KATHLEEN DUXBURY AND GARDNER YEAW

As seen in Autumn Years Fall 2015

Traveling History's Trail. . . Together

By Patricia Farrell Delhauer

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It's funny how what seems an inconsequential moment in the grand scheme of things can actually be the catalyst that turns your life completely around. Such a moment happened to Kathleen Duxbury Yeaw in 2006, and the result has been visiting places, meeting people and pursuing interests she never imagined she would—and the adventures continue to this day.

"I've always been a curious person," Kathleen notes, "but I was never what you'd call a serious researcher until this point."

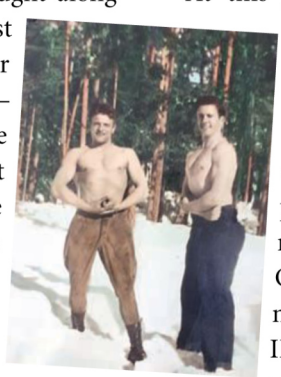
In fact, Kathleen, 64, and Gardner, her 70-year-old husband of 40 years, are both amazed and delighted at what has evolved during the past nine years for Kathleen, and it all started with her casual perusal of some photo albums created by her father.

"My mother had recently passed away," Kathleen recalls as she sits with Gardner in the light-filled office in their Ridgewood home of 35 years, "and while I was clearing out her house, I came across photo albums created by my father, George Duxbury, who died in 1975, during his four years in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930s (see sidebar). I'd seen the albums as a child, but as an adult I was now curious about his experiences during those years, and about the CCC in general."

It was also at this same time that Gardner purchased a 1978 Bluebird Wanderlodge motor home for the couple, with the intention of "seeing a bit of that wonderful world out there." So it seemed like a natural progression for the couple to take the RV on a trip to the site of the first camp where Kathleen's father had worked—Gilbert Lake State Park in Laurens, New York—

"just to see what it was all about."

There is a New York State Civilian Conservation Corps Museum at Gilbert Lake, so Kathleen brought along the photo albums and a host of questions about where her father had been stationed—a satellite location of the main CCC camp at Gilbert Lake. Unfortunately the museum's curator and the park superintendent were not aware that such a satellite camp had ever existed. They suggested looking for information at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland ("Where luck would have it, there is a national parks campground," she notes with a smile), and off Kathleen and Gardner went to do some research, little realizing such would be the pattern they would follow for years to come.



At this point both Kathleen and Gardner were still working. A former radiographer, Kathleen was a freelance photojournalist who also ran a home-based photography studio while raising their three children. Gardner pursued a telecommunications career, first at IBM, and later at UPS. The result was that they could only schedule sporadic research trips to former CCC camps and to National Archives locales in Maryland, Washington, D.C., and St. Louis, Missouri.

"I've always been a curious person,"

AutumnYearsFall2015-42

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28-foot mural that artist Hans Held had painted at the Lake Pleasant CCC camp.

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Artist Hans Held, 1937.

Kathleen notes, "but I was never what you'd call a serious researcher until this point. Truly, it all just started with my desire to find out more about the various CCC camps at which my father served in New York, Oregon, Idaho and Washington State. And it might have remained at that basic level, too, had it not been for another photograph…"

Kathleen recalls that, while attending an Adirondacks-based lecture on the CCC in 2009, she was leafing through one camp's photo yearbook the presenter had brought and saw a picture of a young man painting at an artist's easel. "I thought, this doesn't make sense," she says. "How could there be an artist in a CCC camp? Those young men were there to plant trees and build roads—not paint!"

Learning that a CCC camp in Lake Pleasant, New York, had produced the yearbook, Kathleen decided to drive there immediately to find out more. "I was traveling solo on that trip," she says, "so I called Gardner and told him, 'I'm not coming home just yet…I have to find out more about artists at CCC camps.' I talked to a local historian in Lake Pleasant, and she confirmed there had been an artist at the Lake Pleasant CCC camp and noted a piece of his art was on display at the Adirondacks Museum in Blue Mountain Lake, New York. So I called Gardner again and said 'Still not coming home!' At that point he decided to join me, so we were soon off to the museum."

