for one small incident which I will discuss later.)

For my part I would supervise the men in camp and have them ready to load on the trucks at seven o'clock each morning. I would supply the foreman a list of the names of each man in the crew and the name of the camp foreman I had designated. I also agreed to handle any disciplinary problems that might arise.

After this understanding with the others I went back to camp and organized the men into fifteen-man crews, designating a foreman for each crew and explained their responsibilities and relationship to the irrigation foreman.

I prepared a list of names of each crew member and called them off each morning as crews prepared to load into the trucks. Any name that did not respond to call was sought out to see why. There was no malingering, and failure to respond usually was credited to illness.

The camp complement of 125 was complete and I had briefed the men on how the camp was to be





run and their individual responsibilities to it. It was also made clear that no one was forced to stay, and if anyone became dissatisfied with their lot they could leave at any time. Apparently all were satisfied as none left and only two were fired from camp for infractions of rules.

Everything was working out well in the camp and on the work projects. Then I came down with a severe case of the flu and was carted off to Madera where I was confined to home for about ten days. Arthur Mullins, our assistant ranger from Tulare County, was sent to the camp as my replacement.

When I was ready to go back to work Inspector Wood called and said Chief Deputy Rider was in Wood's office and wanted to see me. Of course, I wondered why. Rider said, "We have a camp at Coulterville which has been in operation for about a month and has been giving us a great deal of trouble. So we want you to go there and see what in the hell has to be done to straighten it out."

I asked who was running it now and he said Ranger X, but he didn't seem to be able to keep the men under control. I said that it might be embarrassing to Ranger X to have another ranger come into his camp to restore order.

Rider said, "We are moving X down to your former camp at Gilman and the switch is scheduled for tomorrow."

### **Coulterville Camp**

Rider had fairly stated the situation when he said the camp was not operating orderly. When I got to Coulterville Camp about four o'clock next day there was a feeling of tension. The men were sullen

and indifferent. After dinner that night the men became quarrelsome and six different fist fights took place in the road fronting the camp.

One of the men told me that fights were a common occurrence but no one in authority did anything about it. It was obvious that something must be done here and quickly to get order restored. As a start I gathered the twelve men who were in the fist fights, put them in the truck and hauled them into Merced and sent them on their way.

Back at camp again I had just settled down for the night when there was a big disturbance in the barracks. I went to investigate and I found that one of the men, an Indian, was apparently drunk and in a mood for a fight.

When I started to take him outside he pulled a knife and lunged at me, but I sidestepped and hit him on the jaw, knocking him out temporarily. With the help of the other men we tied his hand and foot and threw him in the truck and hauled him to Merced, where I untied him and left him asleep alongside the station depot.

Back at camp I found a tin can by the Indian's bed with some liquid that smelled suspiciously like extracts. The camps were supplied extracts in gallon jugs, generally vanilla and lemon flavors. These were always kept by the cook in his kitchen stores, so if what I smelled in the can was extract the cook could be involved.

I got the cook out of bed to see what he knew about it. He said he had given out none of it but did notice that some of the extract appeared to be missing. To prevent any more raids on the extract supply I locked it up in my quarters to ration out as needed for cooking and baking.



The night was not over for me, however, as two more men in the barracks became violently ill. I discovered that they, too, had extract in tin cans which had apparently eaten into the tin and poisoned the men who drank it. So another trip was made to Merced to deposit the two sick men at the County Hospital. I never found out if they survived the ordeal or not.

By the time I got back into camp the sun was just appearing over the horizon. It had been a hectic first day on the job; three trips into Merced and back and the camp was minus fifteen from its complement. I searched the barracks to see that no more extract was hidden about in tin cans, and finding none knew there would be no more because I had the supply locked up.

At breakfast that morning I talked to the men, setting forth what would be expected of them if they chose to remain in camp. Any infractions would mean a trip down the road and there would be no return.

I learned that one cause of dissension among the men was that they had been in camp now for about a month and had not had a bath or hot water to wash their clothes. The shower house was built and the stove for heating the water was in. But it had never been hooked up for the need of a few pipe fittings. It seems they had repeatedly been ordered from the warehouse but never delivered.

Such an omission could no longer be tolerated, so with my own money I purchased the needed fittings from a local store. And we worked all day and half the night hooking the system up and getting it into operation, which gave hot water to both kitchen and showers.

