

A Refuge in The Woodlands

**A History of the Springfield Federal Transient Camp
in Springfield, Missouri**



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Nestled in a remote, picturesque, wooded area that was once remembered for its historic gristmill and later for its large fishing lake is an area that became a federally-operated transient camp for homeless men during the Great Depression of the 1930s. These men, from all across the nation, were displaced by the ravages of extremely devastating economic times. Eventually, hundreds of men would find shelter in those woods, awaiting sufficient improvement in the economy that would enable them to make it on their own again. Located five miles northwest of the public square in Springfield, Missouri, it would be popularly remembered by locals in the area as the “transit” camp, but they obviously were mispronouncing the word “transient.” In most historical sources, it was referred to as the Springfield Federal Transient Camp or the Federal Transient Camp at Ritter Mill.

The Federal Relief Program During the Great Depression

According to Harry Hopkins, a federal relief administrator for President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the national income in the United States fell from eighty-one billion to thirty-nine billion dollars from 1929 to 1932. By the spring of 1933, one out of every six families had lost everything. By the time Roosevelt took office in January 1933, fifteen million Americans were unemployed. Many had also lost their savings and homes and were dependent on relief money from the government. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) was inaugurated on May 22, 1933. FERA’s three objectives were: (1) adequacy of relief measures, (2) providing work for employable people on the relief roles, and (3) diversification of relief programs. Its purpose was to work cooperatively with state governments, providing federal grants for relief purposes. The Federal Emergency Relief Act of 1933 provided that the authorization for FERA would expire two years from the date of inception. In July 1933, the Transient Division of FERA was established.

As previously mentioned, FERA’s purpose was to work with agencies in state governments to provide relief to those in need. In Missouri, that agency was the Missouri Relief and Reconstruction Commission (MRRC), which had been established in April of 1933 to supervise relief expenditures. In July 1939, a report titled “Aiding Needy Persons in Missouri” was published in Jefferson City by the State Social Security Commission of Missouri. The following information was given in that report regarding the relief program:

Although temporary care had been given itinerant single persons and families by the local bureaus, there was a marked reluctance toward handling these cases on anything but an emergency basis. In order to make the same type of care available under the federal relief program to the non-residents as had been developed for the resident families, the national administration instigated the Transient Relief Program under FERA. In November 1933, the MRRC formulated plans and selected personnel for its operation in Missouri. Not until

the spring of 1934, however, did actual operations begin, with transient centers and camps located at strategic points throughout the state

Later, after the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was created by President Roosevelt under the Emergency Appropriation Act of 1935 on May 6 of that year, the MRRC's name was shortened to Missouri Relief Commission because the work relief or reconstruction phase of public relief was taken over by other programs. The Missouri Relief Commission was replaced by a single state agency called the State Social Security Commission of Missouri in June of 1937 to administer Old-Age Assistance, Aid to Dependent Children, General Relief, Child Welfare Services, and other plans imposing duties upon the Commission, including distribution of commodities and the certification of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

Prior to FERA's establishment, it was estimated that from 1.5 - 4.0 million homeless individuals were wandering the United States. The transient program immediately set out to provide havens nationwide that could put a halt to this hopeless wandering. Numerous centers had been set up in cities and towns throughout the U.S. Transients were either routed home, offered temporary lodging in urban shelters, or provided more permanent care in one of 500 rural camps. According to Lewis H. Kensinger, director of the transient program in Springfield, the transients came from a cross section of American life. In an unpublished article that he wrote in about 1940, Kensinger stated that unskilled labor naturally predominated, but practically all skills and professions were represented over a period of time—both in the shelters and large camps. He further stated: "Drink, disease and irresponsibility were prevalent, as they always are in a floating population, but at no time were these elements characteristic of the transients as a whole." Unemployment was a curse in all age groups and was particularly troublesome for the middle-aged and old. An article about federal transient camps appeared in the July 7, 1934, issue of *The Literary Digest*, which explained that in most cases, transients were homeless, that no community wanted them for more than a night, and that they were willing to work if they had jobs. Until the government started its project, the transient picture was not a pretty one, and many communities were forcing migrants to move on—sometimes at the point of a gun or threat of going to jail if they lingered. Freight trains were loaded with as many as 350 wanderers on a single train. Living conditions were horrible, and diseases were spreading. That article explained the plight of the transient:

There are certain things that should be kept in mind by persons who may be disposed to scoff at and insult these transients. That they are citizens of the United States; that they are in the transient camps as guests of the United States Government; that they are the victims of a national economic disaster which they did not create and over which they have no control.

The article went on to explain that the idea behind the camps was to make them so attractive that the transients would stay. Work was used as occupational therapy. William J. Plunkert, director of FERA transient activities, was quoted in the article:

We give them every care that is necessary . . . These transients aren't lazy, and they aren't bums. They want to work and are easy to work with. Only a negligible percent don't want to work . . . The transients build their own camps, except for installation of plumbing and electricity . . . A dollar a week is given to each transient as spending money.

It was also explained in the article that there was a network of shelters and camps, and that within a day's walking distance (except in the western desert areas), there was overnight care available to transients.

The stock market crash of 1929 and the devastation that followed were felt by families all across the country, including Springfield. The family of thirty-nine-year-old Daniel Earl Nickle, father of six children, was one such family. Nickle had been a building contractor in the city since about 1921. A photo of one of his newly-constructed homes appeared in *The Springfield Press* on October 26, 1929 – right at the time of the crash. Only two days earlier, the front-page headline of that newspaper had read, “Stock Prices Crash; Billions Lost.” It would be a while before he and his family would be severely affected by that catastrophe. The article accompanying the photograph of Nickle’s home mentioned that he had constructed seventy-two homes in the past eight years and that he presently had six other residences under construction. An online biography of Nickle’s daughter, Betty Jean, tells of the troubles that their family endured. By 1932, the loan companies and banks had cut off all loans on the homes he was currently building. He lost all of them – including the one they resided in, so they were forced to rent for \$7 per month. One food source for them became biscuits—fried on the stove to save heating the oven. Nickle was forced to join soup lines to feed the family, bringing a kettle to fill. His oldest daughter, Evelyn, stated the following in Betty Jean’s biography: “It was very degrading to him, and he would put on a coat . . . and hoped that none of his neighbors would see him. They, however, were in line with their overcoats on and their hats pulled down.” As time went on, the family would also benefit from the distribution of government commodities. Due to necessity, Nickle spent much time outside the home scraping to support the family. A lucky break finally came his way. He was hired as the construction supervisor in charge of building the Springfield Federal Transient Camp at a salary of \$90 per month – an amount that seemed like a fortune to many people at that time. He would continue with that job as long as the federal government was funding the construction of buildings at the camp.



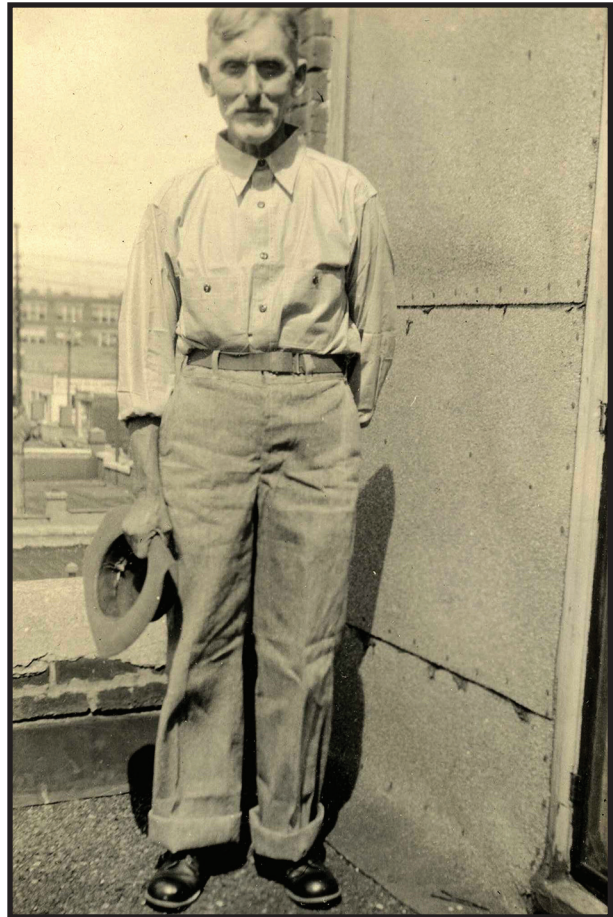
Daniel Earl Nickle
ca. 1940s

Courtesy of David Turley, great-grandson

Announcement of the Camp

On January 5, 1934, an article in the *Springfield Daily News* announced that a permanent camp for transients would soon be established. Richard Gebhardt, the state director of federal transient relief (under FERA) was in Springfield searching for a site for both a camp and a registration bureau. He predicted that ninety percent of the people cared for would be men and that sixty percent of those men would be over the age of forty. He said that the number of young men in their teens and early twenties believed to be homeless was exaggerated, and that many of them were enrolled in Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps. He also stated that anyone appearing at any of the established welfare agencies for assistance would be sent to reference centers where a determination would be made as to their care. From the reference centers, they would be sent to the registration bureau in Springfield where a final determination would be made. While waiting for a decision, these men would be housed and fed by the Salvation Army. Gebhardt was seeking a farm site for the transient camp in which a dining hall, dormitories, and recreational facilities would be established.

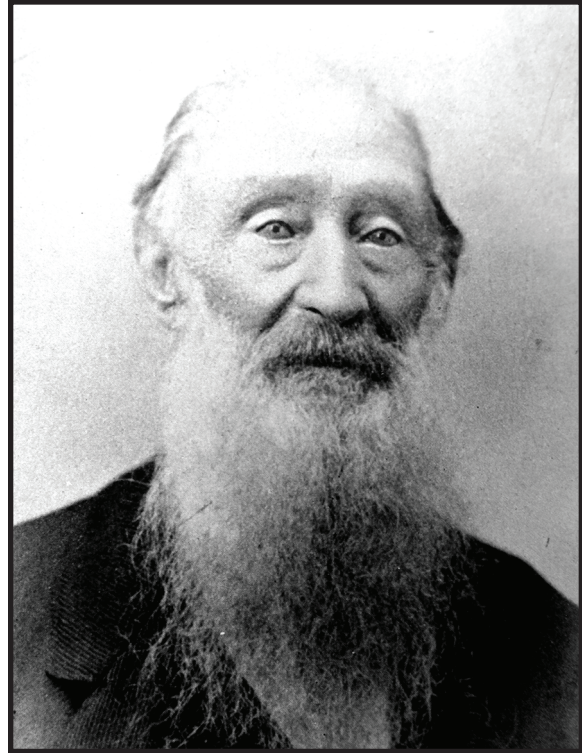
The location of the camp was announced in the January 17th issue of the *Springfield Leader and Press*. A lease was executed between property owner Kittie Wood—descendant of an earlier owner of the property—and the Missouri Relief and Reconstruction Commission (operating under FERA) for a 181-acre piece of property that had been the site of the former Ritter Mill, located five miles northwest of the public square. One neighbor, Pleasant W. Owen, who was a former member of the Ritter School Board, expressed his displeasure with the decision by saying, “We don’t need it at all and we don’t want it.” The new camp’s director, John Paul McKinsey, reacted to that complaint by saying the neighbors were being unduly alarmed and that the men in the camp would be a select group and would be there on a voluntary basis. Donald Cox, transient director in Springfield, explained that any man coming to Springfield for food or lodging would be referred to his office. Attempts would be made to find a locality where he could get a job. If that failed and it was determined that he had wandered so long that he no longer had a home and no other solution seemed possible, he would be admitted to the camp. The lease specified that possession of the property would occur on February 1. The government had pledged not to remove valuable timber or cause injury to the property.



