

Buildings of the CCC – Overlook Shelter

Even as this long snowy winter drags on, thoughts turn to outdoor activities and the coming of spring in a few weeks. Seventy-five years ago it was more common than today for families to go on picnics when the weather warmed. Roadside groves, now largely abandoned and forgotten, as well as state parks and beaches were popular places for picnics. When the Civilian Conservation Corps was active in the 1930s, the 1186th Company was tasked with developing recreational areas around its encampment at Escoheag hill in western Exeter. Besides trail improvements and picnic sites, enrollees constructed several buildings. One of these – the Overlook Shelter – still exists today perched on a massive granite outcrop that falls away steeply to the east, providing an excellent view before the trees leaf out.



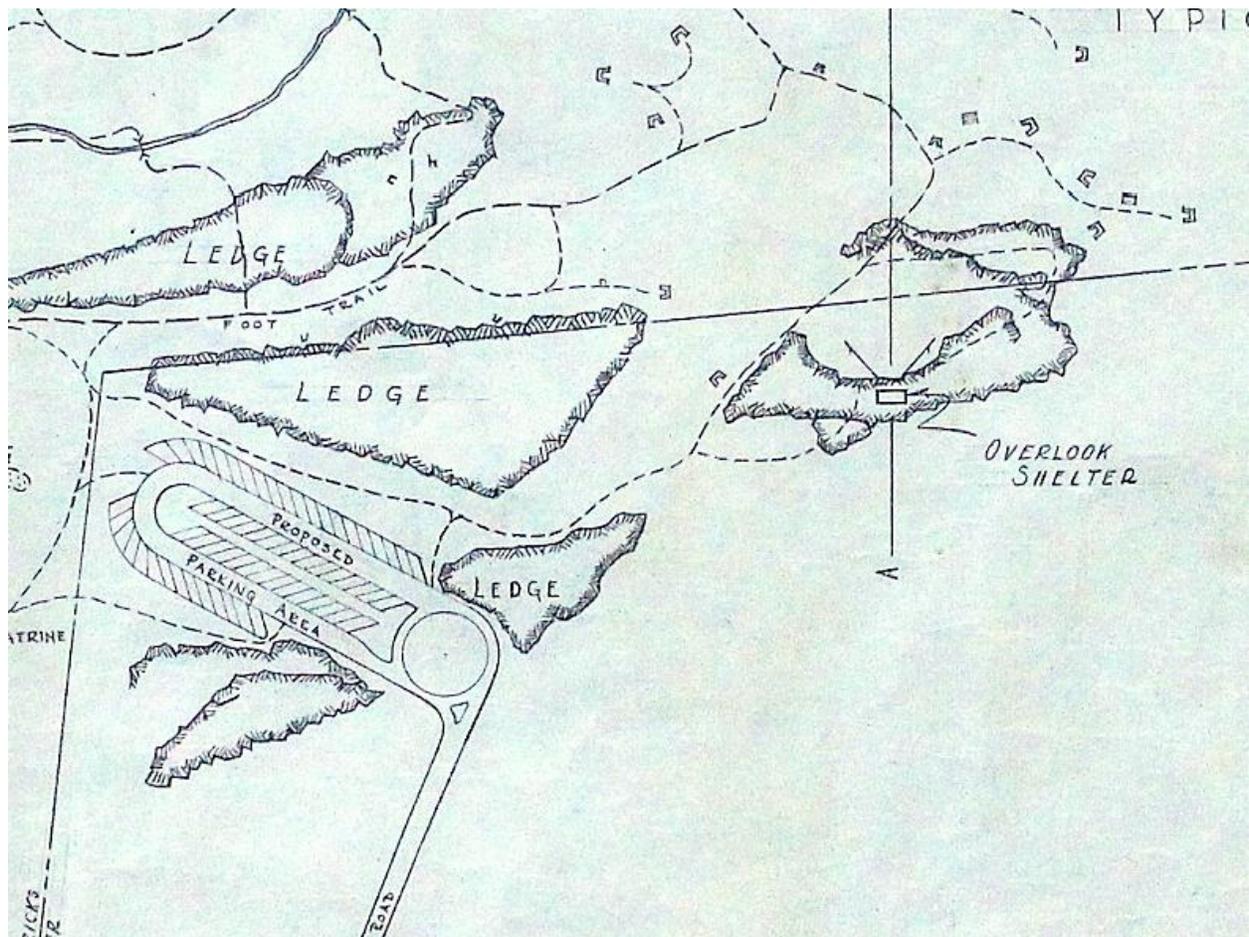
Photo source: Microsoft Bing bird's eye view perspective (<http://www.bing.com/maps/>).



