

Vernon W. Lemmon & Norman Hull  
Zion National Park Oral History Project  
CCC Reunion  
September 28, 1989

Carolyn Hinton: Okay, we're in Zion National Park at the CC Reunion, September 28, 1989, at Zion Nature Center. I'm Carolyn Hinton, and we're here interviewing Vernon Lemmon. Where are you from?

Vernon Lemmon: Originally or now? Where I grew up?

Carolyn Hinton: Yes. Where did you grow up?

Vernon Lemmon: Silver City, Utah; that's five miles from Eureka.

Carolyn Hinton: And what did you do before joining?

Vernon Lemmon: I was in school.

Carolyn Hinton: You were in school.

Vernon Lemmon: And I got out of school in 1934.

Carolyn Hinton: And why did you join the CCC's?

Vernon Lemmon: There wasn't anything else to do, living in a mining town, and I came from a large family. There are six boys and four girls in our family, and I was the eldest. So this was a chance to get a job and help the folks out some because twenty-five [dollars] went home, and I kept five [dollars] for myself. I was filthy rich.

...

Hinton: That's really good. That's one of the questions that they ask you. What did you feel like the CCC had done for you, and you told us what they did.

Lemmon: Learned how to mingle with people and be friendly with them, and so forth. We didn't have any problems in those days. Another thing that happened in February of 1935, they took us down to Boulder Dam. It wasn't finished. It was just finished, but the water hadn't been turned into it yet. They took us down to the bottom of the dam and we viewed the dam looking west. Looked up at that gracious thing there, and the guide showed us flags on the hill where the water would be, and we thought, "That isn't possible. That's way up on the mountain." They said, "The lake will be up to where those flags are eventually." Then we stayed at a VFW hall overnight, just slept on the floor, and then the next week, they took the other half of the camp down. They couldn't take the full camp at once. They had to leave at least half of the people here in case of a fire or anything like that, an emergency.

Hinton: About how many were in the camp?

Lemmon: About 200. Sometimes when you're serving tables, it seemed like, or washing dishes, it seemed like more than that.

Hinton: How many would you serve on a shift? Did they break the shifts up?

Lemmon: No. They all came in at once.

Hinton: Two-hundred.

Lemmon: Just like a bunch of sheep. You open the gate, and here they came all in at once, and it didn't take us too long to take care of it.

Hinton: What were the facilities like?

Lemmon: Well, they had good cooking facilities and everything. The darn cooks would dirty too many pots and pans though. It kept us busy. We thought they were pouring them from one into the other, cleaning up after them. But it was a good experience, and it's too bad they don't have something like that today. I had four of my brothers join the CC camps later on, as they became old enough.

...

Hinton: So what do you think that the CC did for you?

Lemmon: Well, it helped me grow from boyhood into manhood, I think. You had responsibility. They checked on you. You had to have a pass to leave. They had bed check each night. If you wasn't in there, you had extra duty and things like that to give you something extra to do on Saturday during your off-time. And so you had discipline. We had the calisthenics in the morning and the whole thing. That was one beautiful thing about getting in the kitchen. We got out of the calisthenics in the morning.

Hinton: What time did they start calisthenics?

Lemmon: Oh, they'd start just before breakfast. They'd get out there. We'd be in there with breakfast and be all ready, and just waiting for them to get through with that, and we'd watch them through the windows. (Carolyn laughs). And then they'd come charging in there and sit down at the tables and wait 'til somebody served them their breakfast.

Hinton: You don't remember what time?

Lemmon: It was early in the morning. We'd have to get up about an hour and a half ahead of them in order to get everything ready. We got to the point where we could peel a hundred pound sack of potatoes in an hour, each one of us could. We'd hurry up in the kitchen, get our work done, and the first one done would dash down to the cellar and start peeling potatoes. Because every day we'd have a hundred pound sack of potatoes we'd have to peel. And the meals were good. A lot of people complained about it, but most of us weren't doing that well at home because this was right in the middle of the depression. Especially with me and coming from that

large family being the oldest one. When I got out of twelfth grade, my youngest sister was going into the first grade. So they didn't remember too much of me at that particular time because I was gone most of the time. I liked the CC's. I liked it well enough that after I'd been in it six months, working on the railroad for \$2.28 a day, I got back in the CC camps again.

Hinton: What are some real special memories that you have?

Lemmon: Well, we'd go down to Springdale to the dances. In those days, a lot of my friends that I know now didn't dance, but they're good dancers now. But we went to a dance every week down there at Springdale, sometimes at Hurricane. Sometimes they'd have little shows. Trucks would go to Cedar City and different places like that. They always loaded us in the back of a big old truck, about 35 or 40 of us, and away we'd go, just sitting in the back of this truck. Being able to mingle with guys and they were all good guys. They'd get drunk once in a while, some of them and carry on a little bit, but you didn't have the dope and you didn't have the temptations that they have in this day and age. In a way, it might have been easier for us even though we'd gone through the depression. It might have been easier for us than it was. The temptations weren't quite as great there related to drugs and things like that as they are now.

Hinton: So you think it would be a good idea if they had something like this for the youth today?

Lemmon: I think so. They'd probably have to pay them a little more money.

...

Hinton: You said you worked up at Sinawava?

Lemmon: Yes. Just a little bit.

Hinton: What did you do up there?

Lemmon: Well, we were mostly doing pick and shovel work preparing for these basket bands and protection that they put the rocks in with the grating over it, and so forth, to protect the land. It would be just a wave and the water would come down, rushing through the canyon. Then they'd have floods, and terrific rains, and everything like that. The farmer's land was being washed away a little bit at a time. We were preserving that. And when we went up here to the rock quarry we were just breaking rocks and loading them in a truck. They were shipping up to those guys and building a lot of the stuff up close to the tunnel, and that rockwork there, and the entrances to the parking lot, all that kind of stuff.

Hinton: Anything else that you can remember?

Lemmon: I'll remember a lot of things after I go, I bet. It will be too late for them. It's been a long time. I think that I'm fortunate to remember as much as I did after all these years.

I married a Panguitch girl. I did a little work the second time I came back up here up at the campground up here a little ways, a little bit. I was in a group for a little while up in the campground

...

Norman Hull: But do you know this CC done me a lot of good just being away from home.

Lemmon: Get away from mother's apron strings. You see we had this big family. My dad said, "I'm going to teach you boys how to work." There were six of us. He said, "If it's no more than digging post holes and covering them up again." So we had to watch fifty head of sheep. We'd let them out in the mountainside then bring them back in. So we knew how to work. But a lot of the kids just went through high school; they didn't know how to work. And it was tough for them but we knew how to work.

Norman Hull: I think it was one of the best programs

Lemmon: Bring it back.

Norman Hull: You can't give people too much, but it was really a good program. It's like, probably not WPA or PWA, like you say your dad was in. Now I lived when we first got married in 1940, on just a dirt road. So we went finally went over to the County and said, "How about fixing this road?" You know they got wagons and we got six or eight dump board wagons and guys. There's a sand hill not far from me, and they loaded them up and widened that road and fixed that road up. It took them months, but it didn't cost nothing, about two dollars an hour or a dollar an hour for those.

Lemmon: Yes. They got forty or forty-five dollars a month, and they had to work. There wasn't any food stamps and no 'give-me' at all. You had to work. If you didn't show up, you didn't get your WPA allotment. That's all there was to it. You had to do it.