**Transformation of Transient After Being Processed
at Springfield's Transient Bureau — 1934**
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

Background of the Camp Property and its Owners

The camp was located in Township 29, Section 3 (Lot 4) and Section 4 (Lots 4, 5, and 6) of Greene County. Kittie Wood's great-grandfather, John Wood, had purchased the southernmost 80 acres of the leased property (in Lot 4 of Sections 3 and 4) in 1852 from Greene County pioneer, Major Joseph Weaver. Weaver and his son, Ripley B., had purchased it from the United States government in the 1840s. John Wood had emigrated to the U.S. from England in 1824, settling for a while in Philadelphia before residing in Tennessee, Alabama, Illinois, and back to Tennessee. He was involved in the manufacture of cotton goods in the South. In 1852, he moved his family to Greene County, and in July of that year, he bought a total of 560 acres of land northwest of Springfield. Part of his property became known as Wood's Spring but would later be referred to as Ritter Mill or Ritter Springs.



John Wood

Pictorial and Genealogical Record of Greene County, Missouri (1893)

In 1866, John Wood sold the 80 acres (where the camp would someday be located) to Harvey Ritter, a native of Ohio who had moved his family to Greene County that year from Clinton County, Missouri. Ritter soon built a small home and large barn on the property as well as a gristmill, which his family operated for about thirty-eight years. An article about Springfield flouring mills that appeared in the *Springfield Express* on January 4, 1884, stated that Ritter Mill had the capacity to grind 120 bushels of corn and seventy bushels of wheat per day. Ritter and his son, Oliver C., operated the mill, while his other son, William Henry, farmed on adjoining property, where he also reportedly worked as a blacksmith. In 1884, the Ritters deeded one acre of their land for use as a Methodist church, and in 1888, they deeded another acre for use as a school. Oliver Ritter received a U.S. patent in 1889 on a process he invented for milling wheat that enabled small millers to produce a perfect flour with less mechanical process and time. After Harvey Ritter's death in 1896, Oliver continued to operate the mill until his death late in 1903. Upon his death, 68 acres of the property – including the mill – were sold to John Shackelford Wood, Kittie's father. The mill was described in the probate papers of Oliver as being a "15-horsepower water wheel mill house and all machinery to ground all kinds of grain."

The ownership of the property was now in the Wood family once again. John Shackelford Wood, his wife, Alice, and their four children (John Skinner, Frank A. S., Kittie A., and Frederick J.), were shown residing at 716 College in Springfield on the 1900 census. The 1910 census showed the family residing at the country home. Wood continued to buy more property that adjoined his 1904 purchase. In 1906, he purchased 40 acres to the west from the estate of Charles E. Lodge. In 1908, he purchased 23.5 acres to the north from William and Elizabeth Ritter, and in 1912, he purchased another 60 acres—further north from the previous acquisition—from John and Juliet Williams. This 1912 land purchase had an interesting connection. John Williams' mother was Hannah Wood Williams Farrier, oldest daughter of the immigrant John Wood, making him a cousin of Kittie Wood. The connection has an even more interesting twist in that John and Juliet Williams' son,

Dr. John Williams, Greene County Health Director, had suggested the site to Richard Gebhardt when he had been in Springfield in January 1934 looking for a location for the camp. Though Williams had not been there for about twenty years, he remembered driving cattle into the pasture adjoining a lake located above a dam. His father, who had previously owned land north of the camp's site, once carried his grain to the old Ritter Mill that was situated on the property. The mill was now a dilapidated ruin, and a break in the picturesque stone dam two years earlier had caused the lake to drain. The former Ritter farmhouse and large barn still stood on the property—and with alterations—were ready to occupy.



**Ritter Mill
(undated)**

Courtesy Springfield-Greene County Library



Dilapidated Ritter Mill — 1934

Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

One story passed down through the years regarding the property relates to the use of mules. It was that the Wood family worked for the railroad and that mules were used in the laying of tracks in the early 1900s. It was said that they would work a group of mules for a few days, and then rest them at the Wood farm. While that group of mules rested, another group would be taken out to work. The story has not been proven, but we do know that John Shackelford Wood was

listed as living on the property in the 1910 census as a contractor for the railroad. In the 1916 Springfield City Directory, he was listed as a “rodman for the Frisco” – which meant he worked for a railroad surveyor and held the surveying rod. It is feasible that both jobs could have involved the use of mules.

A study of the Springfield city directories shows that the Wood family continued to live on the former Ritter Mill property until about 1917 when they relocated to St. Louis, where John worked as a water service foreman for the Frisco Railroad. The family was shown residing in St. Louis on the 1920 census. Their Greene County property was reportedly used as a fishing lodge (or resort) in the 1920s, and there were several cabins located on the ridge above the lake—most likely rented to people by the Wood family. Clyde W. Greenwade was one Springfieldian who used one of the cabins, and his daughter and son-in-law also enjoyed spending their

leisure time on that picturesque hill overlooking the lake. Loring Bullard mentioned the following in the book entitled, *The Springs of Greene County, Missouri*: “At Ritter, the lake at the mill was stocked with trout which, along with home-made biscuits, provided dinner for patrons of the Lot-A-Fun Lodge” No other information has been found regarding the property being used as a fishing resort. Visits there to fish would no doubt have stopped after a 1932 flood caused the dam to break, draining the lake.



Broken Dam — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

From about 1925-1932, area resident Rufus Robertson, his wife, and their six children leased the property, cultivating 35 acres. Descendants of John Shackelford Wood recalled that for a brief time around 1932, the families of siblings John Skinner Wood and Frank Wood; Kittie Wood; along with their parents, lived together in the old home there. A grandson of John Skinner Wood remembered hearing that his father did not like the chore of hauling buckets of water from the spring to the house on wash day!

It appears that the John Shackelford Wood family did indeed move back and forth between St. Louis and Springfield during the 1930s—as they were shown in St. Louis on the 1930 census, but in 1935 and 1936 (after the government had leased their country property), they were residing at their city home on College Street, according to the Springfield city directories. In the 1940 census, they were once again in St. Louis.

Five Beautiful Springs on the Property

The heavily-wooded area was indeed a beautiful location. There were five natural springs located on the property—two in Lot 4, two in Lot 5, and one in Lot 6. The springs—that had once been known as Wood’s Spring and later as Ritter Springs—have been mentioned in several books. One of the springs in Lot 4 was mentioned in the 1915 book, *Past and Present of Greene County, Missouri*, by Jonathan Fairbanks and Clyde Edwin Tuck:

There are but few mineral springs in Greene County, three small chalybeate springs being the only ones known in this area. One of them is just under the dam at the pond at the Ritter mill, township 29, range 22 west and section 4. This can only be utilized at low water, as the stream overflows it at other times, but its waters are strongly impregnated with iron, and its accessibility to Springfield would make it well worth walling up. . . .

Fairbanks and Tuck gave another description of the springs in the area: “. . . On the Ritter farm, a large lake has been formed by damming the mouth of a narrow valley, into which three great springs empty, making one of the most picturesque points in the vicinity.”

These springs were mentioned again years later in a book entitled, *Springs of Missouri*, by Jerry D. Vineyard and Gerald L. Feder, published in 1974, in which the following information was given about the two springs in Lot 4:



Ritter Spring West — 1985
Courtesy of Lynn Williams

Ritter Springs form a scenic area in a ravine about one mile northwest of Springfield near the head of Spring Branch, a tributary of Little Sac River. In earlier years, a dam was built at the mouth of the ravine, forming a lake. This lake and the dam are gone and the springs have reverted to their natural state. Numerous concrete foundations and ruined buildings in the vicinity attest to the former

development centered around the springs. The east spring rises in a bed of gravel at the base of a rounded bluff of Burlington Keokuk limestone and flows through a spring branch lined with watercress to join the branch leading from the west spring. The spring is unimproved. The west spring is at the base of a low vertical bluff of limestone and is enclosed by stone and concrete retaining walls. The opening of a small cave has developed on a bedding plane in the limestone at the base of the bluff

Tom Persell, a present-day neighbor near the property who was acquainted with Frank Wood, remembers hearing that when the concrete enclosure was built at the west spring, a trap door (or gate) was constructed at the bottom of the outer wall (spillway area) in order to drain the enclosure periodically to flush out all the debris and sediment. Wood made periodic trips to the property as late as the 1970s to accomplish this task, which required getting into the water-filled enclosure to open the trap door.



Ritter Spring East — 1985
Courtesy of Lynn Williams

Development of the Camp

The February 1, 1934, opening of the camp was delayed due to awaiting government approval for the purchase and shipment of construction supplies. However, local electricians were to begin the installation of wiring right away. Also, transients would soon begin work on improving the roads leading into the camp. It was announced that Dan Nickle had been hired as the construction foreman and that the building of the camp would be done by transient labor.

Since the transient bureau had opened in Springfield a month earlier, transients from forty-five (of the then forty-eight) states had appeared there to request assistance. The only states not being represented in Springfield by transients were New Hampshire, Oregon, and Vermont. This shows how widespread the unemployment and homeless problems were nationally. In late February, John Paul McKinsey, who had been transient camp director since coming to Springfield on January 4 to assist in the search for a camp site, was appointed as Greene County Relief Director. Richard Gebhardt would soon choose a successor to oversee the camp's operations.

The camp finally opened around the first of March with sixty transient men being sheltered—ranging in age from seventeen to seventy. Before it opened, the large barn on Kittie Wood's property was being remodeled into a dining hall and bunkhouse. An article in the *Springfield Leader and Press* on March 23 announced that carpenters had just finished constructing a small frame building that would serve as a hospital. The daily sound of saws and hammers undoubtedly echoed through those woods during that time of constant construction. The men were staying warm at night as new flannel pajamas had just been made by the sewing department of the local Civil Works Administration (CWA), a work program soon being eliminated that would eventually be replaced by the Works Projects Administration (WPA).

In addition to the camp, a transient shelter in town was also established by the federal government. The vacated Central Hotel in Springfield, located at 505 Boonville—just north of Mill Street on the west side of the street—was leased in late February and opened in April of 1934 to help house the growing population of transient men. Built by successful miller, John Schmook, it had—40 years previously—been one of the city's finest hotels, but in more recent times, it had become a low-grade rooming house.



**Springfield Transient Shelter and Bureau
(Former Central Hotel)**

Springfield News and Leader — June 30, 1946

A description of the transient camp came from the camp's first self-published newsletter, *The Transient Journal*. The April 11, 1934, issue included an article entitled, "181-Acre Transient Camp Undergoing Development." The following information was given in the article:

One hundred and eighty-one acres of timbered land, including 20 acres of garden, an old mill site, and natural springs from which flow more than 3 million gallons of water every 24

hours, is the location of the Springfield Transient Camp. The acreage is 5 miles northwest of Springfield. Present equipment consists of mess hall and barracks housing 70 men, hospital, barber shop, laundry, recreation room, and offices. A one-story dormitory, which will provide room for 80 men, is under construction, and two more will be built after the same plan. A lake project includes the completion of the dam by the old Ritter mill, thus allowing a 5-acre lake bed to be fed from the springs. The lake will be stocked with bass and trout, and there will be facilities for swimming, boating, and fishing.