What they saw at the museum was a 28-foot mural that artist Hans Held had painted at the Lake Pleasant CCC camp. What Kathleen gained, however, was a new research direction—learning about an arts program that was apparently an integral part of the CCC.

"After we'd been to the Adirondacks Museum, I called a contact at the National Archives and asked if he could do some research for me to determine if there had, in fact, been an official

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"Sunlight Through the Timbers" by Edmund Fitzgerald.

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"Jacobus Park, Honey Creek Parkway," by Richard Jansen, Wisconsin 1934.

arts program within the CCC," Kathleen continues. "He soon emailed me back to say there were numerous folders and photographs on the subject at the Archives. This opened a whole different box of research for me, and I've been pursuing the topic ever since."

Indeed, Kathleen and Gardner—both retired since 2010—now travel across the country in their second RV (a 1983 Bluebird Wanderlodge), tracking down the artists and artwork of the CCC. Visiting campsites, archives, museums, government agencies and galleries, they are chronicling a part of the CCC that has until now gone relatively unheralded.

"The CCC Art Program was one of the first Federal Government art projects," Kathleen recounts, "and provided work during the Depression for artists who had no other means of earning a living. It also realistically documented life in the camps and the accomplishments of the CCC in the parks and forests. It was the greatest conservation movement in American history."

Kathleen believes she is the only person actively researching and chronicling the CCC Art Program, and it has resulted in the second of her two self-published books—*CCC Art: Artists of the Civilian Conservation Corps – Marshall Davis.*

"My first book is called *The Boys of Bergen: Remembering the Civilian Conservation Corps in Bergen County, New Jersey,*" she notes, "and it was a test of

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"The Card Players" by William Dolowick, Oregon 1935.

sorts for me to see if I could, in fact, research, write and produce a book. My second book initially began as an overall study of the CCC Art Program, but during my research I had the good fortune to be contacted by John Davis, the son of Marshall Davis, who was the most prolific artist within the program. John had a wealth of information on his father, and having the book focus primarily on Mr. Davis and his work seemed an excellent way for me to recount the essence of the CCC Art Program."

And while chronicling that program is Kathleen's primary work, her research has taken her in unexpected directions as well. One particularly rewarding example begins in Oregon, and segues to Arkansas.

She explains: "I'd been studying this one CCC artist, Arthur Clough, and had a small newspaper article that mentioned a six-panel wood carving of his depicting scenes of Oregon. I contacted Ken O'Connell, an art professor at the University of Oregon, to inquire if he knew anything about it. I'd no sooner sent my email than my phone rang, and Ken asked, 'You don't mean the panels in our Knight Library, do you?' Apparently, I did!

"Long story short, they were created in 1934 and are considered among the crown jewels of CCC art. Ken told me that no one had any idea what the lower parts of the panels depicted, and thanks to my research, I was able to assist with that. They are scenarios of the Depression-era society from which the CCC camps were designed to save the nation's young men."

In 2012 Kathleen was in Oregon to present a lecture on the Clough panels and other CCC artists. While there, she met an art gallery owner, Mark Humpal, a fellow presenter, who recognized the work of one of the CCC artists in Kathleen's slide show—George Gordon Snyder—as the creator of two paintings he owned. The paintings, measuring about 2 feet by 2 feet each, were of Petit Jean State Park's Mather Lodge near Morrilton, Arkansas. They were created in 1937, soon after the CCC had constructed the lodge at the state park. Now realizing the origins of his paintings, Humpal asked Kathleen and Gardner to return them to Arkansas during their travels.