I believe the only person that had his bath regularly was a little Filipino who would fill a wash tub with the ice cold water, climb in, sit down, and with a wash basin pour water over his head and down his body. It gave me the cold chills to watch him.

The next day was declared clean-up day. The men were kept in from the work projects and spent the day taking showers and washing their clothes. One cannot imagine how this little bit of consideration raised the morale of the entire camp.

There had been some very prosperous gold mines, like the Mary Harrison and others near Coulterville. It was not uncommon after a heavy rain to now and then pick up a small gold nugget in the unpaved streets. The little stream at the rear of the camp would also yield colors in the gold pan. The cook was constantly running down to the creek to recover his fry pans that the men had borrowed to use as gold pans. Most of the men had the gold fever and spent their time off panning or searching the streets in hopes of finding a gold nugget.

There was the iron pyrites or fool's gold that created much excitement until they found that although it looked like gold, it wasn't. We had in camp a young Jewish fellow who gathered a can full of it and was about to leave camp headed for the Mint. He was so emotional when he learned the truth that he went to his bunk and cried.

The camp had assumed an air of harmony and contentment. On Christmas Eve the men brought in a fir tree and decorated it with pieces of colored paper and sang Christmas carols until midnight. I, too, was contented, for I loved the Sierra, especially this Mother Lode area and its history. I had been



congratulating myself on my good fortune of being assigned this camp. While we did have snow now and then it was still more pleasant than being confined at Gilman with its cold north winds and cussed fog.

relieve me at Coulterville, and since there seemed to be an urgency for me to get to Gilman, I was not to await Moberg's arrival.

### Back at Gilman Camp

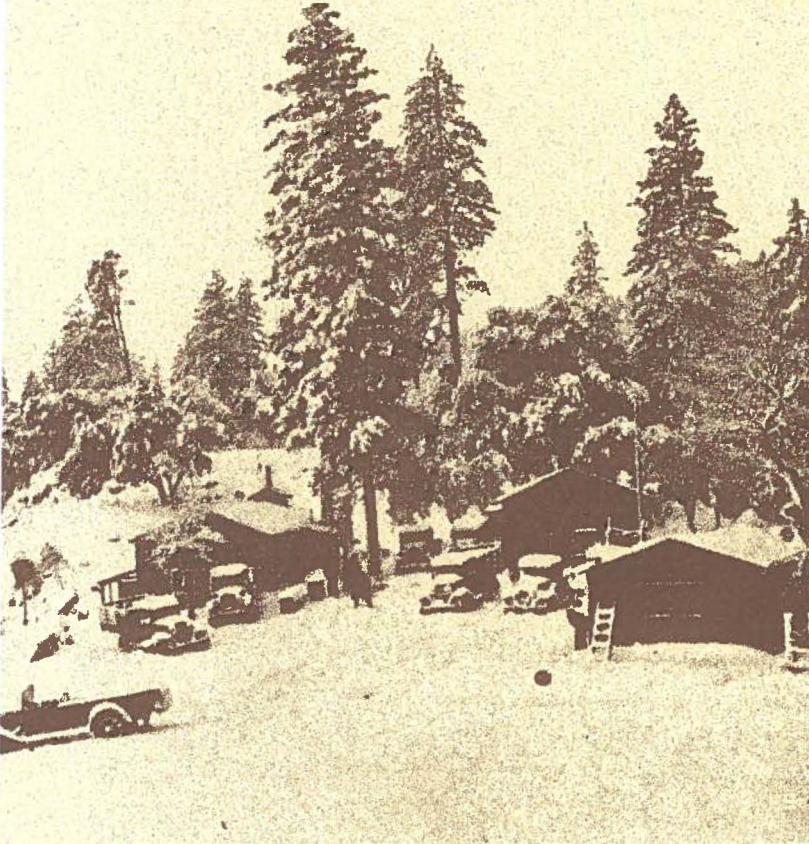
As I walked into the building at Gilman I was greeted with a chorus of loud cheers and handshakes. Apparently all were glad to see me back. They had prepared a sign in foot high letters on wrapping paper which read "Welcome home, Mr. Winters." The men were reluctant to comment on why the sudden change in Rangers and suggested I get the details from Mr. Hamlin.