At times, the camp received some interesting visitors. That same issue of *The Transient Journal* also included an article about a visitor to the camp who remembered the days when wild turkeys and deer were abundant. W. M. Jay, born about 1856, grew up on the nearby Owen farm. He remembered the building of the Ritter Mill and house. According to Jay, the mill was constructed by Oliver Ritter, who ground flour and cornmeal for the neighborhood. He said Ritter was a practical engineer, explaining:

“On a wire cable leading from his house, a bucket traveled far below to the spring where it was quickly filled with water and then brought back to the house by a windlass.” A windlass was an apparatus used for moving heavy weights.



Establishing a Garden — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

By July, the number of men being housed at the camp had increased to 158. They were assigned to various jobs around the camp. Living there was not free; they were required to work thirty hours per



Grading a Road — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

week for their room and board. Most of the men worked in common labor jobs, did agricultural work, or were involved in road-building projects, earning ninety cents per week.

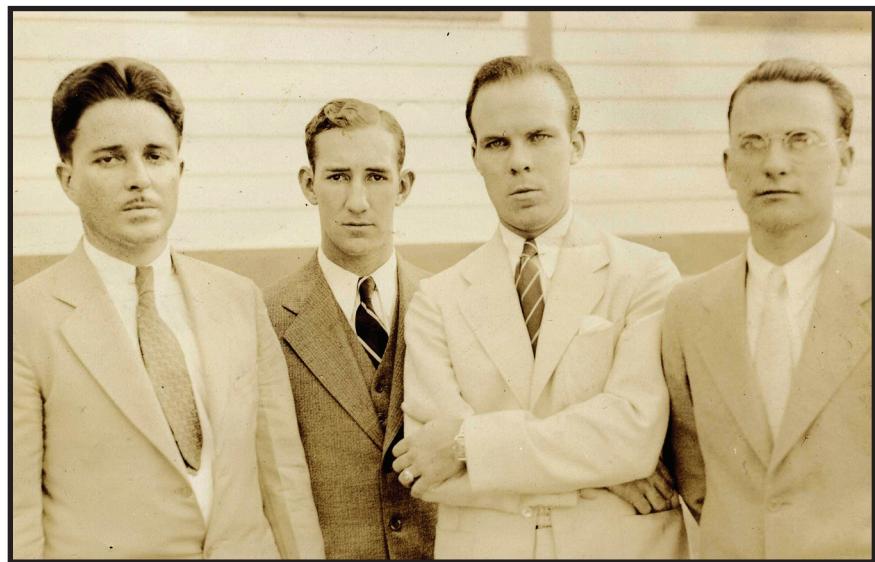
Another article about the camp appeared in the *Springfield Leader and Press* on July 11, 1934. It stated that the water in Ritter’s branch was very clear and the shaded, rocky hillsides were as inviting as they had been in earlier years. Further information about the site was given in the article:

Here, by the springs, where the pioneers came long ago, a new group of settlers has come in—men and boys, off the long highways of the nation, to sit and rest in the shade and to drink of the shining cold waters, and to try to find their place again in a world that has passed them by . . . The site is attractive. The big old barn, reconstructed by the men themselves, makes an adequate mess hall where meals are served army fashion, and there are barracks upstairs. The old farmhouse is an office and administration building . . . There is a new hospital and a new barracks to house 80 men with a recreation hall in the middle that has game tables, and a meager sort of library. There is another new barracks building, and still another, contemplated. There is a smithy, the woodworking shops, the tool rooms, the laundry, and the 20 acres of gardens. There are the volleyball courts, where the men in camp frequently defeat town teams. There is a baseball diamond, croquet grounds, and horseshoe lanes.

By July, the following administrators were in charge of operations of the camp: Lewis H. Kensinger, director of the Springfield Transient Bureau; Gordon W. Thomas, camp superintendent; Robert H. Mitchell, a third-year medical student, who was initially in charge of the hospital; Burns Jones, the case worker who interviewed all newcomers; and Dan Nickle, construction supervisor.



Building a Road — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri



Camp Administrators — 1934
Left to Right:
Lewis H. Kensinger, Gordon W. Thomas, Robert H. Mitchell, and Burns Jones
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

The Lake

In May 1934, more news about the lake appeared in *The Transient Journal*:

Few camps, if any, can boast of having their own individual lake in which to fish and swim. While the lake is not a present reality, plans for the summer include the restoration of this once beautiful body of water. We have a 6-acre basin into which several springs empty, and when the dam is replaced, a lake will be in evidence in 36 hours.

Some references to the lake referred to it as being five acres in size while others stated it was a six-acre lake.

Work continued on the lake during the summer. In August, *The Transient Journal* mentioned that “water from the three small springs in the hill east of the lake bed had been diverted into a channel leading from the spring stream down the old mill race.” Plans were to close the door leading to the race, allowing the water to flow over the lake bed.



Repairing the Dam — 1934

Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

During the fall, a crew of fifty men worked on the completion of the lake project, clearing the acres of lake bed, strengthening the banks and walls, building an island with surplus earth taken from the bed, and finishing the dam. A news report on October 17 reported the following progress:

Down in the “bottoms” of the camp, below the big spring which furnishes its water supply, several gangs of workers are engaged in rebuilding the old dam, once a part of



Clearing the Lake Bottom — 1934

Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

the Ritter’s mill reservoir, which was swept away by a flood in 1932. A spillway at the eastern end of the new dam is being built to prevent further flood damage. For weeks, men have worked with shovels and hoes, clearing away weeds and leveling off the ground which will be the floor of the lake when the dam is completed.

The men were anxious to showcase the completed lake at a Field Day planned for November 3, in which the camp would be open to the public. Unfortunately, the Field Day event was postponed due to heavy



Ritter Spring West with Lake in Background — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

rains, but it appears that the lake was finally completed by about mid-November. An application was sent at that time to the chief of hatcheries in Jefferson City to obtain fish to stock the lake. The lake no doubt became the pride of the camp and was truly a beautiful addition—with its island, rustic bridge, and spillway. At that time, the camp had grown to 200 men.

Transient Camps Throughout Missouri

Transient camps had opened in Missouri in the following locations: Branson, Camdenton, Jefferson City, Joplin, Kansas City (Liberty Camp), Monett, Nevada, Poplar Bluff, St. Joseph (Riverview Camp), St. Louis (Kimmswick Camp), St. Louis (Sylvan Beach Camp), Sedalia, and Springfield. In November 1934, Camp Clark in Nevada was converted into a transient camp, becoming the largest in the state with a capacity of 500 men. At that time, the camps in Branson and Camdenton closed and consolidated with the Nevada camp.

Building or Renovation Projects at the Camp

Other than the beautiful lake, the most remarkable aspect about the Springfield Federal Transient Camp was how large it grew over time – with the construction of one building after another—until a little village existed in the woods. The government had leased the land with only a small home, large barn, and a chicken house on the premises in February 1934, and those structures were soon remodeled to quickly get the camp functioning. A description of the building projects follows – in an approximate order of their construction.

Water System

A water system was completed in March 1934—soon after the government leased the land for the camp. The system supplied water to the various buildings from a pump station beside the old Ritter Spring. A 700-gallon pressure tank, equipped with a chlorinator, sent sparkling water up two steep hills with sufficient force for the camp's needs. The digging of trenches and laying of pipe for the system was all done by the transients under the supervision of a plumber.

Sentry Box

A sentry box was situated at the entrance to the transient camp. It was manned constantly by men from the camp. They controlled traffic into the camp, opening and closing the gate in an attempt to keep the road through the camp from being used as a thoroughfare.

Administration Building

As mentioned previously, the former Ritter-Wood farmhouse, probably built about 1866 when the Ritter family assumed ownership of the property, was still on the property when the camp formed. Constructed of wood over a native Ozark field rock foundation, it soon became the administration building. In the beginning, the barber shop was located in the basement. The shoe cobbler's shop, tailor's shop, and commissary (where supplies were kept) were also located in the old home. In the basement, the large hewn rafters—made by the pioneer



**Administration Building — 1934
(Former Ritter-Wood Home)**
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri



**Ruin of Administration Building — 1985
(Former Ritter-Wood Home)**
Courtesy of Lynn Williams

builders—could still be seen. Eventually, walks were built around the administration building, improving the appearance around the old home. A relic from the years the Wood family lived on the property was very apparent near the administration building. At some point after their move to the country, they had placed a personalized carriage step along the driveway near the entrance to their home.



**Carriage Step Used at
John Shackelford Wood's Country Home — 2014**
Photo by Author

Dormitory No. 1

The massive Ritter-Wood barn, also on the property when the government leased it, was soon remodeled into a mess hall and dormitory. Its size surely made the site more attractive as it could be renovated quickly to house the first transients to arrive. It was thoroughly reconstructed by the men themselves and became known as Dormitory No. 1. Undoubtedly due to its size, it was described as the first building one could see from the entrance to the camp. The building had previously been used as a dairy barn for the Wood family. It was well built—made of native field stone at the bottom and wood at the upper portion. The first floor was used as a mess hall, kitchen, and bakery, and the mess hall was capable of seating about 200 men. In December 1934, some further remodeling was done to the building, which eliminated a first-floor sleeping area for the cooks. This space, combined with a nearby storeroom, became a food commissary.

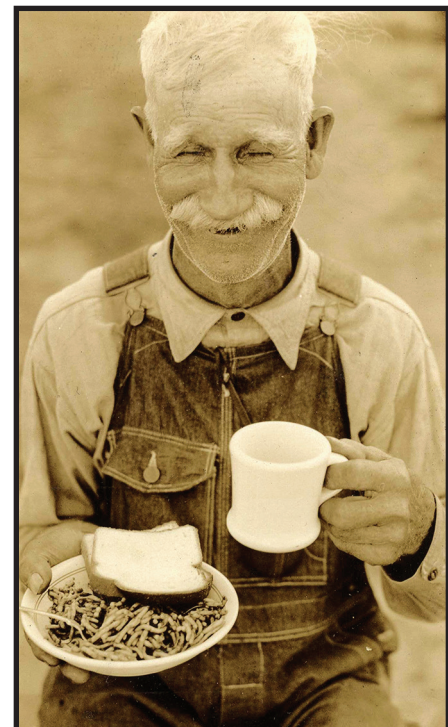


Camp Shoe Cobbler Repairing a Shoe for Resident — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

each containing sixteen beds. These were the first living quarters while the camp was under construction, and at this time, all residents were housed in these two sections of the building. Double bunks were used at that time, and while conditions were crowded, it provided shelter to many men who had no other place to go. On a third level, above the two dormitory areas just described, was another story, which eventually became space for the caseworkers' office. Two other small rooms provided housing for the foremen and contained eight beds. Eventually, the shoe cobbler's shop was also located on that floor.

At meal times, a long line of men—stretching one-hundred yards—could be seen waiting for the bell to ring. The meals were served cafeteria style with nineteen men handling the kitchen and

The original food commissary became a bakery. At about that time, the stairway to the second floor of the building was moved from the inside to the outside and also provided the entrance to the third floor. Judging from a comparison of photographs, it appears that the stairs to the second floor were once situated on the exterior toward the rear—on each side of the building but later moved to the front. The second floor was originally constructed into two separate dormitories,



Transient Showing Obvious Delight with a Spaghetti Dinner — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

dining room duties. Breakfast was served at 6:45 a.m., lunch at 11:45 a.m., and dinner at 4:45 p.m., and always, the bell would ring at those times.

