

A Lesson in POWs

March 24, 2009

Email to a
friend

Voice your
opinion

The Camp Algona POW Museum will host several events in April that focus on confinement and treatment of war prisoners in northwest Iowa during World War II.

The camp at Algona housed nearly 10,000 German prisoners during the war, with satellite prisoner camps in Storm Lake and other communities.

* April 7 - The museum committee hosts a presentation on prison camp life for both local POWs held in Germany and German POWs held in Iowa. Speaker Dr. Michael Luick-Thrams, is director of TRACES, a non-profit group that researches WWII era facism and its impact on individual lives. The event will begin at 7 p.m. at Algona Library. There is no charge.

* April 8 - Two of TRACES museum buses will be on hand for public tours. The traveling exhibits include artifacts, display panels and multi-media presentations. One bus contains the exhibit "Held in the Heartland" on German prisoners in local camps including Storm Lake, and the other features "Behind Barbed Wire" on midwest prisoners held in Germany. The buses will be at the Camp Algona Museum, 114 South Thorington Street, 4-7 p.m.

The Algona museum will be open free of charge during these hours as well.

*April 9 - The bus museums will be stationed at Algona Garrigan High School for tours by area students in the morning.

Advertisement

The area prison camps operated from 1943-46. Often the prisoners worked harvesting crops, building roads and cutting trees - and in down time they produced art and writing that still survives today in the museum.

Although the camps were in public view, interaction with prisoners was very limited, and in Storm Lake and most of the other communities, there is no sign of the prison facilities remaining and most people have no knowledge that they existed, says Jerry Yokum, director of the Algona museum.

Some 435,000 Germans were brought to the U.S. to be held, and the local 34th Division (the Red Bulls still based out of the Storm Lake armory, made up the largest group per capita to be held as prisoners of war in Germany. Camp Algona POW Museum regular hours are (April through December) 1-4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Exhibits include a model prison watch tower, camp staff car, uniforms, letters, art objects and more.