"The art dealer had purchased them years earlier at an estate sale in Portland from a woman who said her father had salvaged them out of a dumpster in Washington, D.C.," Kathleen said. "Mr. Humpal tried to learn more about

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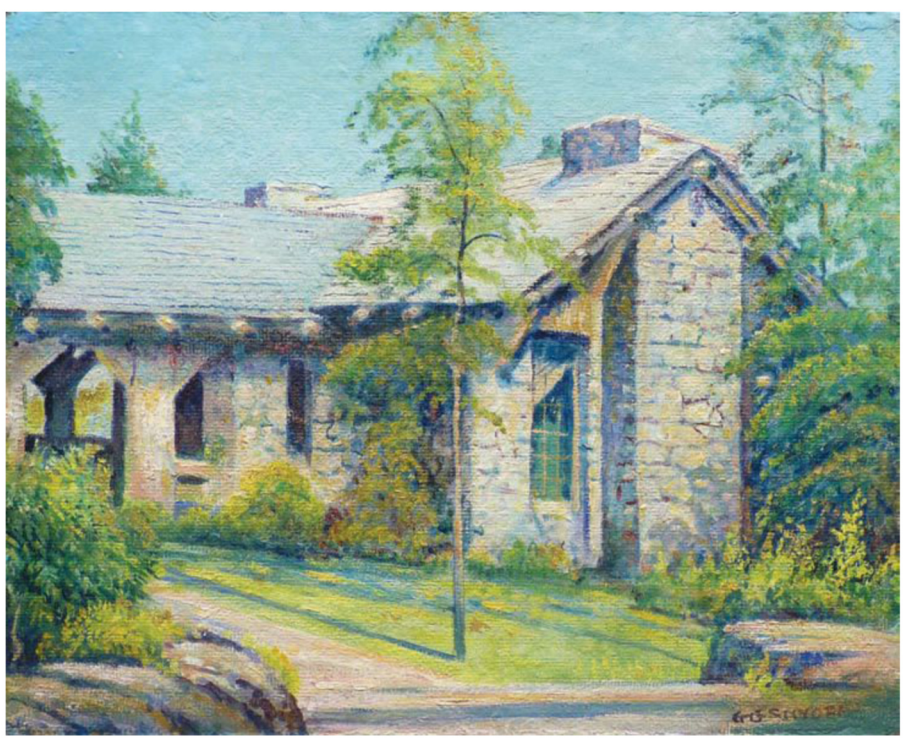
CCC art returns to state park in Arkansas.

"It was poetic justice that more than 70 years later we were able to bring Mr. Snyder's art back to Arkansas," Kathleen says. "It brought everything full circle and validated for me what Gardner and I are doing."



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Section of the lobby by George G. Snyder, 1937.

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Scene in an Oregon CCC camp by artist Aimee Gorham, 1934.

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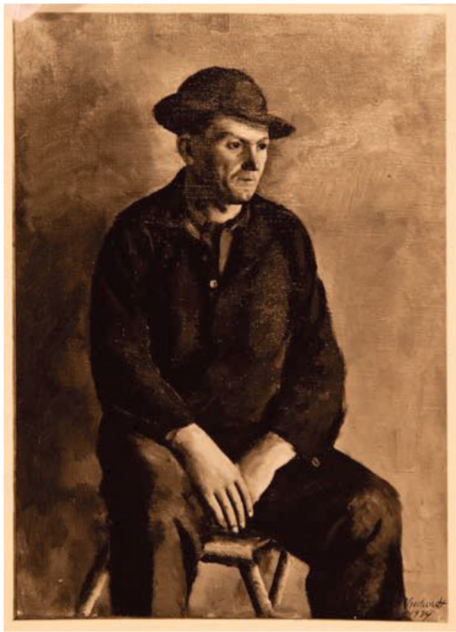

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Portrait of a worker of Joseph Roy by CCC artist William Gebhardt, 1934, Michigan.

the artist who signed the paintings and where they were painted but had been unsuccessful until our chance meeting at my presentation."