The building was equipped with hot water from a nearby bathroom building, and dishes were thoroughly washed with scalding water and dried after each meal to prevent disease. A “mop gang” cleaned the second and third floors, while the work force in the mess hall and kitchen scrubbed the lower level daily.



Dormitory No. 1 — 1934
(Former Ritter-Wood Barn)

Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

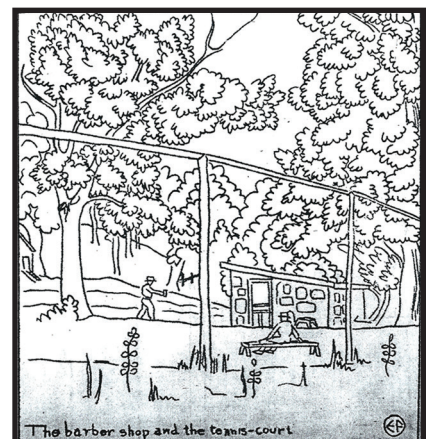


Ruin of Dormitory No. 1 — 1985
(Former Ritter-Wood Barn)

Courtesy of Lynn Williams

Barber Shop

Although the camp’s barber shop was originally located in the basement of the administration building, it was eventually moved to the former Ritter-Wood chicken house, a structure made of native field stone. It was located near the administration building. A barbering class was taught at the camp by William Lutz, head barber. In February 1935, the barber shop was moved to the basement of the second hospital.



Sketch of Barber Shop — 1934
(Former Ritter-Wood Chicken House)

Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri



Barber Students Watch a Demonstration — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri



Barber Shop and Students — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri



Ruin of Barber Shop — 2013
(Former Ritter-Wood Chicken House)
Photo by Author



Patients Recuperating in Front of First Hospital — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

First Hospital

Construction of a rustic-looking small cottage was completed in late March of 1934 that would serve as a seven-bed hospital. A larger facility would replace this hospital within a year.

Dormitory No. 2

Due to the growing camp population, a second dormitory was constructed. It would be referred to as Dormitory No. 2. An article in the April 11th *Transient Journal* mentioned the project was coming along well and was projected to be ready for occupancy by April 20, 1934. The article went on to state the following: “The view from the new dorm will be one of the best the Missouri Ozarks has to offer.” Blasting for the rock was done on location at the camp’s stone quarry. That quarry would also provide the rock for the completion of the dam and other structures. The new dorm was constructed by members of the camp, under the supervision of Dan Nickle. The building was 120’ long by 20’ wide and contained thirty-two single beds in two areas that were separated by a recreation room that measured 39’ x 19’ and was filled with books and magazines. This room was a gathering place after work hours—a place where the men could read the daily newspapers, write letters, study, play games, or visit. At the rear of the recreation room was a bathroom containing five showers and five toilets. The sleeping areas were equipped with lockers for the men to secure their personal items. The focal point of the building was its massive fireplace—located in the recreation room. Said to have been built by a “master hand,” it was made of 27 tons of native rock, the opening of which was 56” by 32” – enough space for large logs to be rolled into it for burning. The April 20th *Transient Journal* added this commentary about the new dormitory:

To those of the outside world, Dormitory Number Two means nothing; to we who have been unfortunate to have been caught in the whirl of the Depression and have been forced to seek assistance from the government, Dormitory Number Two means HOME, and always down through the future ages, there will be one spot that is never forgotten. Dormitory Number Two will stand in the memory of many and many a transient as a beacon on a stormy sea.



Dormitory No. 2 — 1934

Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

Today, all of the buildings of the transient camp are gone, but the massive fireplace from Dormitory No. 2 still rises up from the foundations left behind in the woods – an impressive sight to see!

Dormitory No. 3

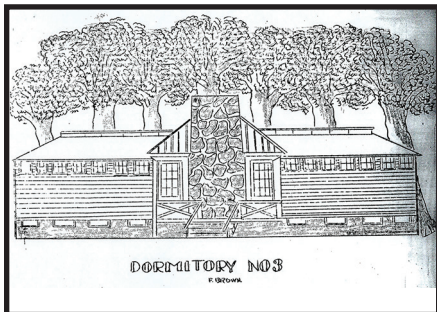
The June 27th *Transient Journal* announced that work was progressing on a new 60-man dormitory that would be known as Dormitory No. 3. The forms for the foundation were rising rapidly under the direction



Ruin of Fireplace from Dormitory No. 2 — 2013
Photo by Author

of Dan Nickle, who was directing four carpenters and a group of eight camp men learning construction. In addition, two teams were hauling gravel for the foundation. At that time, the rafters had been made, and the basement window forms had been inserted. A month later, more details appeared in *The Transient Journal*. The building was painted a chocolate brown and had a green roof; it was patterned after Dormitory No. 2. The new building had a center recreation room, backed by a cemented, metal-lathed bathroom and had side wings for beds. Wooden shades were made for the lights in the recreation room, which was equipped with a library, reading and game tables, and writing desks. This dormitory was also built with a massive fireplace, made from 27 tons of rock, and was described as being practically the size of the one in Dormitory No. 2. Small concrete porches were built on each side of the wing entrances, and just inside were built-in shelves for bedding. The building was also equipped with lockers. The porch on the front side of the building was a concrete slab with a stone railing around it. The dorm opened on August 7, immediately accommodating the lodging needs of 60 men, 40 of whom were transferred from the

transient shelter in Springfield. In November, the dormitories were lined with Celotex, which apparently was (according to Internet sources) an insulation made from asbestos. At that time, a drying area for the camp's laundry was being dug under the bathroom of Dormitory No. 3 so that clothes could be dried by the heat of hot water pipes during inclement weather. By December, a concrete floor had been laid in the drying room. Since Dormitory No. 3 was next to the laundry building, it was expected to be an asset to the laundry crew during cloudy winter days when clothing and bedding would not dry outside.



Transient Artist's Sketch of Dormitory No. 3 — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri



Dormitory No. 3 Under Construction — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri



Ruin of Dormitory No. 3 — 2013
Photo by Author

One of the most important assignments in the camp is for a group of men in a small red building behind the newest dormitory [Dormitory No. 3] . . . A visit to the building reveals a clean kept, concrete-floored room, lined on the left by a battery of three washing machines and a huge boiler to furnish the hot water for the two dormitories on the eastern side of the camp. A lot of clothing goes through the laundry each day. Sheets, pillow cases, blankets, clothing—all come in for a weekly cleaning using modern methods. The soap comes in barrels. At the door, one is likely to be met by John Haney or by one of his six helpers. One man may be attending the three machines, where the clothing is placed for the initial cleaning. Another may be operating the electric ironer, through which the dry wash is run. Two or three others are usually at the outdoor lines, bringing in the dry clothing or hanging out the freshly laundered.

Situated at the east end of the camp, it was one of the busiest places on the grounds. It was 20' x 50' with a six-foot concrete foundation. The three home-size washing machines handled 2,000 pieces of laundry per week. A 500-gallon hot water tank furnished the hot water for the laundry and the two new

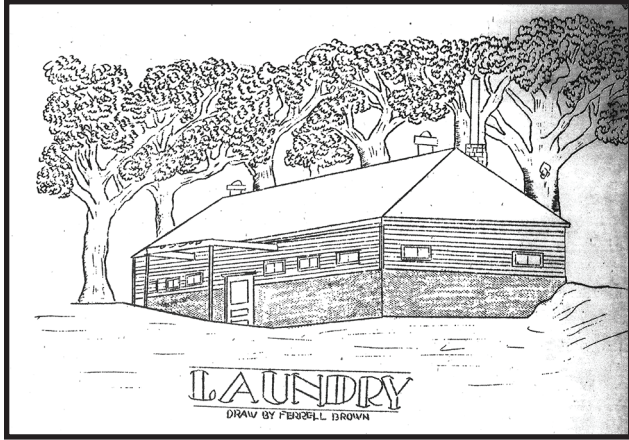


Laundry Under Construction — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

Laundry

The first laundry at the camp had been located in the basement of Dormitory No. 1. Later, a larger laundry was built at the site of the building boom on the higher ground of the camp that overlooked the lake. The men referred to that higher ground as “the ridge.” It was in existence by June 27, 1934, when it was mentioned in *The Transient Journal* as being located near Dormitory No. 3, the blacksmith shop, and the carpenter shop. That fall, an article appeared in *The Transient Journal* giving details about the new laundry:

dormitories nearby. A long drainage ditch was eventually dug to carry off water from the laundry. Sixty loads of wash were done daily, and the machines ran about forty-two hours a week. The drying took place outside. Laundry from the hospital was put through a special process to avoid the spread of contagious diseases. The men checked their items into the laundry from 7:00 – 11:00 a.m. daily, and each dormitory had a separate laundry day. The laundry was considered one of the most essential operations in the camp.

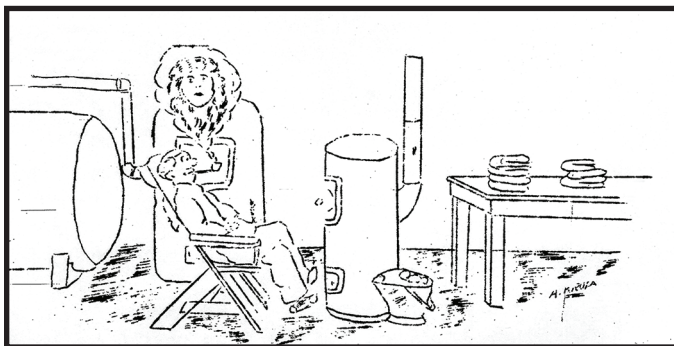


Transient Artist's Sketch of Laundry — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri



Ruin of Laundry — 2013
Photo by Author

Current-day hikers have stated that they have seen a massive-sized piece of pipe at the location of the former dam that is possibly a piece of the laundry's boiler, which could have rolled down the hillside years ago.



Transient Artist's Sketch of Interior of Laundry — 1934
(showing large boiler pipe to left)
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri



Massive Pipe – Possibly from Laundry's Boiler — 2013
Located Along the Creek Below Broken Dam
Courtesy of Timothy Stanton

First Bath House

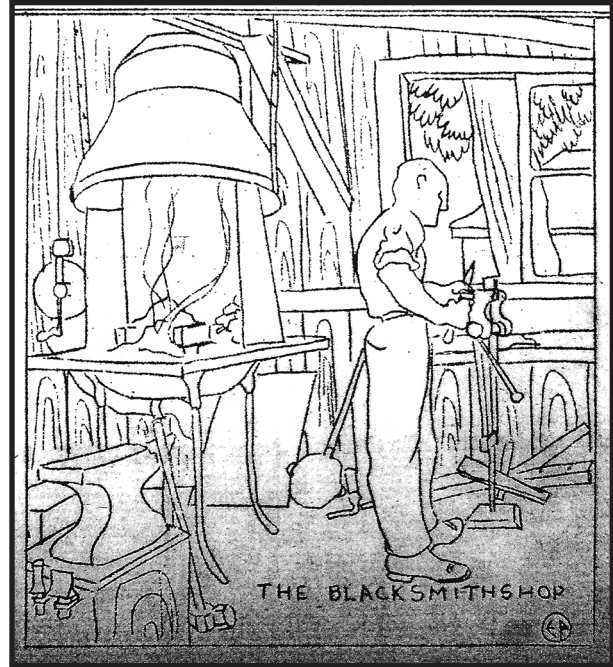
By the end of July, a 10' x 20' bath house was being constructed just north of Dormitory No. 1. It was completed and in use two weeks later.

