THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ECHOES

The March Meeting

Tuesday, March 24, 2009, 3:00 p. m

At the Thomas E. McMillan Museum

Jefferson Davis Community College Campus

*********Don't Forget*********

It is time to Pay Dues for 2009

Business Members: Don't Forget to Renew Your Membership for 2009

Surveying the Ellicott Line

This image from the bronze map of Alabama (which is in front of the Alabama Archives and History Building in Montgomery) has this accompanying text:

"Using a 67-foot-long surveyor's chain, U.S. Surveyor General Andrew Ellicott led a team to survey and establish the U.S. southern boundary with Spanish West Florida. This line remains the boundary between Alabama and Florida, except in Mobile and Baldwin counties."

The Program: The Ellicott Line

Guest speaker Jeff Ross will present a program on the surveyor's line commissioned by the United States government in the late eighteenth century.

It established the boundary between the Mississippi Territory (the United States), and Spanish West Florida.

The Speaker: Jeff Ross

Retired from Alabama's corrections department, Jeff, a native of Escambia County, lives in Atmore.

He is interested in history and is a member of the Atmore Historical Society, and the Sons of the Confederate Veterans of Baldwin County.

He is knowledgeable about and has presented programs on the Mobile Delta and Alabama's Indian Mounds.

Guard Tower at Aliceville

Volume 36, Number 3

March 2009

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The April Meeting

April 28. 2009

Escambia County's Probate Judge Emilie Mims will present a program on her office as it relates to historical documents and records.

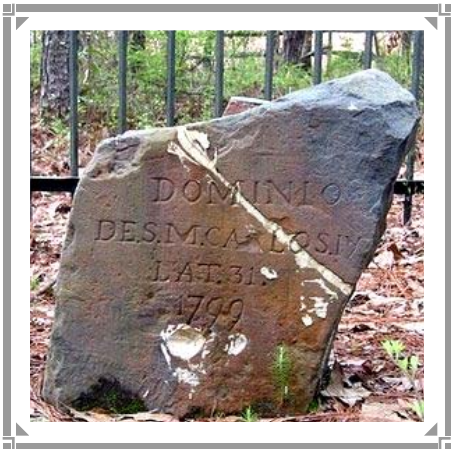
The Program (Continued)

The Ellicott Line and the Ellicott Stone or St. Stephen's Meridian

The web site , "The Mound Line" <http://www.historyquest.com> describes the line and the stone which marks it:

"Surveyed in 1799 to mark the 31° North Latitude, this line charted the first southern boundary of the United States, separating the U.S. from Spanish Florida.

"The line was marked at one-mile intervals by earthen mounds approximately fifteen-feet square and three-feet high with a charred lighter-pine post at the center, hence the name Mound Line.



"Jointly surveyed by Major Andrew Ellicott , U.S. Commissioner, and Esteban Minor, Spanish Commissioner, [its purpose was] to determine boundaries as agreed in the Treaty of San Lorenzo in 1795.

The line began at the Mississippi River, ran east along 31° North Latitude to the Chattahoochee River, thence eventually to the Atlantic Ocean.

The Ellicott Stone has been recognized by the American Society of Civil Engineers as one of the ten initial National Historic Civil Engineer Landmarks. It is also noted by the Alabama Historic Commission as the oldest above ground artifact in the Southeast.

The Ellicott Stone.

The stone is the only marker, other than mounds of earth, which Andrew Ellicott and his team used to mark the boundary line.

The inscription on the side of the stone facing Spanish West Florida, pictured above, is inscribed in Spanish with "Dominos de S.M.C. CAROLUS IV. Lat. 31 1799." The side of the Ellicott Stone which faced what was then the Mississippi Territory is inscribed in English, "U.S. Lat. 31 1799."

"Stockton (Alabama) was divided by this line, with some residents living in the United States and some in Spanish Florida. Although Stockton became a 'border town,' U.S. law generally prevailed in the area."

(from "The Mound Line")

The Surveyor: Andrew Ellicott

Andrew Ellicott

From a miniature portrait from 1799.

