

A CONVERSATION WITH BARBARA SOMMER

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

After hearing the first-person stories of those involved with the CCC, I began to think about their place in 20th century Minnesota history. My interest in putting the stories into the context of Minnesota and United States history was a major driving force. My sister is an award-winning children's author. She, too, inspired me to take on this writing project.

What research did you undertake in writing *Hard Work and a Good Deal*?

The book is based on the use of oral histories and archival research. The first-person information is drawn from 110 oral histories done with people who were part of the CCC. I did extensive research at many institutions including the National Archives in Washington, DC, the CCC-Indian Division at the National Archives regional facility in Kansas City, the Minnesota Historical Society, the Iron Range Research Center, the Northeast Minnesota Historical Society, and local and county historical societies across Minnesota.

How long did it take to complete the book?

I worked on the book, on and off, for about eight years.

What do you hope readers take away from *Hard Work and a Good Deal*?

I hope the readers gain an understanding of 1930s Minnesota history and the impact of the CCC – the most important conservation program in U.S. history and for the state of Minnesota.

What has your journey as a writer been like?

Writing always has been a part of my professional life. I have published books and articles on various history topics. It had long been a goal of mine to write about Minnesota history. The opportunity presented itself through this book.

What is your biggest dream?

I am a proud fourth-generation Minnesotan. I want to, and will continue documenting Minnesota history through oral histories, archival research, and the written word.

What do you enjoy doing when you're not writing?

I read. I like exploring places throughout Minnesota and surrounding areas, both new ones and old favorites. I also like to travel, especially to visit my children and extended family throughout the United States.

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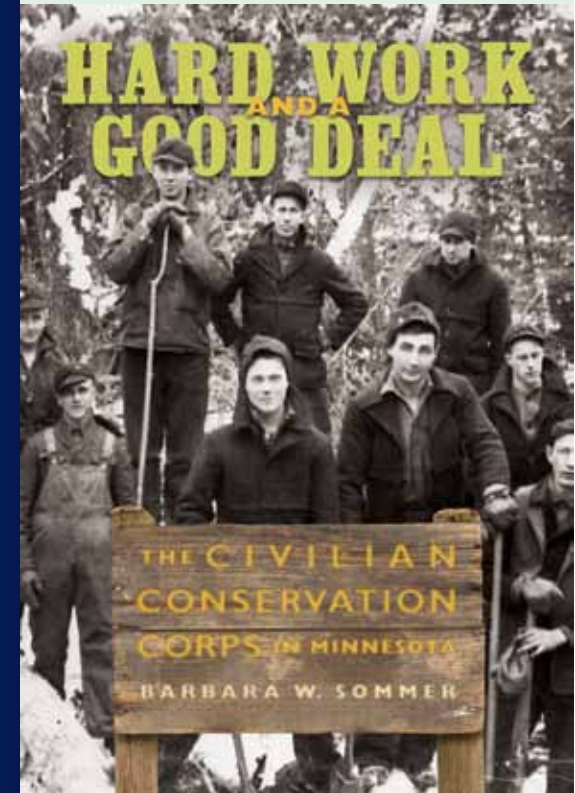
A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards

21ST ANNUAL

MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Minnesota Winner

Category Sponsored by Xcel Energy



Hard Work and a Good Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps in Minnesota

by Barbara W. Sommer

PUBLISHED BY MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESS

Hard Work and a Good Deal



SUMMARY:

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), born out of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal at the height of the Great Depression, supplied jobs to more than 77,000 Minnesotans. Hundreds of interviews complement the author's text in this account of the workers' lasting legacy, visible today in Minnesota's thriving forests, state parks, and soil conservation practices.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What did you learn about the Great Depression years in Minnesota, and did the book change your understanding of the Great Depression?
2. Why was the New Deal chosen as the title for Franklin D. Roosevelt's program? Does the title resonate for you, or would you have chosen a different name?
3. What Great Depression stories have been handed down in your family?
4. What did you learn about the CCC's projects in Minnesota that surprised you the most?
5. Prior to reading *Hard Work and a Good Deal*, what did you know about the CCC's work in Minnesota, and what were the sources of this knowledge?
6. What is the value of a book about the Minnesota CCC, both from a historical and present day perspective?
7. The book contains stories taken from oral histories. What is your favorite story?

8. Could a CCC-type federal program work today, and if so, what projects would you like to see the workers tackle?
9. What was the CCC workers' greatest gift to the state of Minnesota?
10. If you could pick any Minnesota history topic to research and write about, what would you choose?

About Barbara Sommer:

Barbara Sommer, a Minnesota native, has spent her career in the field of public history. She has directed and co-directed numerous oral history projects, led oral history workshops, and has presented at state, regional, national, and international conferences. Barbara is a founder of the Oral History Association of Minnesota and the Nebraska Foundation for the Preservation of Oral History. She has taught oral history at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Nebraska Wesleyan University. For more information about the author and her projects, visit www.barbarawsommer.com.



Photo by Scott Strebler



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