Sportsmen's Cottage

On July 11, *The Transient Journal* mentioned that a Springfield attorney frequented the "sportsmen's cottage" on the grounds. This was undoubtedly one of the cabins remaining from the fishing resort that had existed in the 1920s.

Blacksmith Shop

A blacksmith shop was located on the ridge near the carpenter shop, laundry, and north of Dormitory No. 3. The small brown building was in use by the end of June, and was one of the busiest places in the camp. It was mentioned in *The Transient Journal* on September 12: “Inside, a visitor is carried back fifty years, when the blacksmith shop was the real center of the American village, and the neighborhood farmers brought in the old gray mare to be shod.” The shop was complete with a smoky forge, an anvil, cinders on the floor, and the odor of red-hot iron. The smithy, John Egan, and his assistant, Calvin Bates, were always willing to show visitors around. Piled in a corner were picks to be sharpened for use on clearing the lake bottom. A discarded wheel in the shop would soon be part of a wheelbarrow for the garden crew. Egan boasted that they hadn’t used a dollar’s worth of iron since he’d been there. All of their material came from discarded junk iron. Pieces from the old mill lay rusting—waiting to be recycled. Egan made trowels for the plasterers, reinforcements for a barber chair, like-new axes, and horseshoes—expertly made from a lifetime of experience in that trade.



Transient Artist's Sketch of Blacksmith at Work — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

Carpenter Shop

The June 27th *Transient Journal* announced that the work on the new carpenter shop had been completed earlier that week, and the rock was being hauled for the floor. The article stated that the building would serve three purposes: a manual training room, a paint shop, and a storehouse for tools and equipment. It was located conveniently near the blacksmith shop, Dormitory No. 3, and the laundry.

Commissary

The earliest mention of the camp’s commissary described it being located in the basement of the administration building. Judging from a newspaper photo that showed the buildings on the ridge, the new commissary appeared to be west of Dormitory No. 3. Another mention of the commissary described it as a “commissary and workroom.”



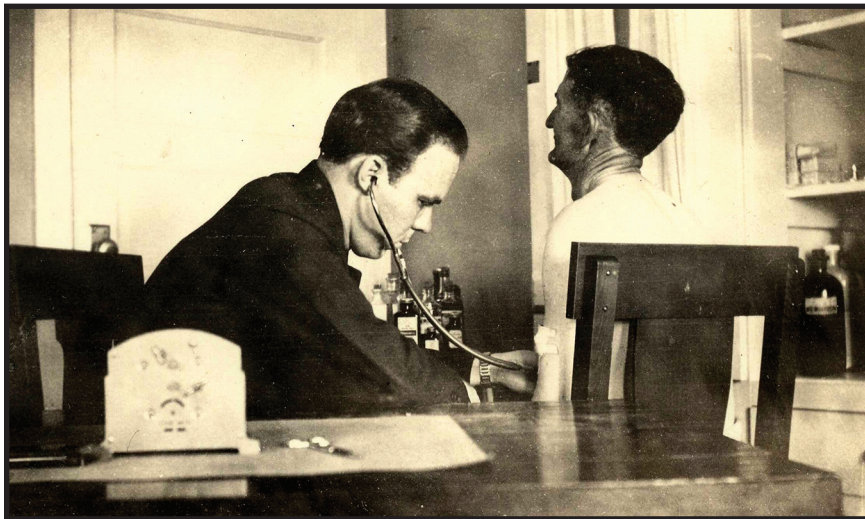
Carpenter Shop — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

Tents

Due to the increasing population at the camp, it became necessary to provide more housing facilities. It was announced in the November 14, 1934, issue of *The Transient Journal* that the camp's population could be increased by 120 men if eleven tents—received from the former Branson camp—were erected. Immediately, an experimental tent was set up, under the direction of Dan Nickle. The tents could be heated adequately with stoves and proved to be warm, comfortable winter quarters. The new group of brown shelters would be known as “tent row” and would form a double row extending from the dormitory row eastward overlooking the lake. The tents would be set up as they were at the Branson camp—pulled down over a framework of wood overhead and joining wooden walls about three feet from the floor. Beds would be spaced evenly around the walls and gas lights would suspend from the central beam to furnish light. The tents could also be used for work projects away from the camp property, if needed. By the middle of December 1934, three tents were erected and in use; surprisingly, there were no complaints. Kensing reported that the tents were warmer than one might think, and the men were very comfortable in them. Seven more tents were soon placed at the camp.

Second Hospital

In October, it was announced that a 29-bed hospital would be built on the grounds. At that time, the previous hospital was torn down, and a temporary facility operated in one of the dormitories. The new hospital opened in February of 1935, at which time the camp population had expanded to 250 men. A full-page article appeared in an undated issue of *The Transient Journal* giving more details of the new facility. The building was 50' x 130' and included three isolation wards (which kept contagious patients in a separate area), one kitchenette, one convalescent room, a screened-in convalescent porch, offices, a dining room, a medicine



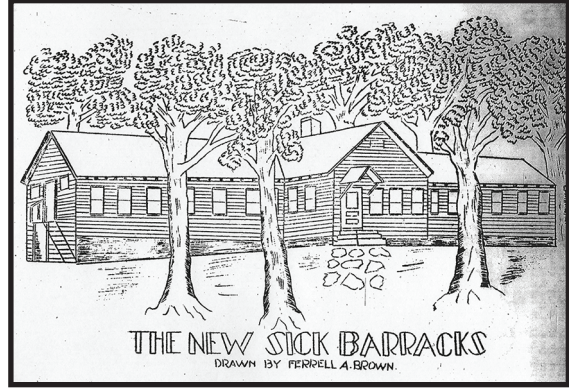
Transient Being Treated at First Hospital — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

room, and an operating room. It was heated by hot-air furnaces. The basement garage had space for three cars and was designed with an interior driveway running the length of that entire level. The camp's barber shop moved to the new hospital's basement, which provided the barbers with a large, cool room. The article mentioned that an average of 40 patients per day had been treated since the camp opened a year earlier, and five deaths had occurred during that time.

The new hospital was equipped for all minor operations and would soon be equipped for major operations. The hospital staff consisted of six attendants, with Ike Butler serving as chief orderly and Robert F. Williams, M.D. serving as acting physician. Dr. Williams (another cousin of Kittie Wood) was the brother of John W. Williams, M.D., who had originally suggested the camp site to the government. The article described the location of the new hospital as one of the most beautiful areas on the entire grounds: “Situated



Ike Butler at the Second Hospital — 1935
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri



Transient Artist's Sketch of Second Hospital — 1935
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

on the top of a large, steep hill, it overlooks the lake and surrounding hills. Great rock driveways have been built leading to and from the building, adding greatly to the beautification; large trees are seen on all sides, and the view is one of beauty in each



Excavating a Septic Tank — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri



Ruin of Second Hospital — 2013
Photo by Author

way you look.” All work on the new hospital was completed by members of the camp—and was proudly proclaimed “strictly a camp production.”

Septic Tanks

At the same time the new hospital opened, a septic tank project was also completed. It was surely situated somewhere close to the hospital. Reportedly, another septic tank was also in existence on a hill just east of the administration building.

Sidewalks

At the same time that the second hospital was under construction, sidewalks were being built around the dormitories



Building of Sidewalks — 1934

Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

that they could be torn down quickly and moved to a location convenient for men working on public projects away from the camp. Only five portable dormitories were actually built, and they housed 100 additional men. They were 20' x 60' in size. The tents were moved (and scattered over the grounds) in preparation for new portable dormitories, which were placed where the tents were formerly located—on the ridge near the large dormitories and hospital.

Superintendent's Timber Home

Perhaps the last building constructed was a small home (more the size of a cabin) for the superintendent

and to the laundry and commissary. The gravel walks were three feet wide and six inches high and were lined with native stones. They were considered a major convenience to the men and greatly improved the looks of the grounds. During the summer of 1935, walks were constructed around the administration building. One of the writers of *The Transient Journal* described the grounds as looking like a well-kept park. Remnants of the walks can be found today if one looks closely.

Second Bath House

Just after the new hospital was completed, a second bath house—large enough to accommodate 140 men—was constructed on the ridge. It would be mainly used by the occupants of the tents. It had a concrete floor and contained twelve toilets, twenty-four wash basins, and six showers.

Portable Dormitories

The *Springfield News and Leader* reported on April 21, 1935, that seven new portable cabin dormitories would be built at the camp in an effort to “usher in a new phase in the transient program.” The new barracks would be built in such a manner



Monty Nickle (left) visiting his cousin, Sonja Nickle at the Former Superintendent's Timber Home — early 1950s

Courtesy of Asenath Nickle Adams



Ruin of Superintendent's Timber Home — 2013

Photo by Author

near the entrance of the camp. It was described as a “timber home.” Later, in the 1950s, when James Nickle—a nephew of Dan Nickle—was renting the property (where his family resided in the former Ritter-Wood home), one daughter and her husband set up housekeeping in the little cabin when they first married. When the Nickle family moved away in 1954, it was still standing and in good repair. It is not known when this building was demolished (or if it burned). The ruin is still there—with its field stone fireplace and chimney in place.

Life in the Camp

The extensive building projects that took place at the transient camp during 1934 and 1935 prove that this facility ended up being a small village in those woods. The population eventually grew to around 250 men, so this brings up some questions. What jobs did the able-bodied residents do during their required 30 hours per week, and what did they do for recreation in their spare time?

Jobs

Many of the men at the camp worked at jobs that kept the many buildings functioning. There were office jobs in the administration building such as staffing *The Transient Journal* newsletter, which began publishing on April 11, 1934. There was a newsletter editor and an artist, plus at least three more men who helped with the printing—all done on the premises. The newsletter began printing eighty-five copies of a four-page publication, and on July 11, 225 copies of a six-page issue were printed. The last-known issue, dated July of 1935, had expanded to 20 pages. It is unknown how many copies were being printed when it ceased.

It is obvious from the number of building projects that a large number of men were occupied in the construction of buildings. Others were building roads and walks or simply keeping the camp clean. Some were involved in rebuilding the dam and lake – and in tearing down the dilapidated Ritter Mill. Others worked in the dormitories, blacksmith shop, barber shop, shoe cobbler's shop, carpenter shop, laundry, commissary, hospital, garden, or in the kitchen of the mess hall. An article that appeared in the *Springfield Leader and Press* on June 26, 1935, explained that the men worked thirty hours per week and that twenty-seven of those hours were in payment for food, lodging, clothing, and medical care. They were paid cash for the other three hours. Seventy percent of the transients received \$1.00 per week, 20% received \$2.00 per week for heavier or more important tasks, and 10% were making \$3.00 per week for performing supervisory duties. They were also put to work in Springfield at the U.S. Medical Center for Federal Prisoners, newly opened in 1933, doing garden work, fence construction, and sewer ditch digging. In January of 1935, sixteen of the transients began working at the Transient Bureau's 80-acre dairy farm, located several miles north, which had a herd of fifty milk cows. The milk from this herd supplied the camp, the downtown shelter, and 125 transient families under the Transient Bureau's care. In most instances, the men at the transient camp were willing to do whatever was needed. One example of that was a brush fire that 125 of them fought on July 24, 1934, on the adjoining land to the northwest of the camp (still owned at that time by descendants of the Ritter family). Armed with wet gunny sacks, fire buckets, shovels, fire extinguishers, and miscellaneous tools, the transients eventually put out the fire on that hot July day, saving two small homes on the property.