It was a good camp and all seemed satisfied with it when I left to go home with the flu, and I was at a loss to understand what went wrong. Mr. Hamlin came to camp next morning and told me the whole story.

The first problem arose when Ranger X demanded that a separate toilet and shower be built and installed for the exclusive use of himself and the two 16-year-old boys he had brought along with him to Coulterville and also into this camp.

It had always been my practice to use the same facilities as the men and to take meals at their table. I felt that this would be one way of showing the men that I was one of them and not separate or above their level. Arthur Mullens, whom X relieved, must have also had the same thoughts for he used the facilities along with the men and ate his meals at the same table.

Mr. Hamlin objected to the extra expense of building a separate toilet and shower. This difference of opinion apparently grew and festered as



It was not for me, however, for the day after Christmas Inspector Wood called saying there had been trouble at the Gilman Camp and the State Forester wanted me to get right down there today. Wood said Ranger Arthur Moberg was on his way to



time went on. The cooks, and especially Blackie, got upset when they had to set aside a special table for the Ranger and his two boys and prepare special meals for them.

It also did not sit well with the men to see this special table served steaks while they ate stew. As Blackie later told me, it would not have created so much resentment if this special table could have been served at a time other than when the main mess was served.

The men came to resent the two boys whom the ranger used as his lieutenants. He passed out his orders to the men through them. These boys were much too immature to handle such assignments.

With X's blessing the men set up a kangaroo court and conducted mock trials, much to the humiliation of the victim who had been chosen because of a dislike for him. There was also a young man in camp who was not particularly bright, but thought himself to be a great radio announcer. They had nailed a can on a stick and called it a homemade microphone and had him talking into it thinking he was actually broadcasting over the air. There were a few besides X and his boys who thought it amusing, but the majority viewed it in total disgust.

The majority of the men were becoming uneasy after about two weeks of these tactics and got together a committee to lay the problem before Mr. Hamlin. On his next trip to camp the committee took him aside and said they liked the camp as it had been run by Mullen and Winters. But if the present administration continued they would be forced to leave. I guess this attitude expressed by the men, together with his differences with X, caused

Hamlin to seek advice from his board of supervisors. They instructed him to contact the state forester and give him the choice of changing rangers or closing the camp.

Choices of this kind always shook up the state forester pretty well, especially if he thought there were any political overtones attached. He agreed with Hamlin to make the change that same day and sent word to X to report back to his assigned ranger unit. So that's how I lost out in spending the winter in the good mountain climate at Coulterville and spent the rest of it under the fog blanket at Gilman.

It did not take much time to restore peace and harmony at the camp. There was no more kangaroo court or broadcasting. Such tactics are bad, especially when imposed on a group who, through hard times, were trying to live and make the best of a bad situation. I have always believed it proper to uphold and respect the dignity of the individual regardless of his intelligence level or his social status. I believe adhering to this rule has helped me immeasurably in my relations, not only with the men in the camps, but with others throughout my life.

I would not want to imply here that there were no problems that required a meeting head-on as they arose. When one puts 125 men into a space of 300 feet by about 30 feet they are thrown in close contact with one another and minor differences do arise.

We had here a range in ages from 16 to men well into their 60s. The younger ones like to make noise as youth will, while the older ones wanted to play cards or read in silence. I made it a point to always be among the men while they were in the



barracks at night. In this way I could sort of quiet down the noisy ones and tell the older ones they, too, must cooperate.

Each evening after dinner I opened the window separating my quarters from the barracks and issued tobacco, clothes and medicine to the men. I noted that there were two of the younger men who did not use tobacco but drew their ration each night. I also noted that they were playing poker with tobacco as their ante and stake. Some were accumulating a considerable supply of tobacco, and I learned that their intent was to gather a rather large supply and then leave camp and sell it on the outside. After spending the money they got from the sale they would get back into this camp or another.

This type of dealing I could not permit, so when they began to accumulate a supply I would require them to give it all back and it would then be returned to the supply room. There was some resentment at first, but when they found that it would not be tolerated, they accepted it cheerfully and had fun gambling with it anyway.

The winter was cold and the large metal building hard to heat. For our wood supply, Mr. Hamlin had made a deal with the Uri Brothers. They were dairy farmers down on the river bottom. We could cut the wood from their place, taking half and leaving them half. We also disposed of the brush by burning.

