

Camp: Residents included farmers, poets, accountants

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described some of his fellow COs as “plain, placid farm-boy” types, many of whom had been raised in the traditional “peace churches” including the Brethren, Mennonite and Quaker — or Friends — denominations.

But there were also, as described by Steve McQuiddy — an English instructor at Lane Community College and author of “Here on the Edge,” an exhaustively detailed history of Camp No. 56 — “poets and writers, artists, actors, musicians, creative types” as well as “scholars and engineers, architects and philosophers, machinists, carpenters, accountants, welders, pipe fitters, religious absolutists.”

In Everson's case, his anti-war sentiment dated to his student years at Fresno State College in California, where he was introduced to the poetry of Robinson Jeffers, which he described as “an intellectual awakening and a religious conversion in one.”

When Everson signed up for the draft, he labeled himself a pantheist, stating his belief that the United States should withdraw from the war so that “men of the future would say: Here was finally a people in all the bloody past who loved peace too much to fight for it.”

Needless to say, conscientious objectors were not popular with the general public, so many of their camps were located in fairly remote areas.

In the case of Waldport, a camp already existed on the site, having been built in 1941 as the new headquarters for the CCC — Civilian Conservation Corps — on the central Oregon Coast.

But when the United States entered World War II, the CCC camp was no longer needed as a source of post-Depression employment.

It was closed until 1942, then reopened by the National Board for Religious Objectors, part of the Selective Service System, to house Public Service Camp No. 56.

The location was not nearly isolating enough to suit some.

One year, three married COs and their wives, along with two single COs, had permission to attend a New Year's Eve celebration at Cap's Beach Resort in Waldport as “goodwill ambassadors” from Camp Angel.

But an editorial writer named Dave Hall at the Lincoln County Times blasted them for dancing the jitterbug and drinking at the resort's bar.

“So why are these Conscientious Objectors with the jitterbug complex allowed to go out, drink and publicly flaunt their draft status in front of hundreds of people who have Dear Ones in the uniform of these United States,” he thundered.

“Let these Conscientious Jitterbugs stay in camp — their act smells!”

Of all the buildings in Camp 56, only one — No. 1381, a barracks about 80 feet long and 21 feet wide — survives.

In 1985, it was donated to the city of Waldport, remodeled for use as a museum, and opened as the Waldport Heritage Museum in 1997.

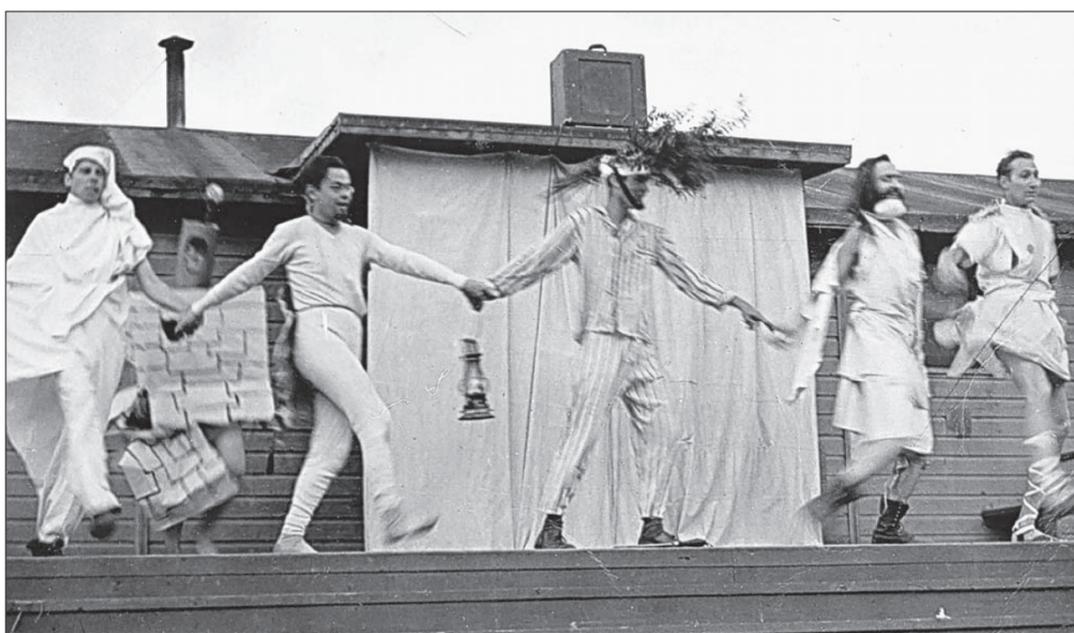
Destined to write history

It took McQuiddy 20 years to research and write “Here on the Edge.”

