

July 17, 2022

Grand Canyon History Tidbit by Kim Besom

Tennis at Grand Canyon

Wimbledon wrapped up earlier this week, so a tidbit about **tennis** at Grand Canyon.

In the mid 1930's, the Civilian Conservation Corps re-built or built new tennis courts on both the South (1933) and North Rims (1936). Building the courts was not simply a matter of clearing a large rectangular space on a patch of hard ground. According to a 1933 CCC project report the construction was quite involved:

“This project consisted of completely rebuilding the battery of two tennis courts located in the recreational area [on the South Rim].



#00700: COMPLETED RODEO CHUTES AND CORRALS AND TENNIS COURTS IN THE COMMUNITY FIELD, JULY 1935

It was necessary to reconstruct the subbase of telfor rock, to regrade the entire area, and surface with Laykold tennis court binder and wear coat [currently the official surface of the US Open]. A new log backstop with wire netting was erected as well as a log shelter size 20'x20'.

The playing surface covers an area 105'x120'. Particular care was taken in the preparation of the subbase, and the laying of the surface material.



GRCA 29853: NORTH RIM TENNIS COURTS, CONSTRUCTING THE SUB-SURFACE, SUMMER 1936

Drainage was provided by sloping the area to the net line from each end, and the drainage water is taken off through an open slot directly under each net, and underground between the courts.

Provision for night lighting was made by inserting a conduit pipe under the playing surface through the center of the courts.

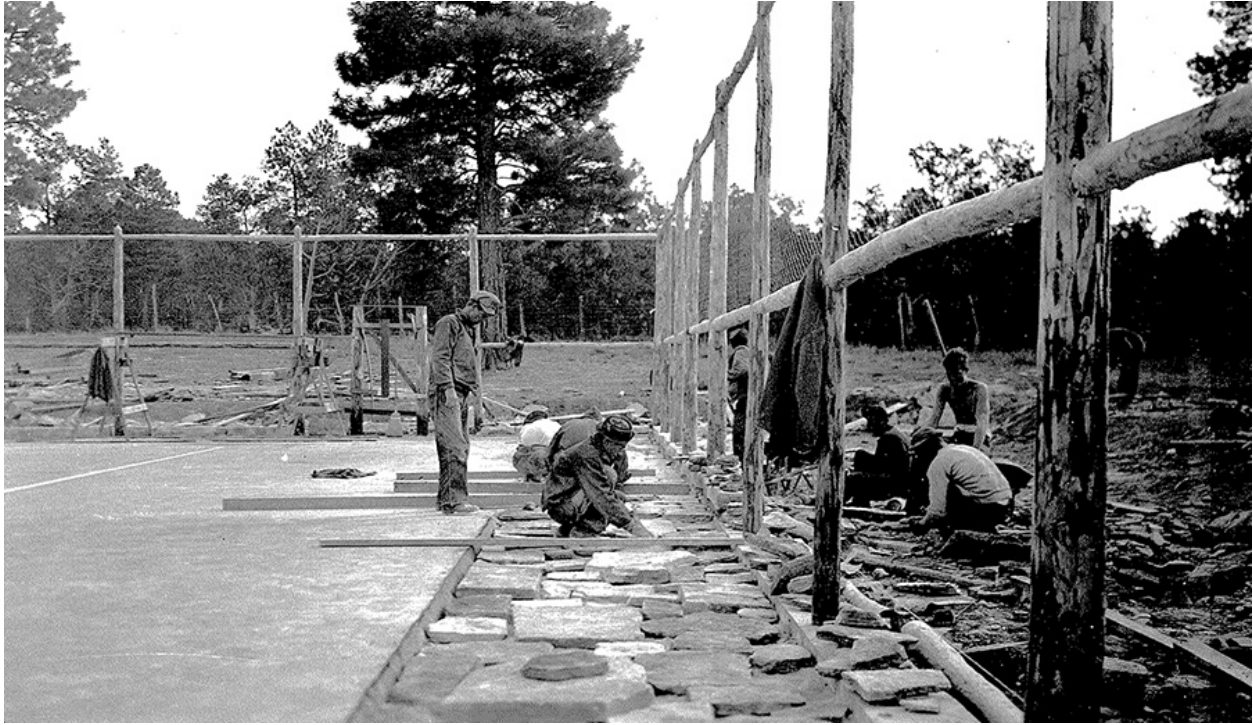
A five-foot flagstone border was laid around the entire playing surface, and a six-inch stone curb with a better face surrounding the area. This curb permits the playing surface to be flooded during the winter months for ice skating. Net posts were inserted in six-inch vitrified sewer tile to permit their removal during the winter when an unobstructed skating surface will be desired.



GRCA 29861: TENNIS COURT CONSTRUCTION, LAYING THE LAYKOLD BINDER, 1933



GRCA 29861: TENNIS COURT CONSTRUCTION, ROLLING FINISHED BASE, 1933



GRCA 29861: TENNIS COURT CONSTRUCTION, LAYING THE FLAGSTONE BORDER, 1933

A crew of approximately 10 men have been used on the work. The work is nearing completion and should be in use for the winter season.

Particular interest was shown in this complicated piece of construction by the men. It required exceptional care in grading, mixing, laying and finishing the Laykold surface material.”

The 1934 Yearbook for the South Rim CCC Camp 819, describes the pride the men took in their work:

“A first class tennis court was completed by the C.C.C. boys during this enrollment period. Park officials were satisfied at the kind of work performed, for it was rated as a first class job. Professional stone masons couldn't have laid better rock around the courts, carpenters couldn't have performed better carpenter work. In fact, all work done was above par of any kind possible.”

The yearbook also details the importance of sports to the men of the CCC. Of tennis, in particular, it says:

“Tennis at 819 has been one of the major sports since the camp began and has achieved a ranking next to baseball, the most popular sport indulged in by players and side-liners. The followers of the game of tennis number almost 40% of the company strength.

The tennis tournament just completed was won by George Megary, a California boy, by a default from C. Shy Botkin, due to an ankle injury obtained in a previous match. The entire tourney

featured hard, fast play and was applauded for the abundant show of sportsmanship. All matches were fought to the very last point and showed some very high ranking players.”



#06112: ECW COMPLETED TENNIS COURTS ON THE SOUTH RIM, 1934

In a 1995 Interview, Jack Greening, who grew up at Grand Canyon in the 1930's & 40's remembered engaging in entrepreneurial efforts at the tennis courts:

Greening: We would sell [soda pop] there in the recreation area... They had a big field and they had tennis courts then, and some of the adults played tennis. Us kids would get soda pop in a big tub and ice it down and sell that to the tennis players up there to make a few pennies to be able to go to the movie.



#18106: BILLIE ENNIS, JEAN TILLOTSON AND FRIEND POSING AT TENNIS COURTS, CIRCA 1938

Although they had fallen into disrepair, the tennis courts remained in existence at the South Rim until the 1990's, when they were removed to make way for the current community recreation center and daycare facility. The location of the former North Rim tennis courts and when they were deconstructed are not mentioned.