The online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, in its article on the surveyor notes these accomplishments in addition to the survey of the Ellicott Line:

"Andrew Ellicott (January 24, 1754 – August 28, 1820) was a U. S. surveyor who helped map many of the territories west of the Appalachians, surveyed the boundaries of the District of Columbia, continued and completed Pierre (Peter) Charles L'Fant's work on the plan for Washington, D. C. , and served as a teacher in survey methods for Merriwether Lewis."

(Picture and text from Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Ellicott>)

News of the Society and Announcements

ECHS President Jerry Simmons at Mobile Genealogical Society Meeting

Saturday, March 14 Jerry Simmons was on the program at a regular meeting of the Mobile Genealogy Society, representing the Escambia County Historical Society. Ann Biggs-Williams was to have also been on the program, but had a terrible virus and was unable to make it.

So Jerry had to wing it, with the assistance of his lovely wife, Dianne. He reports that folks there were extremely courteous, gracious, and just plain nice. We're sure they were informed by the presentation and even enjoyed it.

Pensacola Genealogical Society Conference

The West-Florida Genealogical Society's Conference on April 4, 2009 will have Debra Sandstrom, LLC, the "Ancestry Detective" of Ancestry.com.

Scheduled for 9:00 a. m. – 3:00 p.m. (Registration begins at 8:30 a.m.), the conference will be held at the Bayview Senior Center, 2000 East Lloyd St., Pensacola, Florida.

Topics include: "Getting Started in Genealogy," "The Three D's: Deeds, Death, Divorce," "Obscure Record Sources," and "Heritage Quest.com: An Underutilized Resource."

Cost is $30.00 for members, $35.00 for non-members and includes a Continental Breakfast and a box lunch from Norma's By-the-Bay.

Questions? Call 982-8247 or e-mail

pnobles@panhandle.rr.com

Alabama Historical Association Annual Meeting

April 23-25, 2009 in Tuscaloosa.

A booklet with the complete program and registration form is available in the Alabama Room.

ECHS Needs Researchers

Jerry Simmons, our president, is also the Museum Coordinator, a job and responsibility paid for by the college. Jerry has a lot on his plate. Every week, he receives numerous inquiries asking mainly for information about families for genealogical use.

The Alabama room, of course, is a source of much of this type of information. Jerry would like to be able to answer all the inquiries and he has done the best he can. However, the situation is unfair to Jerry.

The Board of Trustees would like to suggest to the society that we turn these inquiries over to someone, one or more, who would do this work on a fee basis This is a common practice in many societies and there are some great fee-based, experienced researchers in many towns.

To our knowledge, we have none in this immediate area. Please consider doing this yourself, and if you would like to get on Jerry's list of fee-researchers, please let Jerry know.

And, of course, we are still open to volunteers.

Museum Web Site

Check out the Thomas E. McMillan page on the college website:

<http://museum.jdcc.edu>

A new page was recently added and more will be forthcoming in the next few weeks.

Queries

Seeking Information about Adopted Twin Boys

Sylvia Morris of Mobile has inquired about twin boys adopted in the first half of the 20th century by a Mr. Castleberry (of Castleberry, AL). She wants to know the birth names of the children. If you can offer any assistance, contact Jerry Simmons.

Information about Leonard McGowan

Larry Massey in interested in any information about Leonard McGowan, who shot Railroad Bill. Larry would like to know where he lived, what he did after killing the outlaw, etc? Larry states in his email that he ran across something on the web once that stated that he apparently didn't live around Brewton. Anyone with information can contact Jerry Simmons.

ECHS Field Trip to Magee Farm and Mobile Museum of Art

Monday, March 30, 2009

Magee Farm

Located north of Mobile, this is the scene of the signing of the terms for the cease fire prior to the surrender of the last organized Confederate forces east of the Mississippi.

The Mobile Museum of Art

The Museum is now showing the exhibit entitled "Illuminating the Word, a presentation of 100 pages of the Saint John's Bible, the first handwritten, illuminated bible of the modern era.