He named the book for a piece Everson wrote a few weeks after arriving at the Waldport camp early in 1943.

It was published in the camp's underground newspaper, the Untide Press, to distinguish it from the official camp paper, the Tide Press.

In it, Everson described the isolation of the place, windows



Brethren Historical Library and Archives

Members of the fine arts group at Camp No. 56 perform “A Midsummer Night's Dream” at the camp. Costumes were made from sheets and pajamas.

blinded to the west to prevent enemies across the Pacific from detecting the lights of community.

To the east, mountains separated the inmates from their families and the fundamental history of the country as it colonized from east to west and then back to the middle of the continent.

“Here on the edge, we look east to the West, west to the East, and cannot resolve them,” Everson wrote of himself and the other men incarcerated because of their stance on warfare.

“We can only watch; watch and prepare; and bide on the time when what we are, and that for which we have taken this stand, can be tangent again to the world.”

McQuiddy stumbled on the fact of Camp 56 by accident in 1993 or '94, when he was a freelance writer “trolling for stories, barely paying the rent, doing things for campus publications.”

“I had sort of fallen into the ‘history beat,’” he said, “and I got to know Keith Richard, the archivist at the University of Oregon.”

One day when the two were talking, “He said to me, ‘Somebody should write about those conscientious objectors,’” McQuiddy recalled. “I said, ‘Who?’ and he started showing me all this stuff from the camp that he had in the archives.”

Being a writer was not among McQuiddy's early aims.

He grew up on the East Coast, where his father was a salesman for oil companies.

“I was born outside Boston, but by the time I was in high school we were living in York, Pa.,” he said. “I left there right before Three Mile Island,” which was only 13 miles away.

McQuiddy's original intention was to pursue architecture, botany or literature, but “by pure chance, I got a copy of ‘Walden,’” he said, and Henry David Thoreau's book about living simply and close to nature changed his life.

“I decided I wanted to get as far away from where I was as I could, and that looked to me like Bellingham, Wash.”

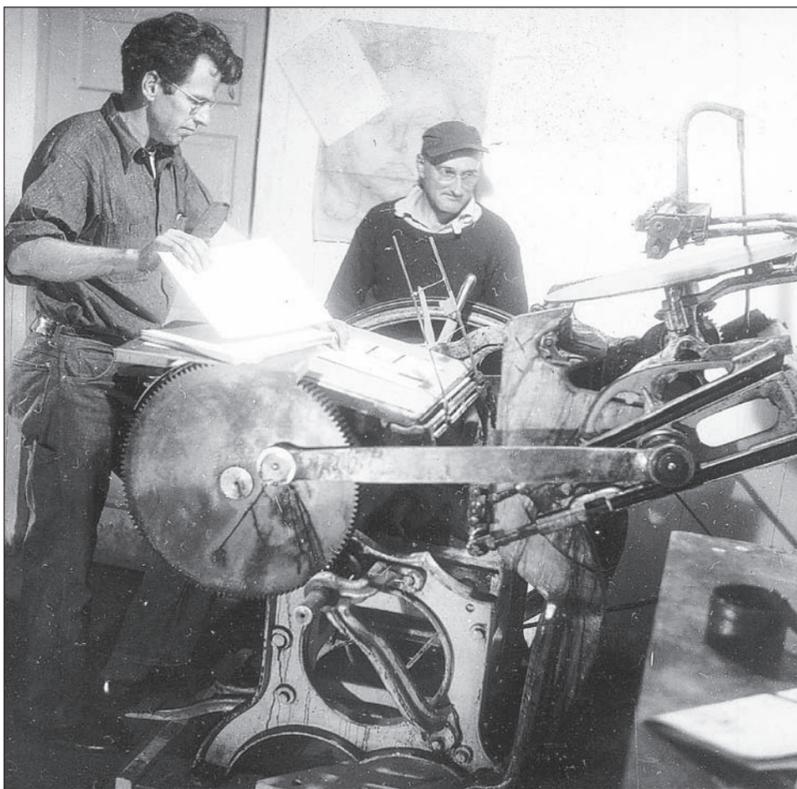
He made it as far as Corvallis and eventually made his way to Eugene, where he completed a master's of fine arts in creative writing.

“I had read (Jack) Kerouac and told myself, ‘I have to write like this,’” McQuiddy said. “So I wrote a bunch of terrible stories,” followed by a novel that got some brief attention from an editor in New York City “before she decided she couldn't sell it” to her fellow publishers.

“She said I was a good writer but I didn't know how to write a novel.”

