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Civilian Public Service Camp Newsletter Collection

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1941-1944

1 box (0.25 linear ft.)

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Born out of a unique collaboration between the United States government and the historic peace churches, the first Civilian Public Service camps were established in 1941 to provide conscientious objectors the option of performing alternative service under civilian command. Nearly 12,000 COs served in the 152 CPS camps in projects ranging from soil conservation, agriculture, and forestry to psychiatric care. While the work was ostensibly of national importance, many COs complained that the labor was menial at best, and with their churches and families responsible for financing the camps, and no ability to earn wages, the families of many COs found themselves impoverished both during and after the war.

During their time off, many of the men in the CPS camps published newsletters that offer insight into the conditions of internment, the prisoners' religious motives, social life inside the camps, and news from home and the war. This collection consists of newsletters published in camps in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Indiana, Maryland, and Colorado.

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Background

When conscripted during the First World War, members of the historic peace churches (Quakers, Mennonites, and Brethren) were typically provided with a stark choice: serve the military in a non-combatant role, which many refused, or serve in prison. The resulting experiences of conscientious objectors during the war, both the brutality inflicted upon them by their guards and their ardent non-compliance was viewed by both government and church as problematic. With the approach of the Second World War, leaders of the peace churches therefore banded together to work with the federal government to create a more satisfactory system for dealing with individuals who refused participation in the military for religious, moral, or ethical reasons.

As a result of peace church lobbying, the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 included a provision for conscientious objectors (COs) from any tradition to "be assigned to work of national importance under civilian direction." Beginning in May 1941, COs were interned in barracks in a series of Civilian Public Service camps around the country, all funded by the churches, and assigned arduous work that ranged from forestry to firefighting, soil conservation and agriculture, and psychiatric care. Many internees refused even this accommodation with the military and several camps were subject to work stoppages or strikes during the later years of the war. The most non-compliant internees were remanded to federal prison. The camps remained in operation until March 1947, a year and a half after the end of the conflict.

Scope of collection

This small collections contains newsletters and copies of two letters written by conscientious objectors interned in Civilian Public Service camps during the Second World War. The newsletters offer insight into the conditions of internment, the prisoners' religious motives, the war, and social life inside the camps.

Inventory

"Action", Publication of the CPS Conference on Social Action, CPS III, Mancos, Colorado

1943 Oct-1944 June

Box 1: 1

"Atom", CPS Camp 11, Ashburnham, Massachusetts

1942 May-Aug

Box 1: 2

"Bluffton Peace Sentinel", Bluffton, Indiana

1941 Oct-1942 Mar

Box 1: 3

"Builders", Camp Wellston, Vol. IV, No. 1

1944 Jan

Box 1: 4

"Bulletin, The", CPS Camp 32, West Campton, New Hampshire

1942 Dec., 1943 Apr-Jun

Box 1: 5

"53", Civilian Public Service Camp #53, Gorham, New Hampshire, Issue #3

1943 Mar-Apr

Box 1: 6

"Columbian, The", Cascade Locks, Oregon Vol. 1, No. 18

1943 Feb

Box 1: 7

"Germfask News Letter", Germfask, Michigan, No. 5

1944 Oct 13

Box 1: 8

"Harmony", Civilian Public Service Camp No. 34, Bowie, Maryland

1942 Sept-1943 Jan

Box 1: 9

"Irrigator, The", Trenton CPS Camp 94

1943 Apr-June

Box 1: 10

"Jasper-Pulaski Peace Sentinel", Medaryville, Indiana

1942 June

Box 1: 11

"More of the Truth About the Lewisburg Fast", A Reply by Jim Watson to a letter from Bennett

undated

Box 1: 12

"Olive Branch, The", Denison, Iowa Vol. I, No. 3

1941 Nov 4

Box 1: 13

"Plowshare", Merom, Indiana

1941 Oct-1942 Dec

Box 1: 14

"San Dimas Rattler"

1943 June

Box 1: 15

"Special Supplement to New Roots", Issue # 7, Royalston, Massachusetts CPS Camp

1942 Oct

Box 1: 16

Summary of Letters received on "Towards greater opportunity"

1942 Aug 22

Box 1: 17

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Acquired from Eugene Povirk, 2009.

Digitized content

Most of the material in this collection has been digitized and is available online through our digital repository, Credo.

Processing Information

Processed by Kristen Johnson, January 2011.

Related Material

Among other collections in SCUA pertaining to World War II-era conscientious objection, see:

William K. Hefner Papers (MS 129): pertaining only to Hefner's post-war, post-internment career

Stephen Siteman Papers (MS 503)

Robert and Waldemar Schultze Papers (MS 528)

Language:

English

Acknowledgments

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Search terms

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Civilian Public Service--Periodicals

Conscientious objectors--United States

Pacifists--United States

World War, 1939-1945--Conscientious objectors--United States

Genres and formats

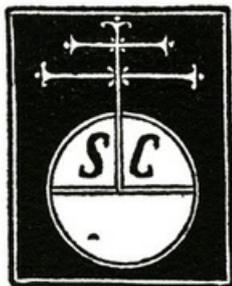
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