Time

Tentative plans are to be at Magee Farm by 10:30 a. m. for a tour of the home and grounds. Then, after lunch, to be at the Mobile Museum of Art at 1:30 p. m.

Cost

Magee Farm - $8.00 per person group rates. Museum of Art - $10.00 ($9.00 for seniors) per person for a group of less than 12: $8.00 per person for group of 12 or more.

Transportation

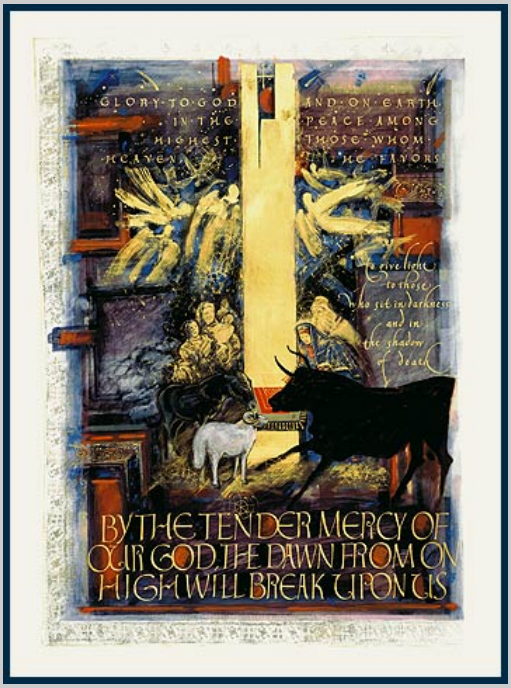
By car. Car-pooling can be arranged

Final Plans

All the details and adjustments can be made at the March 24 meeting.

Coordinator

A big "Thank you" to Ann Biggs –Williams who has made all the arrangements.



Two pages from the Saint John's Bible, 100 of which are on display at the Mobile Museum of Art in an exhibit called Illuminating the Word," the exhibit courtesy of the Minneapolis Institute of Aart.

The page on the left is entitled "The Birth of Christ," the one on the right, "To the Ends of the Earth," is the frontispiece for the exhibit and was inspired by a photograph from the Hubble Telescope.

Commissioned by Saint's John's University and Abbey, the Saint John's Bible is a combination of the old and the new.

The old is represented by the calligraphy of the texts which is being produced by scribes in Wales under the direction of the scribe to Queen Elizabeth.

The illuminations or art and decorations are the new. Illustrations courtesy of the web site Illuminating the Word at <http://www.artsmia.org/illuminating-the-word/about.cfm>

Our Business Members

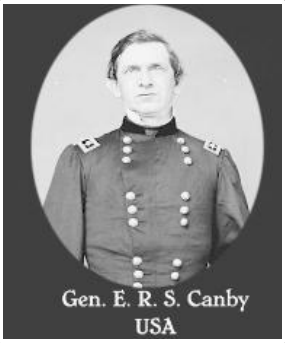
Please patronize our new business members. Be sure to tell them you appreciate their support of the Escambia County Historical Society!

Magee Farm

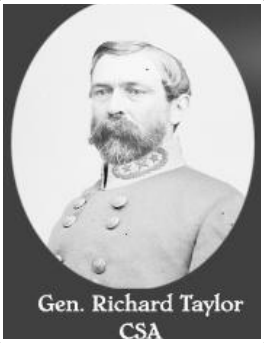
This account of the meeting of the two generals as well as all the pictures are taken from the web page for Magee Farm www.historicmageefarm.com>.

This meeting between General Richard Taylor and General E. R. S. Canby led to an agreement for a cease fire prior to the surrender of the last organized Confederate forces east of the Mississippi

"On the morning of April 29, 1865 the historic meeting occurred. The Magee Farm was to be the stage for the negotiations of peace between North and South.



