

Civilian Conservation Corps and Watch Tower Lodge

In 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the public work relief program known as the Civilian Conservation Corps. The "CCC boys" were to perform desperately needed conservation work on the nation's forests and farms. In September, the Illinois State Park System was granted six CCC camps. One of these, Company 1674, was to be stationed at Black Hawk.

From 1933 to 1935 a camp of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was located at Black Hawk. Camp Black Hawk employed more than two hundred veterans of the First World War. In exchange for clothing, room, board and a dollar a day, the CCC men created much of the site as it appears today. The camp was located at the park's west end where the prairie and the park office are found today. It consisted of six barracks, a mess hall, and kitchen, an infirmary, bath house, and two latrines. The shower and toilet facilities at Camp Black Hawk made it among the most advanced camps in the nation.

During their time at the site, CCC members built six miles of hiking trails, trail structures, parking lots and two picnic shelters. They also planted thousands of trees and wildflowers and constructed two-thirds of the present-day lodge.

The lodge was designed in 1933 by state architect Joseph F. Booton. It consisted of a museum building, a restaurant and kitchen, and a lounge. The structure was to be built in phases, starting with the museum. Ground was broken in May 1934 and work progressed throughout the summer. In October the men began construction of the restaurant and the kitchen (the present East Room). This building was completed in June 1935.

Construction costs were very low since the CCC performed most of the labor. The buildings were constructed of native limestone quarried at LeClaire, Iowa. The quarrying, facing, and transport of the stone was all done by the CCC. The oak used for the hand-hewn trusses and doors was donated by a private citizen. The CCC cut the trees, then hauled them back to the camp and treated them. The ironwork found on the doors and trusses was forged in a small machine shop found at the camp.

In May 1935 the old colonial-style inn was demolished but the foundation was left intact. The architect's plans called for the new lounge to be built atop the foundation of the old inn. When the state requested additional funds from the CCC administration for the construction of the lounge, the request was denied. In July 1935, Company 1674 was relocated to Decatur, Illinois and Camp Black Hawk was abandoned.

Finally in 1941, the state appropriated \$80,000 for the construction of the lounge. It was built by a private contractor. The project also included construction of a covered

walkway to connect the three buildings and provided for completion of the interior of the restaurant so that, at long last, it could be opened.

The new lounge, built on the foundation of the old inn was constructed of limestone veneer. It was surrounded by open terraces on three sides. The Works Projects Administration (another program developed by FDR) provided the furniture, rugs, and draperies. Two murals in the lounge were painted by WPA artists and donated by John Hauberg. Eight years after construction began, the building complex was finally formally opened and dedicated on July 19, 1942.

The Watch Tower Lodge has seen many changes over the years. In 1968 the walkway was enclosed as were two of the open terraces. In 1978 the restaurant was closed. In 1983 the building was nominated to National Register of Historic Places and today the lodge is used by public groups as meeting space.