Beginning in October of 1934, about a dozen men at the camp worked tirelessly making toys for a project named Santa Claus, Ltd. Fifteen hundred toys were made for the disadvantaged children of families on relief. Everything from toy airplanes to clowns, pigs, ducks, horses, toy guns, and doll chairs were made by the men, who worked until late at night to have the toys ready for Christmas.



Fighting a Brush Fire — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

Educational Opportunities

The April 11, 1934, issue of *The Transient Journal*, mentioned the existence of an educational program at the camp. Initially, instruction was available in barbering, cooking, penmanship, blacksmithing, manual training, and journalism. In the April 25th issue, it was announced that additional classes would be conducted in mathematics, reading, writing, spelling, drawing, color mixing, and painting. An editorial appeared in the May 16th issue urging the men to take advantage of the educational opportunities at the camp:

At the present time, our educational work at the camp is in its embryonic stage owing to the facilities with which we have to work. Yet the field enveloped by the variety of classwork offers distinct opportunity to those who desire to increase their knowledge . . . Every man should have a trade; therefore, we are establishing trade classes. And there is also instruction available in almost any subject in which a man may be interested. Educators say that we learn by doing, not that the task becomes any easier, but that the habit of learning is acquired . . . Anyone who has been out looking for a job will admit that one of the first questions asked is, "How much education do you have?" With this view in mind, we urge that every man take as much educational work as is possible while he is in the camp.

By September of that year, additional course offerings included bookkeeping, typewriting, Spanish, English, geography, shorthand, astronomy, geology, and general science (which would include chemistry). It was explained that the courses would be of a practical rather than an academic nature; they would be for everyday use so that they would benefit them in a trade or profession. The hours were arranged so that the men could enter all of the courses they desired to take. At the beginning, more than seventy men signed up for classes. Teachers from Springfield provided the instruction. In early October, more classes were organized, one being a woodworking and mechanical drawing class. These students would put their education to use by making toys for the Santa Claus, Ltd. project. No doubt, the educational opportunities that the men took advantage of helped them after they left the camp and again entered the workforce.



Developing the Recreation Field — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

Recreation

The first issue of *The Transient Journal*, published in April of 1934, mentioned that after the men had worked their required six hours a day, they could play horseshoes, read in the recreation room of the dormitory, or take part in various game tournaments. Later that month, *The Transient Journal* announced that a camp recreation field was being staked out and that individual courts were being constructed.

There would be facilities for nine types of sports, which included two softball fields, three horseshoe courts, two paddle tennis courts, a croquet court, a handball court, a 100-yard track, a volleyball court, a stick bowling court, and outside shuffleboard. A boxing ring was planned outside the main field. In May, it was announced that a recreation room in Dormitory No. 2 would soon open and was being made as attractive as possible. Furnishings for the room ran through the center of the building—with its massive fireplace at one



Swedish Artist, Eric Froberg, at Work on a Painting — 1934
Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri

end. It was furnished with seven tables, benches and chairs, and a console radio. One corner of the room served as a library and had a paneled counter separating it from the rest of the hall. The library contained books, magazines, writing paper, and games—all organized on shelves, in compartments or cupboards. The recreation room was opened each night until 10:00 p.m. Also in May, various camp baseball teams were named – the Wildcats, Bulldogs, and Barbers. The volleyball teams were named the Redbirds, Eagles, Blackhawks, and Robins. Soon, another camp baseball team, the All Stars, began playing against teams in Springfield. In June, they played against the St. John's Evangelist Church team, winning 16-9. In July, the All Stars played the team from the Colonial Bakery at Phelps Grove Park. The All Stars were still going strong in September when they beat the Springfield Ice and Fuel team twice in a doubleheader at the camp's athletic field.

A few of the men in the camp were artists, and they occasionally displayed their work. Eric Froberg, Albert Otto, Oscar Hornback, Andrew Bass, and Ernest Deming all exhibited their art work in July 1934 in the window of the Heer's Department Store on the square in Springfield.

A few months later, the transients at the camp enjoyed participating in sports at a Field Day, held there on November 17. Originally, Field Day was scheduled to occur on November 3, but due to heavy rains, some activities were postponed for two weeks. They ran races, played horseshoes, croquet, tug-of-war, and the camp's baseball team played the transient shelter's team. The camp team won 22-6.

Hobby Week was held at the camp the week of April 15, 1935. The men were encouraged to exhibit wood works of all kinds—including cabinet work and whittling, metal work, clay molding, flower work, drawings, paintings, leather work, pottery, sculptures, tin work, and toys.

Entertainment

It was fairly common for groups in the Springfield community to provide entertainment for those living at the transient camp. The citizens of the area no doubt felt they should try to make life a little more bearable for those living there. On the evening of March 29, 1934, after a day of work on the rocky hillsides of the camp, the men were entertained by a group performing hoedown tunes. Eleven-year-old Herschel “Speedy” Haworth, Jr. yodeled while playing the guitar. He was accompanied by several family members, all musicians. Haworth would one day become a well-known recording artist. In May 1934, the Elks Club quartet—composed of Denny Smith, Ted Trapp, Frank Colvin, and Dean Peck— sang a number of songs. One was a laughing song that was particularly well received by the men. Ballads were sung by C. H. Morris and Dan Nickle (the camp construction foreman). Transients celebrating a birthday were honored, and cake was served.

Sixty-three transients were given tickets to a Springfield Cardinals baseball game in late June of 1934, through the courtesy of Springfield businesses Elkins Swyers Office Equipment Company, Reys Dry Goods Company, Williams Lumber Company, Lines Music Company, Cooper Plumbing Supply, and Cook Paint and Varnish Company. Transportation was provided by Edwin C. Rice of the Coca Cola Bottling Company. The transients were also entertained that month by the 100-piece Springfield Boy Scout Band, under the direction of R. Ritchie Robertson, during a birthday night program. The July 4, 1934, issue of *The Transient Journal* gave details of the event, saying that the band was organized in 1920 with 50 members but had increased to 350 Boy Scouts, 100 of whom formed the concert band. It was the largest Boy Scout band in the world, and they had attended the World’s Fair the previous summer. Later in July, the Music Department at Southwest Missouri State Teachers College (now Missouri State University) entertained the transients during a camp birthday night in which lemonade and cookies were served. On November 3, heavy rains did not stop the Drury College Music Department from providing entertainment at the camp, which had postponed many of its Field Day events. Those who performed were Leon White, cellist; Edward Jeffers, vocalist; H. E. Small, flutist; and Ruth Maudlin, pianist.

Church Services

The religious needs at the camp were also considered. Various churches in Springfield provided services on the grounds. In May 1934, Rev. G. Bryant Drake, pastor of the Springfield First Congregational Church, held a service, including music from their choir, in front of the newly-completed Dormitory No. 2. Services were also conducted by the Dale Street Methodist Church and by the National Avenue and Cherry Street Presbyterian Church.

A Change in Direction – The Beginning of the End of the Camp

A change of direction in the lives of the many people who were so horribly challenged by the effects of the Great Depression became known in 1935. In Joan M. Crouse’s book, *The Homeless Transient in the Great Depression: New York State, 1929-1941*, she wrote about what was to happen nationally:

On January 4, 1935, FDR instructed Congress: “The Federal Government must and shall quit this business of relief . . . We must preserve not only the bodies of the unemployed from destruction but also their self-respect, their self-reliance and courage and determination.” To accomplish this, he proposed a massive federal work program that would substitute

work relief for direct relief for some 3.5 million people, a permanent social security system that would provide for an old age pension as well as categorical aid to specifically defined dependents, and a system of unemployment insurance to assure that emergency relief measures like FERA would never again be necessary. The needy who did not fit into the specified categories or were unable to participate in the works program were to be once again, as tradition dictated, returned to the responsibility of the state and local governments.

The transients knew that change was eminent—that a shift from direct relief to a new federal work program (the WPA) for the able-bodied men in the camp would soon take place. Most would soon be walking out of the camp's entrance for the very last time. The last-known *Transient Journal* newsletter was published after the Fourth of July in 1935. Although undated, that newsletter mentioned the holiday's festivities at the camp. The title on the cover of that issue was "Hope: The Transient Sees the First Rays of Hope Rise in the Distance." A rumor in the camp was that it would be made into an "old men's home and convalescent camp" that would provide a place for old men to spend their final days. It was obvious the newsletter editor was aware that the healthy and able-bodied men of the camp might soon be leaving to join government work projects elsewhere. His bitterness about having lived his recent life as a transient could be felt in his editorial:

Soon we will be back—back beside the man who has used every effort to kick us on downhill a little farther; he was our associate before we hit the "toboggan," but as soon as we became useless to him and our pocketbooks became empty, then his attitude changed from an exalted position of being his equal simply because the world did not need what we were producing anymore. We were thrown out of employment, and in his eyes, we became "bums or tramps." The minute we get back on our feet and the empty pocketbook begins to fill, you will find this man with a broad smile on his face and a ready hand to greet you so he can again get his share and be your friend again . . . Throughout the Transient Camp, there is a feeling among the transients today that cannot help but be noticed. On every face is a look of expectancy, joy, relief from the thought that "we're coming back" to mingle with our fellow men, not as dependents, but as men who are making their own way.

That last *Transient Journal* gave some interesting statistics about the camp (as of May 1935): total number of men sent to the camp—962, number of acres of the camp—181, number of acres being farmed—26, number of cows—48, average gallons of milk per day—115. The camp's bakery was supplying 650 loaves of bread daily—for their use, for the transient shelter, and for the camps in Monett and Joplin. Buildings listed were: three dormitories, eight tents, two recreational rooms, three bath houses, one administration building, and one hospital with a capacity for twenty-nine patients (but presently treating fourteen). Among the items harvested in the garden were 6,300 pounds of potatoes, 23,200 pounds of sweet potatoes, 12,500 tomato plants, 350 pounds of string beans, sixty pounds of sweet corn, eight bushels of onion sets, and twelve pounds of beets. Camp work projects listed were for the blacksmith shop, kitchen, bakery, administration office, commissary, tool room, paint shop, shoe shop, mimeograph department, general cleanup detail, athletic field detail, and the wood-clearing detail.

Additional facts about the camp that appeared in that newsletter were compiled as of June 17, 1935. The camp's population totaled 185—140 in state and 45 out of state. Their legal residences included thirty states, the District of Columbia, and Canada. Most were from Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma.

An impressive number of occupational qualifications were given: barbers, bartenders, boilermakers, bricklayers, butchers, carpenters, cement finishers, chauffeurs, clerks, cooks and bakers, electricians, engineers, factory hands, farmers, glass workers, hotel workers, hospital orderlies, hucksters (door-to-door salesmen), laborers, machinists, miners, moulders, oil field workers, painters, physicians, plumbers, railroad employees, salesmen, shoemakers, steamfitters, steelworkers, trunk makers, and weavers.

Appearing in the back of that last *Transient Journal* were sketches of some of the camp buildings and a second editorial. That editorial, titled "Views of the Camp" gave the editor's moving sentiment of the camp:

In this week's issue of the *Journal*, we are printing a set of the drawings of the camp, thinking that maybe some of the men might want to save them as a remembrance of their stay in the Springfield Federal Transient Camp. As the years drift onward, we are bound to look back at our stay here, and while it has not all been "peaches and cream," there are many bright spots to look upon. There have been acquaintances and associations made that will last a lifetime. With the excitement of getting back to work again, it may not come to us that we are leaving a host of friends and associations that will never be forgotten. Many of us, while fairly well versed in the world before coming here, have been taught lessons in the camp that will be most beneficial to us. They will be written in the pages of our lives and will long be remembered. To the old boys of the camp who came here when the old dairy barn was the whole camp and have seen it grow and help make a camp of it, there are memories that will linger always. I guess there is little difference in camps, this being the only one I have ever known, but as the time draws near that we will go out into the world again, there is a sense of sadness that creeps in to know that we are leaving "The Old Gang," and while we have been liked and disliked, made friends and enemies, yet there is a feeling among the men that there are a lot worse places and a lot worse fellows than we have found here. And, as we one by one leave the old camp, there will be many and many a time when memory drifts back to it and we wonder how this and that fellow is making it and how the old camp is getting along, where they are and what they are doing in the new life they are leading. It has been tough, but there is a world of pleasant memories to look back upon.