Gen. E. R. S. Canby
USA

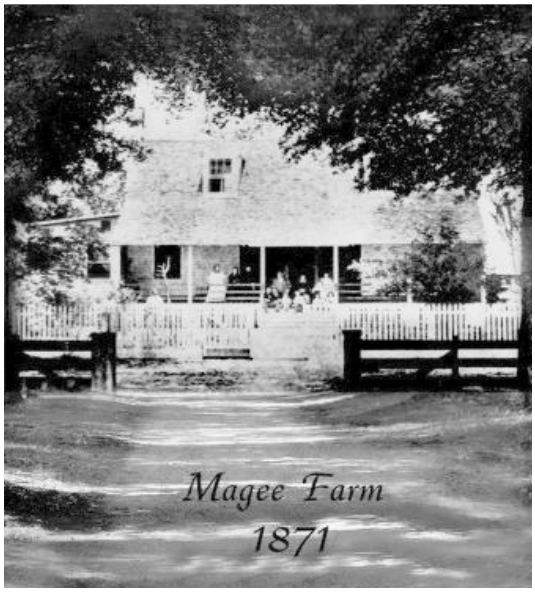


Gen. Richard Taylor
CSA

"Union General Canby arrived by train with a brigade of troops numbering around 1800 men, complete with a military band. The Federal contingent were attired in their best dress uniforms, and were said to cut a dashing image.

"Several hours later, Confederate General Taylor (Son of president Zachary Taylor) arrived standing on the back of a railroad push cart, powered by two black servants. He was accompanied by a single military aide, Colonel Myers.

"Both General Taylor and his aide's uniforms were soiled, tattered and both men looked very worn, but none the less, they approached with military bearing, and heads held high, looking their foe directly in the eyes. It was suggested that the party retire to the comfort of the Magee home, after a cordial greeting.



"The Generals, along with one aide each, went into the parlor, and with the doors shut, discussed and agreed to a cease fire. The entire matter took just over ten minutes or so.

"They then proceeded to the dining room, where champagne had been prepared. The Union band struck up the melody of "Hail Columbia," General Canby dispatched orders for them to play "Dixie," but General Taylor intervened, and said that perhaps "Hail Columbia" would be more suitable for the future.

"As the champagne bottles were uncorked, General Taylor said that it was the most pleasant popping sound he had heard in the last four years. They then toasted the event, and a meal was served, which was most welcomed by all in attendance.

"After some small talk, General Taylor and his aide left for his Headquarters in Meridian, Mississippi. General Canby then returned back to Mobile.

"After much discussion by couriers and telegraph, a final date was set, and the Confederate forces under General Taylor's command, surrendered at Citronelle, Alabama on May 4, 1865."

Snapshots

To the Left, a picture of Lyon Jernigan and his mother Emile Jernigan. They are pictured with the Schwinn Bicycle, which is displayed in the Museum and was used to deliver groceries from the People's Market in Brewton (1815-1979). Lyon is a descendant of the W. Y. Jernigan who owned the bicycle.

To the left and below, pictures of the Art Exhibit, "In Residence," an exhibition of local artists, will be on display in the Museum through March 29th.

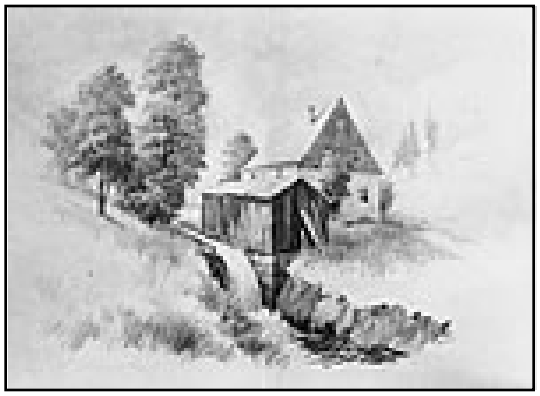
The exhibit is sponsored by the Brewton Arts Council and Jefferson Davis Community College.

In the picture above, second graders from Brewton Elementary enjoying the Museum .

