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History rolls into Camanche

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The BUS-eum, a museum on wheels, from the TRACES Center for History and Culture, made a stop at the Camanche Historical Society on Monday. The school bus, converted into a museum, travels around the Midwest, educating visitors on the existence of prisoner of war camps that held thousands of German prisoners of war. The exhibit centers around soldiers that were captured in Europe and North Africa and brought to the United States. "Our little niche that we discovered and found for ourselves is telling the untold stories of what went on during World War II in the Midwest," stated bus driver and tour guide, Irving Kellman. "Very few people realize that there were 370,000 German POWs held in the United States. (Some were) held right in Clinton." According to Kellman, there were 660 camps across the United States, 220 camps in the upper Midwest and 15 camps in Iowa. Two POW camps were located in Clinton. One was in the Schick General Hospital, now the Cambridge Place Apartments. It housed Italian prisoners. The other was located at what is now the Mt. Pleasant campgrounds, and was a German POW camp. "So Clinton was unique in that it had two camps of two different nationalities," said Kellman. Kellman indicated that the goal of the BUS-eum is to shed light on the little-known facts and stories of World War II. "Everybody knows about the Japanese-American internees. There were also 15,000 German-American internees held from 1941 to 1948," Kellman stated. "Everybody knows pretty much the diary of Anne Frank, well she had a pen pal in Iowa before the war started... So we tell that story... It's little things like that." "Also, for Iowa of great interest, there's basically a 'Schindler's List' of the prairie," stated Kellman. Scattergood Hostel, which is a Quaker-run hostel just outside of Iowa City, rescued 186 refugees from Europe starting in 1939 and brought them to Iowa. We tell that story, and that's a very little-known story also." According to Kellman, this is the 10th tour TRACES has done, going out in the spring and fall for the past five years. In the fall, the BUS-eum visits North and South Dakota, Kansas and Nebraska. In the spring, it visits Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin. "Over the last five years... we've been to over 1,500 towns in 16 states and over 120,000 people have gone through the exhibits," Kellman said. "As far as we know, we're the only museum in the country that puts itself on wheels and goes out to the countryside." Kellman stated that the idea for the BUS-eum came from the

director of the museum, Michael Luick-Thrams. "(He) got the idea one day," said Kellman. "He realized that not enough people are coming to the museum. So, how about if we take the museum to the people?" Several buses were obtained and converted to resemble World War II-era buses. "We've been on the road ever since," stated Kellman. Kellman expressed that the goal behind the BUS-eum's travels is to bring the history of the Midwest camps back to life. "Unless there was a camp in the town, or people knew about the POWs from owning farms or working with them in canning factories, it's an untold story, nobody knows it," Kellman said. "And that's one of the things that we really want to get out is to bring that part of history back to life and tell (visitors) of things that they don't know." Visitors viewed exhibits with photos, personal items and information from the prisoner of war camps. A short video documentary also was shown, detailing the history of Iowa camps.