When Richard Davies, executive director of the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism, accepted the return of the two George Gordon Snyder paintings from Kathleen and Gardner in October 2012, it was a proud professional moment and a profoundly personal one for him as well. In 1937, his grandfather, Samuel G. Davies, was superintendent of the CCC camp at Petit Jean during the artist's time there.

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Kathleen is currently working on what she calls her "magnum opus," a book that will be a compilation of biographies of the 300-plus artists who were a part of the CCC Art Program.

"It's a wonderful life, really," Kathleen happily acknowledges. "We generally map out where our travels will take us based on the research I need to do, but we keep things loose enough so we can take side trips—or just enjoy staying in one place—as the mood strikes. The research directs us to places we probably would never otherwise go and allows us to meet wonderful people all over the country—archivists, forest rangers, park officials and historians. I would like to add the CCC artists themselves, but, unfortunately, only one CCC artist is still with us, and he is now about 103 years old."

Nor are Kathleen's own artistic roots neglected on these trips. An award-winning enthusiast of infrared photography, she often documents the remnants of CCC camps or reshoots a duplicate of a view found in a CCC artist's painting.

Gardner adds that they also belong to a 2,000-plus member forum of Bluebird Wanderlodge owners, and they often meet up with members during their travels. "It gives us friends all over the country," he enthuses, "and helps us feel welcome wherever we are."

Once Kathleen completes her next book ("I really have to stop researching soon and just start writing!"), she thinks she may concentrate next on investigating the areas in which CCC camps operated. "And if we ever get to the point where we can't travel anymore, I'm sure I'll continue writing and perhaps do informational presentations again.

"This is truly my lifetime project now," she concludes with a grin, "and I wouldn't have it any other way."

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"Back Home" by Marshall Davis, 1935.

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THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS

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CCC worker illustrated by Friedolin Kessler.