Cub Scouts visit the Museum

Pictured at the left and beginning with the front row, left to right, are Dominic Beasley, Austin McCall, Ian Gardner, Dylan Ingram, Cobi Godwin, Devin Wilson, Chase Hammac, Matthew Murphy, Waylon Sanders, Edward Hart, Michael Murphy, Patrick Lovelace, Levi Fuqua, Shirley Beasley, Frank Beasley, Chris Hammac, Debra King, Christina Jones, Ella Hart, Clara Hart, Austin Douglas, Amanda Gardner, Susan Crawford, Sharon Wilson, Shirley Wilson, Pat Summerlin, Jim Hart, Carolyn Hart, and Dwian Ingram.

German POW Photos from Aliceville Museum



The photographs show activities of the German POW's at Camp Aliceville. Alabama

German POWs In Alabama During World War II

By Charles Ware

The following article first appeared in Atmore magazine for December 2008. It is reprinted by permission.

German POW's in classroom at Camp Aliceville.

.Photos courtesy of the Aliceville Museum Collection.

"During World War II, as the battles for North Africa were coming to a close, American and British forces were taking large numbers of German and Italian soldiers as prisoners. Finally, in May of 1943, with the surrender of Rommel's Afrika Korps in Tunisia, more than 250,000 prisoners were taken. These prisoners were held in temporary compounds until they could be processed and sent to prisoner of war (POW) camps for the duration of the war. Most were sent by ship to various ports on the east coast of the United States. It was here that thousands of these prisoners learned that they were being transported to a far off destination that most of them had never heard of - Alabama.

"I grew up in Alabama in the years following the war and I had never heard anything about POW camps being located here, but in fact, Alabama hosted one of the largest concentrations of German POWs in the world. Some of the camps were located not far from Atmore.

"Construction of camps in Alabama had begun in 1942, shortly after the United States had entered the war. These camps were originally planned for alien internment but remained mostly unoccupied until the spring of 1943. After the Axis defeat in North Africa, the United States and Great Britain agreed that the vast majority of prisoners would be interned in the United States. A crash program was begun, by the Army Corps of Engineers, to enlarge the existing camps and to construct many more camps throughout the country, Because of climate concerns, most of these camps were to be construe southern regions of the country. By 1945 there were about 500,000 POWs in over 500 camps throughout the United States.

"The first camp in Alabama was constructed near Aliceville, just west of Tuscaloosa. Camp Aliceville consisted of frame barracks and numerous other administrative buildings situated on over 700 acres of land. In addition, prisoners were provided with recreational areas, theatres, several mess halls, and a hospital. It was virtually a small city. The camp was surrounded with two barbed wire fences with a "no man's land" in between and with many guard towers and light stands. It could accommodate 6,000 prisoners and up to 1,000 American military and support personnel.

"Camp Aliceville was considered a base camp. A base contained all the facilities necessary for the support of thousands of prisoners. Other base camps were soon constructed at Opelika, Ft. McClellan near Anniston, and Ft. Rucker near Enterprise.

"The Ft. Rucker camp initially housed Italian prisoners, but when Italy surrendered later in 1943, these were moved to other locations. After that, only Germans were interned in Alabama.

"Later, as POWs were being put to work outside the camps, smaller satellite camps were constructed. The satellite camps were located in areas where the demand for prisoner labor was the greatest and were usually designed for 200 to 300 men. Each satellite camp was assigned to a base camp for support. By 1945 there were over 20 satellite camps in the state. Some of those nearest to Atmore were located near Greenville, Evergreen, Loxley, and Foley. In all, there were over 16,000 POWs in camps throughout Alabama.

"The first POWs arrived in Aliceville on June 2, 1943. Nearly everyone in town turned out to witness the event. There were armed soldiers and policemen lining the streets. The prisoners arrived via a Frisco Railroad special train. Some of them were too tired and weak to climb down from the train and had to be assisted off. Most of them still wore their tattered combat uniforms and clung to the few possessions they had been able to bring along. They were soon gathered into formation and marched down the road to the camp that would be their home for the next two and a half years. This was a scene that would be repeated many times at Aliceville and in the other camps in the months to come.

"In each of the camps, the administrative structure was set up so that the Germans themselves would be responsible for their own chain of command, for most of the day to day activities of the camp. They were also responsible for their internal security and discipline.