There were more indications that changes were about to occur. A major cut in federal funding of the transient program was announced in an article that appeared in *The New York Times* on September 19, 1935. The cut would begin in three days. The article gave the following information about this crucial change:

After Friday midnight, the doors of 595 lodges and camps where a quarter of a million persons have been receiving food and shelter will be closed to future guests. The camps will be maintained temporarily for their present occupants, but relief officials say newcomers must look to the bounty of local governments or charitable agencies. . . Under the "liquidation" program, the present population of the transient shelters will be maintained there until they can be assigned to jobs in the work-relief program or returned to their homes for similar assignment. . . Officials estimate that only seven percent of the group is in the "unemployable" class. These will be studied by case workers and either returned to their homes, where local governments must care for them, or be placed in veterans' homes or similar institutions . . . Transient camps in rural areas will be continued as work projects

. . . Up to the present, transient relief has cost the government about \$70,000,000 since it was begun in 1933.

Again, it was hinted that the camp might become a home for elderly men. The *Springfield News and Leader* ran an article on November 10, 1935, with the headline “How the Old Folks Would Enjoy It!” Several photographs of the camp were included with the news that “the federal transient camp at Ritter’s Mill may eventually become a 181-acre farm home for unemployable old men if hopes of officials are realized.” At that time, 219 men were still being housed at the camp. An informative article appeared in the *Springfield News and Leader* on December 15 that gave additional information on the changes taking place. The transient shelter that operated in the former Central Hotel on the corner of Boonville and Mill had vacated. (The building—later known as the Victory Hotel—was eventually condemned and recommended for demolition in June of 1946.) Some of the men from the shelter had gone to work, and others moved to the transient camp. The move began on December 12, when some of the transients got their first Works Progress Administration (WPA) checks. More details were given in the article:

All the men at the hotel and camp arrived before September 20, the date on which were issued orders to admit no new transients. At this time, there were about 500 men at both places and about 200 families being boarded out in private houses. Some of these have been sent home, some have gotten private employment; others are working on the WPA. . . About 150 single men from the shelter and camp working on sewer jobs got their first pay checks on Thursday, half of the \$42 a month. Most of the others, including 110 working on park projects, will be paid this Thursday. By the first of the year, the transient program should be wound up. Ninety-eight men at the camp will leave this week. Thirty-four unemployables will be left. The unemployables and a small staff will inhabit the camp until at least February 1 and possibly after that, the camp will be kept open as a permanent home for unemployable men. When the program finally closes down, some 365 transient wage earners will be left in Springfield working for the WPA.

It appears that the camp continued operating for unemployable men, but on May 3, 1936, the *Springfield News and Leader* ran an article entitled, “State’s Finest Transient Camp Will Close Here.” The article said that officials had hoped the camp would be maintained permanently as a home for aged and unemployable men. However, that looked unlikely as FERA funds would run out in September, and the camp would have to close. The article went on to say that the land belonged to Miss Kittie Wood and was being assessed at about \$32 per acre. She had leased it to the government under an ordinary tenant lease. Miss Wood stated that she had no idea what would happen to the property when it was vacated. She had not been informed whether or not the buildings would be torn down, and she had not thought about selling it. Earl Langkop, the superintendent of the camp at the time, said that five of the barracks and the shower house were “more or less portable” and would be given to other relief agencies. He didn’t know whether the permanent buildings would be demolished or abandoned. The article further stated that even if all the new buildings were taken down board by board, a lot of improvements would remain because of the work the transients had done around the woods by cleaning up, repairing roads, building bridges, and planting. It would be difficult to remove the concrete foundations of some of the buildings or the septic tanks and drainage system from the laundry and bath house. The camp was considered to be the best in Missouri and was the last scheduled to close. Other camps in the state were abandoned when direct relief was replaced by

the WPA. At the time of this article, there were still a number of unemployable men remaining in residence with eighteen of them hospitalized with tuberculosis, heart disease, mental problems, and minor ailments. All but a few were from other states. Missouri transients had been sent back to their home counties for relief. A crew of ten was still on hand to manage the camp.

Although it was predicted that federal funding for the transient program would end in September, the camp was still in operation late that month. An article that appeared in the September 27, 1936, *Springfield News and Leader* provided some updated information. There were now eighty-four homeless, aged, and ailing men living at the camp—also being referred to as the Missouri Unemployable Camp. The Springfield camp was the only one remaining in the state. The residents could not be turned out if they were too sick or old, so the government continued caring for men in those circumstances. The article went on to say that when the other twelve camps in Missouri had disbanded, one hundred men were sent to the Springfield camp. Ten had passed away, and a special fund was used to bury them in potters' field (in Hazelwood Cemetery). A few others left when relatives were located who were willing to care for them. The article stated that the artificial lake on the grounds, which was chemically treated, supplied drinking water and that the camp had a capacity for 300 men. Earl Langkop, camp superintendent, said all of the men received twenty-five cents a week for incidentals, and men who were well enough to do maintenance work earned up to one dollar per week. He said that when the transient camps broke up, all employable men were placed on WPA work camp projects. Unemployable men were sent to the Springfield camp, and a fund from the federal government was earmarked for their care. Langkop estimated that funding was sufficient to see them through that winter (of 1937).

An article that ran in the November 21, 1937, issue of the *Springfield News and Leader* included news that would eventually affect the transient camp. The Greene County Almshouse on West Division (west of the West Bypass), built around 1890, had fallen into deplorable condition. The writer of the article called it “a tumbledown, overcrowded, filthy firetrap” where 135 impoverished men and women lived, supported by funds from the county. Associate Judge Flemin Thompson Jared stated that the present facility was a disgrace to a county with a county seat the size of Springfield. Presiding Judge Ernest H. Scholten and Associate Judge Henry D. Pickel agreed, and the court was awaiting the approval of a WPA project that would partially fund the construction of a new facility. The following year, the residents of the decrepit almshouse would be moving into the woods north of Springfield for a while.

Apparently, funds for the camp held out until the fall of 1938. On October 27, 1938, a sub-tenancy lease was negotiated between the State Social Security Commission of Missouri (previously known as the Missouri Relief and Reconstruction Commission) and Greene County, Missouri. The owner of the camp property, Kittie Wood, was also involved in this lease. The document, on file at the Greene County Archives, explained that the state had been the tenant of Kittie Wood's property, which included the transient camp area, ever since the original lease was executed with her on January 17, 1934. There were still thirty-five indigents at the camp as of October 27, 1938, but the state now agreed to sub-lease the property to Greene County. This was because the county was planning to build a new almshouse for the poor and had applied to sponsor a WPA project to build that facility (and raze the old one). This would necessitate the moving of the residents of the old almshouse and house them temporarily at the transient camp for the period of time it took for the new facility to open its doors for operation. The county agreed to continue paying Wood the \$60 per month that the state had been paying to lease her property. The county agreed to take over the care of the thirty-five indigent people the state had been caring for at the camp and to hire an attendant (at \$100

per month) to supervise those indigent transients and to care for the property. The county further agreed to keep the buildings and equipment at the camp in good repair. They also agreed to care for growing trees and avoid endangering the timber by fire, remove undergrowth, avoid plowing uncultivated soil, and avoid cutting any timber without Wood's written permission. Wood was allowed to store items in the east loft of the barn (Dormitory No. 1) and be allowed access to that area. The sub-tenancy lease was executed on November 1, 1938, and signed by Kittie A. Wood; Ernest H. Scholten, Presiding Judge of Greene County; and Flemin T. Jared, Associate Judge of Greene County.

The November 3, 1938, issue of the *Ash Grove Commonwealth* ran a front-page article saying 110 "inmates" (sixty-five men and forty-five women) had been moved to the camp two days earlier. The project to build a new county home for the poor had been approved, and it was projected to cost the federal government \$90,974 and Greene County \$65,586. The county officials hoped that between \$8,000-\$10,000 worth of material could be salvaged from the old building. The former almshouse residents were now being housed along with the remaining thirty-five transients at the camp—bringing the total population to 145.

The building of the new almshouse did not begin until late the following summer. The architects were James Robinett and Eugene Johnson (who, coincidentally, was another descendant of the Wood family). Johnson provided information on the project in a July 21, 1939, article in the *Springfield Leader and Press*, saying that actual construction would begin as soon as a WPA work order was issued in Jefferson City, Missouri—hopefully the following week.

Indigent individuals continued being housed at the camp until August 25, 1941, when—at long last—the new almshouse opened. An article in the *Springfield Leader and Press* on August 19 announced the opening, saying that one hundred inmates of the former federal transient camp would soon be moved.



Greene County Almshouse
(Later Sunshine Acres Nursing Home)
***The Ozarks Mountaineer* (November 1957)**
Courtesy of Springfield-Greene County Library

The Camp Closes

With a new and modern facility to house the county's most destitute people, it appears that the usefulness of the former Springfield Federal Transient Camp had come to an end in August of 1941—after an existence of seven and a half years. The ruins of the buildings sit quietly in the woods today as a reminder of a very historic and tragic time in American history.

The CCC Camp in Springfield

The Springfield Federal Transient Camp is not to be confused with another Depression-era camp nearby to the east, which was established in August 1939—more than five years after the transient camp opened. Company 2730 of the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) was located at Dickerson Park Zoo and operated until the summer of 1942. At one time, that CCC camp housed over 200 young men. The U.S. Congress had enacted legislation creating the CCC on March 31, 1933. The Roosevelt administration feared that young men roaming the country looking for work would be unprepared to assume financial responsibilities without jobs and training. Unmarried men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five who were U.S. citizens were eligible to work in CCC camps. The CCC camp in Springfield functioned until the last of the young men left on July 20, 1942, after the government had ordered that all CCC camps be closed. A week later, the equipment from the camp was being moved to O'Reilly General Hospital, located on the southwest corner of Glenstone and Division, which was constructed in 1941 and opened a month before the December 7th bombing of Pearl Harbor. Undoubtedly, with World War II raging and O'Reilly General Hospital rapidly growing, building materials and supplies were needed. It is entirely possible that at some point after it closed, some materials from the Springfield Federal Transient Camp could have also been moved to O'Reilly.