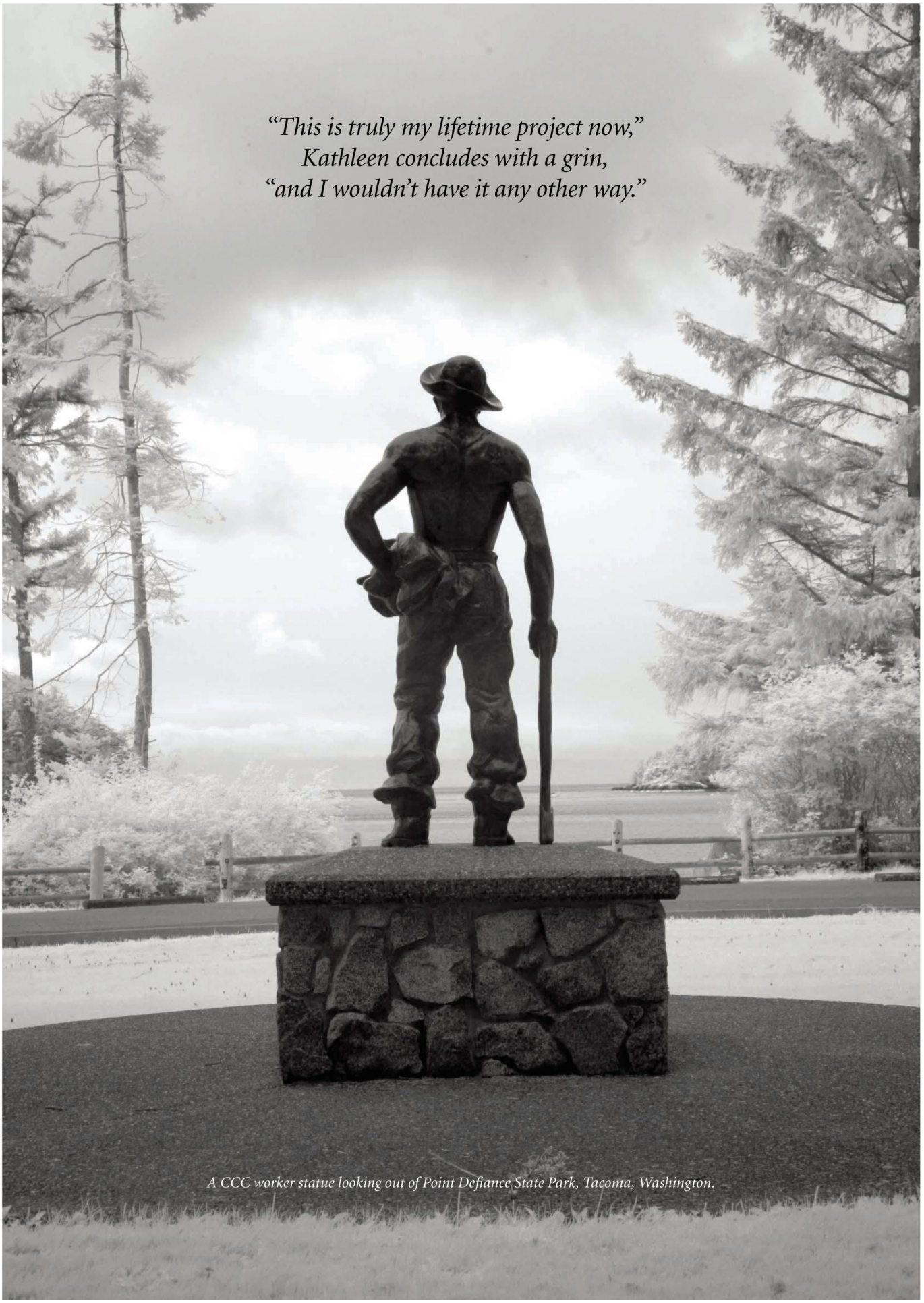
After a decade of national prosperity in the Roaring Twenties, Americans faced a national crisis after the Crash of 1929. The Great Depression saw an unemployment rate of more than 25 percent in the early 1930s. Inner-city crime rates soared, and the government did not have any specific plans to intervene. At the same time in the Midwest, the nine-year drought that would come to be known as the Dust Bowl was just beginning. Farmers struggled to hold on to their crops and their livestock as more precious topsoil blew away in windstorms every day.

In March 1933, within weeks of his inauguration, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent legislation to Congress aimed at providing relief for unemployed American workers. He proposed the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to provide jobs in natural resource conservation. Over the next decade, the CCC put more than three million young men to work in the nation's forests and parks, planting trees, building flood barriers, fighting fires, and maintaining roads and trails, conserving both private and federal land.

The CCC was President Roosevelt's answer to the environmental and economic challenges facing the country. Enlisting 250,000 workers in just two months, the CCC was an ambitious undertaking that brought several government agencies together in the effort. The Department of Labor recruited men from the ages of 18 to 25; the War Department clothed and trained them for two weeks, and the Department of Agriculture designed and managed the specific work assignments.

With projects in every U.S. state and territory, "Roosevelt's Tree Army" lived in camps under quasi-military discipline and received a wage of $30 per month, $25 of which they were required to send home to their families. Typically, boys rose early for breakfast in the canteen before heading off for eight hours of manual labor. Lunch was often brought out to the work site. In the evenings, 90 percent of enrollees took advantage of classes offered in subjects from literature to welding — courses which, over nine years, taught 40,000 illiterate men to read and write.

The CCC dissolved in July 1942. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor and subsequent U.S. involvement in World War II, the CCC's funding and assets were diverted as the nation's focus shifted toward the war effort. However, it was one of the most successful New Deal programs of the Great Depression. It existed for fewer than 10 years, but the nearly three million men who served in the CCC left a legacy of more than 800 parks built and nearly three billion trees planted nationwide. *Source: PBS.com*



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A CCC worker statue looking out of Point Defiance State Park, Tacoma, Washington.

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