After that, McQuiddy spent a couple of years teaching English in Japan before coming back to Eugene “where I had to make a living.”

He started writing for



Bill Everson (left) and Joe Kallal run a letterpress printer at the camp in the 1940s.

magazines — including a piece about the free-spirited and fanciful writer Opal Whiteley, which he sold to the Seattle Times magazine — and for a variety of history and literary journals.

So when Richard, the UO archivist, mentioned Camp 56 and showed him the artifacts, McQuiddy knew what he was going to do.

“Even when I realized I wasn't going to be a great novelist, I always knew I was going to do a history book someday,” he said.

“When he showed me ‘Horned Moon,’ a poetry book by Glen Coffield, who was in the camp, and I saw his picture, I said, ‘I have to write about this guy.’”

And many more. Once he began to dig into the history of Camp 56, McQuiddy was captivated.

It's taken him 326 pages to detail the personalities, politics, arts and histories of the people who spent World War II at Camp Angel near Waldport.

“Here on the Edge” was a finalist this year in the nonfiction category of the \$10,000 Dayton Literary Peace Prize, the first-ever finalist published by a university press instead of a major national publishing house.

Respect for ideals

The way the Civilian Public Service program worked, the U.S. government provided the space, the equipment needed to provide work for the inmates and the personnel to supervise the camps' activities, according to McQuiddy's research.

The rest, including issues of room and board, was handled by the peace churches.

The conscientious objectors worked 8½-hour shifts, six days a week, without pay except a \$2.50-per-month allowance to buy items such as toothpaste and razor blades needed to maintain basic hygiene.

They had Sundays free, as well as Christmas Day, plus occasional furloughs as they would have had in military service.

They were required to remain in the program six months beyond the end of hostilities.

The inmates in the Civilian Public Service camps took over the work that had been done by their counterparts in the Civilian Conservation Corps, whom they essentially replaced.

At Camp 56, that mainly meant firefighting, tree planting and road building.

“World War II was the first time that conscientious objectors were approved for any reason besides organized religion,” McQuiddy said.

“So it just happened that there was a very small group of really creative people at Camp 56, within the larger group of about 100 inmates. The people there varied from very

conservative people to out-and-out anarchists — it was an unbelievable mix.”

The work shifts of the day left evenings for other activities, and the artistic people quickly began to use the time for putting on plays, performing musical concerts, even setting up a rudimentary publishing house.

Although William Stafford, who later became poet laureate of Oregon, was not housed at Camp 56 — he spent his conscientious objector years during World War II in Arkansas, California and Illinois — some of his poetry was published by the “Fine Arts at Waldport,” as the group named itself.

The famous expressionist painter Morris Graves lived nearby and had a show of his work at Camp 56.

“Morris Graves was definitely a CO, but he was not in the camps,” McQuiddy said. “He was

so far out that when he was drafted, he walked down to the orientation and said, ‘I don't want to do this.’ The military threw him in a stockade in California for a year.

“He was so off-center that a psychiatrist finally said, ‘You are not fit for anything — get out of here’ and he was given an honorable discharge.”

Graves ended up in Oregon and built himself a lean-to on the beach about a mile-and-a-half from Camp 56, McQuiddy said, “and he would paint, and he visited the people at the camp.”

“At one point, they had a show of his work and sold pieces for \$10 or \$20 that later would be worth tens of thousands of dollars.”

Unraveling all the stories buried in the history of Camp 56 “owned my life for the past five years,” McQuiddy said. “That's when I knew why nobody had done this book before.”

The research took him all over the country, “and it kept getting deeper and deeper, more complex and complicated and convoluted.

“But I was very fortunate to have the support of the Oregon State University Press people — they said I should take my time.”

That resulted in a manuscript about 30 percent longer than had been discussed, McQuiddy admitted, “but they agreed it should not be cut,” which is why “Here on the Edge” is as long as it is.

McQuiddy also was granted sabbatical for a term from his teaching duties at LCC.

“I could not have finished this book without that,” he said.

Immersing himself in the lives of the conscientious objectors of Camp 56 has changed him permanently, McQuiddy said.

Already on the edge of society for their anti-war beliefs, they “were living and breathing the values that would become mainstream a generation later,” he said.

That included promoting a vegetarian diet, foreseeing the health risks of smoking and practicing equality based on race and sex.

He still wouldn't label himself a CO or even a pacifist, “but having encountered these people, it's really hard for me to argue that what they were trying to do was wrong,” McQuiddy said.

“I have tremendous respect for this small group, living their ideals, staying true to themselves, even though it was something that could not have been more unpopular at the time.”

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