Known Deaths at the Camp

In the seven and a half years that the transient camp was in existence, a number of the homeless men would spend their final days there. An attempt was made by this writer to document as many of those deaths as possible by comparing listings of burials occurring from 1934-1941 in the book, *Greene County, Missouri Cemeteries—Volume 11—Hazelwood Cemetery*, with images of their death certificates available on the Missouri Secretary of State's Death Certificates' database. This study encompassed mostly burials occurring at Hazelwood Cemetery in Springfield. Hazelwood, being a city-run cemetery, was apparently required to accept burials of the indigents from the transient camp. Due to their dire circumstances during that period of time, many families of transients could not afford to have their loved ones' remains transported to their home localities for burial, so their final resting place was in the indigent section of Hazelwood Cemetery—sometimes referred to as potter's field (in the southernmost area of the cemetery, which can be seen when driving along Sunset Street just west of Glenstone Avenue). It is unfortunate that most do not have headstones to mark their graves. Of the sixty deaths documented during this period, there were fifty-eight men and two women (the women having come from the almshouse transfer). Of those sixty deaths, one was eighteen years old. There were no deaths in the 20-29 or the 30-39 age range. The others are as follows: 40-49—5, 50-59—7, 60-69—22, 70-79—18, 80-89—6, 90-99—1. The youngest to die at the transient camp was an eighteen-year-old black man, Samuel Bradley, Jr., from Lyon, Mississippi, who drowned in the lake on July 4, 1935. *The Transient Journal* reported that he had been a resident of the transient shelter and had come to the camp for a Fourth of July celebration, which included games and sporting events.

Bradley fell from a raft into the lake and drowned—despite the efforts of several young men to rescue him. The first to die at the camp was seventy-seven-year-old Luther Saxton, from Sayre, Oklahoma, who died of lobar pneumonia on April 2, 1934. The last to die was sixty-six-year-old Charley T. Smith of Springfield. He died on August 21, 1941, from chronic myocarditis (heart disease)—just days before the camp closed and the new almshouse opened. The oldest to die was Henry Quinn. His death certificate stated that he was “about 90” and died from chronic myocarditis on May 12, 1941. His permanent residence was unknown. Up until late 1938 when the county took over the responsibility of the camp, Dr. Robert F. Williams had been the attending physician shown on most of the death certificates. After the county took over in 1938, there were several different doctors shown on the death certificates. Common causes of death were heart disease, stroke, or cancer. The cause of death on eighty-five-year-old Joseph S. Wagner’s death certificate showed that he died from a broken neck after being gored by a bull on October 27, 1935.

An interesting story appeared in Springfield newspapers regarding the death of penniless Frank W. Mulock in his thin iron bed at the camp on December 27, 1936. Following his death from heart disease, a scrapbook was found under his mattress that told of a fascinating life. During Mulock’s career, according to the many clippings from newspapers and magazines in his scrapbook (either about him or by him), he had been a veteran reporter and former newspaper editor. He had worked on newspapers in Canada and in most of the states (including Alaska, where he had worked for a newspaper during the gold rush). His last known position was the post of Associated Press correspondent in New Iberia, Louisiana. Also found in the scrapbook were poems he had written and personal letters from President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Mulock had told camp officials that he knew Roosevelt when he was Assistant Secretary of the Navy, a post Roosevelt held from 1913-1920. Among Mulock’s personal effects were a receipt for a \$100 Community Chest contribution from a distant city and \$5,000 in worthless bonds from a Louisiana bank. He told a camp orderly that he had lost \$30,000 in a failed theatre venture with his brother. In June of 1936, he ended up in Kansas City, sick and penniless, and stayed in a transient shelter there until the federal government closed it. He was then sent to the camp in Springfield, the only one left in Missouri—by then a camp for unemployable old and ailing men without homes. He would have been buried in



Broken Dam — 1985
Courtesy of Lynn Williams

potter's field at Hazelwood Cemetery but for the generosity of a Springfieldian who knew of Mulock's former circumstances. His funeral was held at Herman Lohmeyer Funeral Home, and he was buried in Eastlawn Cemetery in Springfield.

Later Tenants of the Property

The structures built by the government at the transient camp were most likely torn down soon after the premises were vacated in August 1941. Springfieldian Tom Persell, whose grandfather, Clyde W. Greenwade, had bought nearby property in 1933, is very familiar with the former camp. Persell had always enjoyed hiking there as a child when visiting his grandparents. He remembered exploring the grounds prior to 1942 (before a two-year absence while his father was serving in the military during World War II). The lake was still holding water as late as around 1939 or 1940—when he and his friends enjoyed taking a boat to the small island the transients had built. He recalled that the lake had drained before their departure—ending their boat excursions. He also remembered that the only structures left standing when they returned in 1945 were the old Ritter-Wood home and barn as well as the deteriorated former fishing cabins on the ridge, which had nearly caved in. All that remained of the buildings built by the government were their foundations. Also, the massive fireplace at one of the dormitories remained standing. He remembered seeing huge boiler pipes resting near one of the broken dams in the lower part of the property.

It appears that the Wood family began leasing the property to individual families again following the close of the camp. Asenath Nickle Adams is another area resident who has fond memories of those woods. Her parents rented the Wood family's property from 1947 to 1954, and she experienced an idyllic childhood while growing up near the remains of the former transient camp. Fortunately, they were able to enjoy the modern convenience of indoor plumbing in the house, which had been installed by the government. She remembered that another family—by the name of Little—rented the property prior to their arrival. By the time her family moved to the property in 1947, the dam would no longer contain the water in the lake. Adams remembers that it would fill during a heavy rain but would soon drain again and be back to a stream going through the lake bed. She remembered that the lake formed from a large spring that had been contained in a cement embankment that spilled over a waterfall of about four feet—and how cool and refreshing it felt in the summer. The old Ritter Mill structure was long gone, but she remembered that the mill race was still very evident. Her family raised most of their own food, and they sold their excess milk and cream to a commercial dairy. Milk trucks would arrive once or twice a week



Siblings Kittie and Frank Wood — ca. 1970s
Courtesy of Betty Jeanne (Wood) Turoff

to collect the ten-gallon milk cans. They also had an abundance of chickens, eggs, wild fruits, and berries. She remembered collecting walnuts every autumn from the many trees near their home, retaining large bags of them for Frank Wood (Kittie's brother), who would make trips to Springfield periodically from his home in St. Louis. Adams called this place her very own Garden of Eden—and remembered the tranquil feeling of peace and serenity that engulfed the entire woodlands. She particularly loved playing in the massive three-story barn, climbing to the top to view the beautiful scenery surrounding their home. Although she and her siblings often rode the bus to Ritter School, they also enjoyed walking through the woods to school many mornings. The family moved to Utah in 1954, and Adams remembered that the following year, her father learned from a Springfield friend that the Ritter-Wood home had been burned by vandals and was totally destroyed.

Property Vacant for Long Period

After the Ritter-Wood home burned in the mid-1950s, the property was no longer inhabitable. Unused, the land slowly returned to nature. The barn eventually caved in, and now all that remains of the Ritter-Wood farm and the Springfield Federal Transient Camp are foundations that are hidden beneath a massive overgrowth of vegetation. The springs remain as beautiful as ever. After the property became vacant, it turned into an irresistible destination for young people in the area to explore—mainly boys. Countless young explorers have trespassed onto the property in the six decades since the land was occupied, and when they stumbled onto the hidden foundations and other objects left from the transient camp, many of them no doubt wondered what had been there long ago. Kittie Wood eventually deeded the property to her brother, Frank, at some point before her death in 1980. Upon Frank's death in 1986, his only child, Betty Jeanne (Wood) Turoff, became the owner.

Property is Donated to Missouri State University

Even though Turoff resides in Virginia, she had continued to retain ownership of the vacant, wooded property for many years. Following the long tradition in her family, she did not want the property developed. It is nearly landlocked by developments today. During the winter of 2011, a local real estate appraiser—who was working on behalf of Turoff—contacted Dr. W. Anson Elliott, Director of the William H. Darr School of Agriculture at Missouri State University, about the university acquiring this land for educational purposes. With the university not in a position to purchase the land and no other potential buyers coming forward who met her no-development restrictions, it was about



**Brent Dunn, Vice President for University Advancement,
Missouri State University, Announcing
The Woodlands Gift
December 18, 2013
*Courtesy of Kevin White***



**Dr. W. Anson Elliott, Director, William H. Darr School of Agriculture (left),
Showing Ritter Spring West to Water and Forestry Experts
May 8, 2013**
Courtesy of Michael Klem



**Dr. Elliott Shows the Property to Modern-Day Explorers
Recalling Childhood Stories at The Woodlands
Left to Right: Anson Elliott, Rose and Paul Jones,
Asenath (Nickle) and Dale Adams, and Sally McAlear
November 30, 2013**
Photo by John McAlear

two years later when she decided to donate it to the Missouri State University Foundation for use as an outdoor nature laboratory by the university, managed by the MSU William H. Darr School of Agriculture. During the spring of 2013, discussions began about the potential of such a donation, and on December 18, 2013, the official announcement of the gift of 161 acres of timbered land was made by the university. Turoff specified that it be named The Woodlands. Areas of on-site study include soil erosion control, watershed management, forestry, and wildlife conservation. The property is unique in that it contains mature timber rarely seen so close to a metropolitan area. During the spring 2014 semester, an agriculture graduate student who was working on a master's degree in plant science led a project at The Woodlands. It involved mapping the property by GPS, which included map layout, map overlay, site survey, and cross checking known cultural sites. The group's findings will be used in a forestry stewardship/management plan. Through Mrs. Turoff's generosity, generations of students will be positively impacted.

Property Made a Greene County Historic Site

Because of the historical significance of the former Ritter Mill and the Springfield Federal Transient Camp, the property was designated as a historic site and included in the Greene County Historic Sites Register on February 2, 2014. Rose Cole Jones, a lifelong resident of Greene County and member of the Greene County Historic Sites Board, nominated the site and provided the required documentation for its approval by the Greene County Commissioners.



**Presentation of Ritter Mill and Springfield Federal Transient Camp
to the Greene County Historic Sites Register**
Left-Right: Dr. W. Anson Elliott, Director, MSU Darr School of Agriculture;
Rose Cole Jones, member, Greene County Historic Sites Board;
and Harold Bengsch, Greene County Commissioner
February 3, 2014
Photo by Author



**Ritter Mill and Springfield
Federal Transient Camp Sign — 2014**
Photo by Author

Epilogue

Greene County pioneers Joseph Weaver and John Wood could never have predicted that the remote land they bought so long ago would acquire such an interesting history and would have such a meaningful future. It was home to several families but was also a refuge for hundreds of men rendered homeless in extremely difficult times. The future of the land will undoubtedly benefit thousands of Missouri State University students in the years to come as they become the newest explorers in those beautiful woodlands.



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Washington State University Libraries Special Collections <<http://content.lib.washington.edu/feraweb/essay.html>>

A detailed bibliography is on file at:

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About the Author

Sally Lyons McAlear was a longtime administrative assistant for the William H. Darr School of Agriculture at Missouri State University, retiring in 2003. She grew up a half mile south of the former transient camp property — today known as The Woodlands.

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Key to Aerial Map of The Woodlands

1912

John Shackelford Wood purchased this area from John and Juliet Williams. One spring is located in this area.

1908

John Shackelford Wood purchased this area from William and Elizabeth Ritter. (William was the son of Harvey Ritter.) Two springs are located in this area.

1852

John Wood (immigrant from England) purchased this area—including the two northern corners outside the red border—from Major Joseph Weaver.

1866

John Wood sold it to Harvey Ritter—who built a home, barn, and gristmill. A church and school were also established in this area during the 1880s.

1904

The Ritter family sold the land (shown inside the red border) to John Shackelford Wood, great-grandson of John Wood above. It was in the red-bordered area where the transient camp was later established (in 1934). Two springs are located in this area.

2013

The property in all three colored areas was donated by Betty Jeanne (Wood) Turoff to the Missouri State University Foundation.

Original aerial map is courtesy of the Greene County, Missouri, Assessor's Office.

Aerial Map of The Woodlands