There were many problems during the first months that the camps were opened because there had been little effort by the American military to identify which of the prisoners were hardened Nazis and which were just ordinary soldiers. Only a small percentage were still staunch followers of Hitler, but those who were carried their beliefs into the camps and set out to identify and

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German POW's *(continued)*

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punish those prisoners who did not continue to support the party line.

"They formed secret police organizations within the camp and would threaten or beat any prisoners who they felt were cooperating too much with their captors. There were even a few cases where prisoners, who did not remain loyal to the Nazi cause, were executed by the secret police. By late 1943 American officials had learned of this situation and many of the die-hard identified and sent away to special camps.

Barracks at Camp Alice

"The relations between the guards and prisoners underwent a dramatic shift from early 1943 through 1945. At first there was quite a bit of apprehension and tension between the groups. The guards had a strict set of rules to follow when dealing with the prisoners. There was to be no conversation or contact with the prisoners. If the prisoners left the camp for a work detail, they would be followed by large numbers of armed guards and even a Jeep or truck with a mounted machine gun.

"By 1944, things changed drastically. Guards and prisoners became much more relaxed with each other and would often be seen talking, joking and laughing together. Guards were sometimes seen taking prisoners into local restaurants for lunch or into a theater to watch a movie. One prisoner even noted that by 1945, at some of the work sites, it was hard to tell the guards from the prisoners.

German POW's at work, Camp Aliceville.

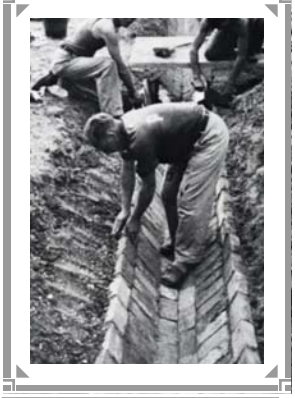
"Each of the base camps had a canteen that was run through the prisoner organization. The canteen was similar to an Army PX and stocked such things as tobacco, toilet articles, snacks, games, books, etc. In some states, including Alabama, the canteens even stocked beer. These articles were purchased with 'canteen coupons' which were earned by working.

"The canteens were quite profitable and the prisoners were allowed the profits. A committee would decide how to spend firs and usually they were used for morale boosting items such as musical instruments, sports equipment and printing presses. In some camps, the barracks were completely refurbished and painted using canteen profits. When the war ended some canteen funds contained tens of thousands of dollars. This would be donated to German charities or divided and paid to the departing prisoners in cash.

"The Geneva Conventions regarding treatment of POWs stated that only the lowest ranking prisoners could be compelled to work outside the camps. There was a tremendous labor shortage in the south at this time because of the number of people serving in the armed forces or having gone into the cities to work in defense industries. To encourage prisoners to work in the outside jobs, the government decided to pay them. Any farmer or business that desired to use POW laborers had to justify, through the War Manpower Commission, that the need was critical and could not be filled from local sources. They could then contract with the Commission to provide laborers and were required to pay to the Commission the going rate per hour for such labor.

"The prisoners were allowed to keep 80 cents a day of this pay. They were paid in "canteen coupons" which could be spent only at the camp canteen. The rest of their pay went into camp maintenance or into the canteen fund. The prisoners provided a good substitute for scarce labor and by 1945 most of them were working.

"POWs worked in a number of different places, including warehouses, military bases, offices, and hospitals. One even worked as a baby sitter. The majority of POWs



The prisoners rebuilt the wooden lined trenches with hand made bricks at Camp Alice.

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German POW's *(continued)*

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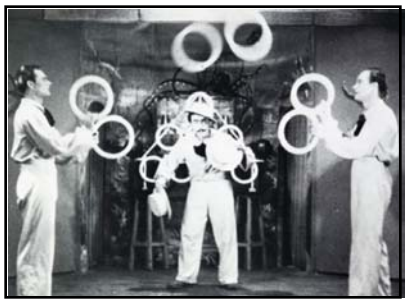
in the south though, were employed in timber and pulpwood related jobs, or on farms. Many hundreds of prisoners worked the farms of Baldwin County through the camps in Foley and Loxley. Most of the prisoners who worked from the Baldwin County camps were probably transported from Aliceville through Atmore on the Frisco.