Photo source: (left) Sheila Reynolds-Boothroyd; (right) Gary Boden

Site plan

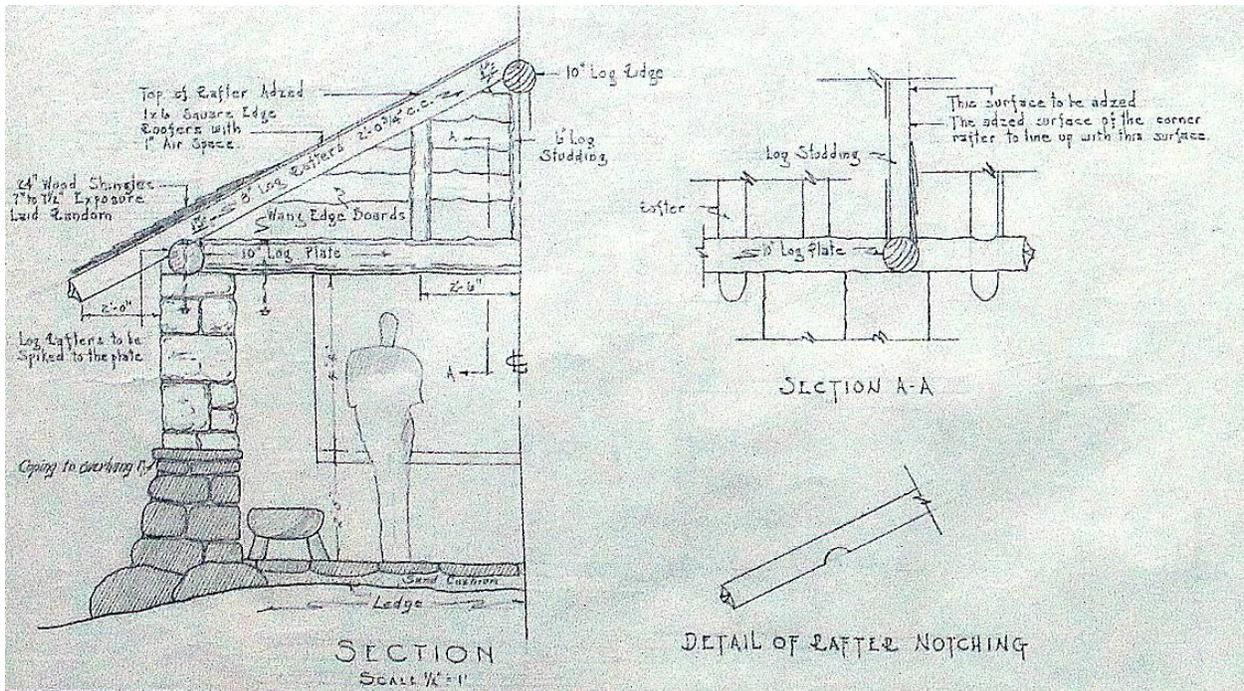
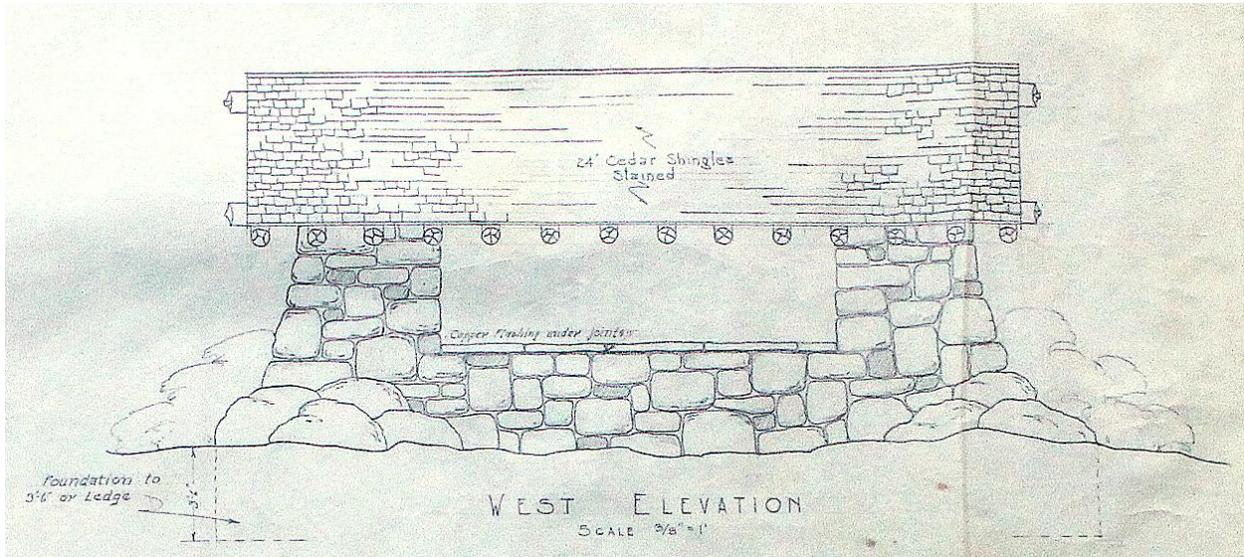
Plans for the Overlook Shelter were drawn up in 1936 by the Department of the Interior, National Park Service Branch of Planning and State Cooperation Recreational Demonstrations Projects. The building would be constructed on a high point in what was called the Hendrick Picnic Area. This site consisted of a gravel access road from Eschoheag Hill Road, a parking area for numerous automobiles, marked foot trails and stone fireplaces. After revisions the plans were approved for development in the following year.



Building plan

The shelter was designed with a 18.5 by 24 foot floor plan and walls made of granite field stone topped with a wooden shingle roof. Rafters and plates were made of unfinished logs joined by mortise and tenon joints and fastened at the building corners with steel bolts. Each wall had a

large open window for appreciating the view from benches lining the inside perimeter. A single door gave access on the north end.



Over the years the shelter withstood the winter snows and autumn hurricanes quite well. Eventually deterioration of the roof required repairs a number of years ago. Many visitors such as “JIM M. MAY 30 54” have not been able to resist leaving their marks on the rafters. Although such graffiti is vandalism, it leaves a curious history of its own.



When the snows finally melt and the temperatures rise again, a visit to the Overlook Shelter is well worth the time. It takes a bit of careful climbing to reach it, but the view is spectacular. Pack a lunch. Take binoculars to observe the birds and enjoy this legacy left to us by the Civilian Conservation Corp so many decades ago.

Gary Boden
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