

SAVING MEN AND FORESTS—THE CCC ON PELICAN LAKE

By Dr. James D. Henderson

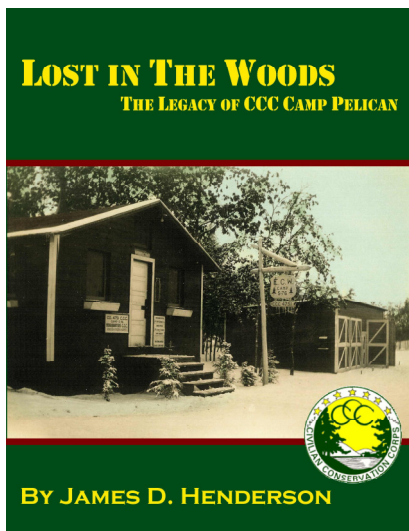
On a Sunday morning in September 1935, an M&I passenger train stopped at the Nisswa depot. On board were nearly 200 men and boys, members of CCC Company 4751. Waiting at the depot were a group of men and trucks from the Minnesota Emergency Conservation Work group better known as the Civilian Conservation Corps or CCC. The trucks transported them to a site on the southeastern shore of Pelican Lake. A mess hall was already under construction, but barracks and other buildings had yet to be built. Tents were erected and the work of setting up Camp Pelican began.

The CCC enrollees were involved in a number of activities on Pelican Lake. These included fishing (both in winter and summer), swimming, ice-skating, ice harvesting and the creation of a lake sounding map during the winter of 1937–38. In June 1938, during a lake survey, water samples were taken from Pelican Lake by CCC enrollees. Samples from the deepest parts of the lake were obtained to determine oxygen, carbon dioxide, mineral and carbonate content. Water visibility was evaluated using Secchi disk readings.

The CCC boys at Camp Pelican worked on a number of projects in the Pillsbury and Crow Wing State Forests. These included dam building on several area lakes, fire lookout tower construction and tree planting. As a result forest conservation and management was much improved.

The employment the young men had in the Civilian Conservation Corps, during the hard times of the depression years of the 1930s, was a lifesaver for them. Most of the money they earned went back to families at home and provided needed assistance to their parents who were often jobless themselves.

Dr. James D. Henderson, a PLA member and summer resident on Pelican Lake near the old campsite, recently published a book about the camp.



LOST IN THE WOODS—THE LEGACY OF CCC CAMP PELICAN describes the camp's history, how it was formed, the men and boys who built it, the projects they worked on, and what camp life was like. Details and construction photos of the diversion ditch from Lake Ossawinnamakee to Pelican Lake are presented. The book includes a roster of over 600 members that lived in the camp between 1935 and 1938 when the camp closed.

The book is available for purchase at local bookstores, the Crow Wing County and Nisswa Area Historical Societies and online from the author at <http://pelmarpublishing.webhop.net>. The author may be contacted at pelmarpub@gmail.com.