I assigned a 15-man crew to the wood cutting job and the foreman was Bill Snell, a woodsman who had been a logging boss most of his life. There was a man in the crew who was in his early thirties, a fine husky chap and a good hand. One day while cutting wood with an axe, he had an epileptic

seizure. As it came on he threw the axe, barely missing one of the other workers. Although we kept him on the crew he was allowed only to handle the saw or pile brush.

I discussed this problem with the physician at the county hospital as I had two other men in camp that had similar seizures. The doctor told me that nothing could be done for the epileptic and the only danger was to his own person. As the seizure takes effect the person's jaw will set, and there is danger if his tongue happens to be between the teeth it could be bitten off. It was rather frightening to me as I had never seen an epileptic before and knew nothing of how it affected them. I learned, however, that the seizure is sudden and before losing consciousness the patient usually screams out.

Armed with this information, whenever any of my three epileptics screamed out with a seizure I would rush to him and jam the handle of my pocket knife between his teeth before the jaws set, then sit on him so he would not bruise his body to severely while he was frothing at the mouth and thrashing about on the floor. It is a most pitiful sight to see. And when they come out of it in about 10 or 15 minutes they are so embarrassed and want to get away and hide for awhile.

I would never comment about it and cautioned others in the barracks to proceed with what they were doing as though nothing had happened. I think it helped to ease the feelings of the victim when no issue was made of it.

While the one man continued to work on the wood crew, the other two I kept in camp on yard detail and other minor jobs where I could keep an eye on them. One of them commented about it to me



one day and I asked what would happen if he had a seizure while riding the freight trains, and he very casually said, "Why hell, I would fall off and get run over."

One day an incident occurred which almost caused an irrigation district foreman to get his ears severely stretched. The various camp foremen that I had designated for that particular crew were not happy with the way this irrigation district foreman treated them. It seemed that while they were down in the ditches working, this foreman walked up and down the bank above them. This gave the men the feeling of being prisoners with a guard looking down their necks. Apparently their resentment had been communicated to the foreman, and he implied that the men were not much better than prisoners.

I suggested to my foremen that they ignore the man's attitude and I would talk to the irrigation representative about it. But it happened before I got the chance. This particular morning I checked the crew out and closed the door and prepared to call up another crew when I heard a loud disturbance outside. As I ran out, I saw one of my men standing in the back of the truck holding the irrigation foreman by both ears with his feet off the ground and shaking him violently.

I requested my man to let him go and as he did so, the man ran to the front of the truck. It seemed that the trouble started when someone made a remark that did not set well with the man and he rushed up to the back of the truck to tell the crew off. This was his bad mistake, for in doing so he was in reach of those inside and they took advantage of the opportunity and struck back. The man had violated his instructions, for if he had any complaints they were to be taken up with me and not the crew.

I had the men come back into the barracks and sent the foreman and his truck back to his headquarters. I had a meeting that day with Hamlin and the irrigation representative who was indignant about the treatment of his employee. I said I would not send a crew out with this man again and suggested they assign another more understanding employee to replace him. At first he refused, saying they would first give up the whole project. But Mr. Hamlin backed me up and a new man was assigned. From then on all worked out well.

One of the crews was working in the Modesto district and crossed over the river bridge on the way to the project each day. There were always the "professional" hobos camped under the bridge. They preferred to live this way than come in to a camp where they were required to work. They made their living by begging on the streets and salvaging food from the garbage cans at the back doors of restaurants.

One day when the Modesto crew came in from work the foreman complained to Blackie that they had been shorted on their lunch. Blackie came to me about it, saying he had personally checked all of the lunch boxes for the proper number of sandwiches before they were picked up by each crew foreman. He knew this crew on that day had the same amount as they always had. Other foremen were asked if their lunches were sufficient and all said yes they were.

I told Blackie to put in more sandwiches in the Modesto crew box, which he did. Several days later the foreman again complained about not enough lunch, although they were getting an increased amount over the other crews. Blackie was very disturbed and asked for advice since he in no way



wanted to have the men hungry. I told him not to increase the amount any more and I would see if I could find out where the food was going.

The next morning after the crew pulled out I followed in my car at a distance to be unnoticed. When the truck came to the river bridge it pulled to the side of the road and stopped. The hobos from under the bridge came out and the foreman took out the lunch box and was busily handing out sandwiches as I drove up and stopped about twenty feet away.

When the foreman saw me he hastily put the box into the truck and they drove on off to work. The incident was never mentioned either by the foreman or by me. There was never thereafter any mention of not enough sandwiches provided in their lunch box. I guess the foreman had run into one of his old acquaintances living under the bridge and decided to provide him and others with a handout.

One interesting feature of our camp was its weekly newspaper called the *Gilman Times*. (*A diligent search of state and county libraries and administrative offices in 1968 failed to reveal a single copy of the Gilman Times.*) It was written, or rather hand printed, on wrapping paper by a young man who had formerly worked in a newspaper office. It consisted of four sheets printed on two sides and gave all the news and happenings of the camp. Since it was printed by hand only a few copies were made and these passed from hand to hand and were read by all.

It seems that in all camps there must be an Irishman who answers to the name of Paddy. So it was that a Paddy came to our camp at Gilman. He was a jovial person with ruddy complexion and

twinkling blue eyes. He was one of those Irishmen who had always worked as a laborer in a railroad gang. While he was most willing to work, he had a bad heart condition. His legs would swell badly and he would have trouble at times getting his breath, and especially at night. He had an intense fear of dying and confided in me that he did not want to be alone when the end came.

Many nights when he had trouble breathing he would come to my door and I would bring him into my room and talk to him until he could breathe more easily. I would then walk him back to his bed and sit with him until he fell asleep. I felt so concerned for him, for although he was a man I would judge to be in his late sixties, he would cling to me like a child as I sat with him.

Any sick cases that occurred among the men were treated in the clinic at the county hospital. I would take them in and usually take over the medicines to administer as directed. On the day I took Paddy to the clinic there were other chores to attend to and I left him to pick him up later.

The doctor had given him some pills for his heart condition. But somehow I forgot to have Paddy hand them over to me so I could see they were given according to directions. He had taken some of the pills and that evening before bedtime commented on how much better he felt. I thought next morning that he must be better as he had not disturbed me during the night. However, when he did not appear at the breakfast table I was fearful that he might have passed on in the night. I went to his bed and was relieved to find him in a deep sleep, so I did not try to waken him.

Paddy awoke about noon and said the pills sure helped and he only had to take two doses of them. I



looked at the pill box and it was empty, and I saw that the instructions read take one every four hours. I asked Paddy if he had followed the directions and he said, "Sure I did. It said take four every one hour, which I did, and in an hour I took another four."

I took the pill box back to the clinic and told the doctor what Paddy had done, and he said, "My God, is he still alive?"

He gave me another supply of his medicine, but I kept it and administered it as directed thereafter. Paddy stayed with the camp until it closed in May. He did light chores around the camp to keep busy and it gave him a feeling of independence since he was doing something for his keep. On the day the camp closed he came to bid me goodbye, and as he turned to go his way I could not help but wonder where he would go and what would be his ultimate fate. Would he, as he so feared die alone, or would he somehow or somewhere find someone to sit with and comfort him when the end came?

The men of this camp were a fine group of people, all of them just average citizens who were temporarily unemployed but all were Americans and as such had a deep faith in their country and its future.

We had a small radio in the barracks and in March of 1933, when President Franklin Roosevelt made his inaugural address there was a great silence that fell over the place as each man bent forward to listen. It is hard for me now to describe the great lift to the morale of the group when he said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Each in his own way seemed to express his feeling that now the corner had been turned and all things would soon be right again.

Because the men were well satisfied with the camp life and their work, there was no turnover. There was, however, one of the 16-year-olds who decided he might do better on the outside, as he expressed it.

Mr. Hamlin brought in a replacement on Saturday. He was a hulk of a man with a cast in one eye and a negative attitude toward the world in general. As I did with all who came to camp, I explained the camp rules and the camp limits. He wanted to be outfitted with new clothes but we had a rule which applied in all camps statewide that no clothes were issued until one week after entry. This rule had come about from some bad experiences with men coming to camp and outfitted with clothes and slipping out of camp at night without ever a day's work on the job.

The following day was Sunday and the men were out in the yard doing their laundry. We had no wash tubs or washboards, but some five-gallon kerosene cans which were used instead. The new man was scornful of this crude way of washing clothes, and contrary to what I had told him about keeping within camp limits he went to the nearest ranch house and borrowed the lady's wash tub and washboard. He never got to use it, however, as I was





in the yard as he returned and had him take it right back. He called me a dictator along with some other unprintable names, so I loaded him in the car and took him back into Modesto, and that ended his camp career.

It was difficult to house the cooks and bakers in the main barracks due to their irregular working hours. Cooks got out at four in the morning and usually wanted to get to bed early at night. Then the bakers working all night had to get their sleep and rest during the day. There was a vacant farmhouse close to camp and Mr. Hamlin got the County to rent it as Cooks' quarters.

Blackie had picked some good cooks from the men in camp and his kitchen ran like clockwork. There was, however, one incident that occurred which in a way was most unfortunate. One of the cooks began to get sullen and at times had the appearance of being slightly under the influence of liquor. When I first noticed it, I asked Blackie if he also thought the man had somehow got some liquor. He said the man at times acted like it. I explored the possibility of his getting into the extracts but was assured otherwise.

While we had established camp limits for the men so they in no way would mingle with the nearby farmers or annoy them, we did encourage outsiders to visit the camp and talk with the men. One morning Blackie came to me and said there were two whole hams and two sides of bacon missing from the supply room, and that the cook we had suspected of drinking had not reported for duty.

I went over to the Cooks' quarters and found him in bed. He had about half of a fifth of whiskey beside him and two gallon jugs of wine under his bed. When I aroused him, he became very

belligerent and would not tell me where he got the liquor or how he was able to get it. It finally came out, however, for it seemed that one of the nearby farmers while visiting the camp had struck up a deal with this cook to supply him with wine and whiskey for ham and bacon.

I went to this farmer and confronted him with the confession of the cook and he denied it all. But he would not consent to come to camp and face the cook with his denial. I said, "O.K., I will get the sheriff out with a search warrant to search your place for the meat I believe you have traded for, and if found, will swear out a warrant for the arrest of both you and the cook."

At this he confessed and pleaded with me not to have him arrested. He carried the hams and bacon back to camp and took back his two jugs of wine. He assured me this would not happen again. I told him never to again set foot in the camp, and with that dropped the whole affair as far as he was concerned.

The cook, however, proved to be more difficult to handle. He had broken the rules of camp and as he well knew, that meant he had to go. I took him into Modesto and would have dropped him off there and forgotten about it except he became abusive and threatened to come back to camp at night and burn the whole damned thing to the ground. For this I took him to the police station and swore out a warrant for his arrest.

I appeared at his trial some two weeks later and the judge gave him a severe reprimand and a six months jail sentence, suspended on the basis that he get out of the county and stay out. This trial was held in Ceres and the last I saw of the cook, he was walking down the railroad tracks headed south.



Throughout the time the camp was in operation, there were only a few unpleasant situations such as that described above. On the whole they were a fine group of men, satisfied to accept things as they were, and with a faith that times would eventually get better. They were most cooperative with me and considerate to one another. They worked hard on the job and played hard when time permitted. My association with them gave me a very fine insight into human nature and how best to meet and overcome adversities. It was an experience of a lifetime. All such things, however, must come to an end. And it came to this camp just before May 15. The paymaster came down from Sacramento and each man was given a five dollar bill so each would have at least that amount in his pocket to start out on.

For our last supper together I had arranged for Mr. Hamlin, the chairman of the board of supervisors, and the representatives of the irrigation districts to join us. Each of them gave a talk to the group expressing their appreciation for the contribution they had made to the county. I concluded by thanking all for the cooperation they had given me throughout the whole period of the camp operation.

The next morning after breakfast the camp was broken. I had arranged with Blackie to make an individual lunch for each man. He and I worked most of the night in their preparation. One lunch was placed beside each plate at the breakfast table.

Before leaving each of them came to shake hands and bid me goodbye. It was a sad departing and I noticed more than once a rough hand stealthily wiping away a tear as a man turned to walk on down the road.

This was the last year of the state labor camps under the supervision of the Division of Forestry. The idea was carried on, however, in succeeding years through the Civilian Conservation Corps, the State Emergency Relief Camps and similar programs. The California Division of Forestry played a vital role in such camps but principally in the planning and direction of wildland conservation projects and forest fire control, not in camp management.