"The camps in Greenville and Evergreen supplied workers for pulpwood harvesting and timber related jobs. Many of the Camp Evergreen prisoners worked for the T.R. Miller Mill Co. and worked in the vicinity of Brewton and Atmore. In 1945, it was estimated that about one-third of the pulpwood cut in the southern states was cut by POW workers.

The Outdoor Theatre at Camp Aliceville

Plays, juggling, and puppet theatre produced by the POW's, Camp Aliceville.

In the fall of 1943, there was a critical need for workers to harvest the vast peanut crops in the Dothan and Enterprise area. Hundreds of POW workers were contracted for but there was also a shortage of guards to handle the movement of so many prisoners. A special military unit was moved into Alabama to serve as temporary guards for this operation. Interestingly, this unit was made up of volunteer nisei Japanese (second generation Japanese) who themselves, just weeks before, had been behind barbed wire in Japanese internment camps in the western United States.



"The Germans were an industrious group and very little of their free time was wasted. From the beginning, they set out to change their bleak camp compounds into a more pleasant and more livable environment. They painted the buildings, planted grass and shrubs, and put in ornate flower gardens. One camp even had a prisoner who had been a professional landscaper. He decorated the grounds with elaborate designs using flowers, shrubs and stones. Other prisoners made wood carvings or other artwork for the gardens. Compounds would compete within the camp for the monthly beautification award. Many local residents would come out to the camp to see these beautiful gardens behind the barbed wire.

"Prisoners also built soccer fields, gymnasiums, and other sports facilities along with libraries, handicraft shops, theaters, officer and NCO clubs, and many other amenities. At Aliceville, they built a 1,000 –seat amphitheater from bricks that they had made themselves.

"The off duty hours in the POW camps were filled with many activities. The prisoners were given almost total freedom as to how they occupied their free time, and in typical German fashion, programs were organized which would capture the interest of almost everyone. Camps had bands, orchestras, dance groups, choirs, and theatrical companies. Within a few months of opening, Camp Aliceville had a 40-man symphony orchestra with instruments donated through the YMCA or purchased from canteen profits.

"Theatrical produc5tions were staged with costumes and scenery that had been made in the prison workshops. There was a wealth of experience in the POW ranks as many of the prisoners had been professional musicians or performers before the war.

Records at Aliceville show that before the end of the war, in addition to the symphony orchestra, there were six smaller bands, six glee clubs, a dance orchestra, a string quartet, and a 25-member choir organized within the camp. These camp

Puppets iin the theatre and making the puppets.

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German POW's *(continued)*

(Continued from page 11)

productions began drawing large numbers of spectators from the local population who would gather to watch from outside the fence. On a few occasions, the prisoners were invited to hold performances in local auditoriums which would be open to the public.

"In addition, each base camp established a newspaper which would publish camp news and articles and stories submitted by the prisoners. They obtained printing presses through donations or bought them from canteen funds. The camp papers did not publish any news of world events but the prisoners had access to local newspapers through the camp canteen. They got periodic mail deliveries from back and could write letters to be forwarded to Germany through the Swiss embassy.

"Sports, especially soccer, were also big pastimes. The camps fielded some very high quality soccer teams. They formed leagues and played games for the camp championships. These games attracted large cheering crowds and it wasn't long before the guards had adopted favorite teams and would be seen at the games cheering as loudly as any of the prisoners. The guards tried to introduce the prisoners to American football but just never seemed to catch on.

Drawings of camp life, at the theatre and in the barracks, by one of the POW's.

"All of the major POW camps established camp schools and colleges where prisoners could take a variety of courses. The courses ranged from basic high school subjects to engineering and even pre-med.

"Most of the courses were taught by qualified teachers from the POW ranks, but a few were taught by visiting teachers from nearby schools. Near the end of the war, arrangements were under way to have prisoners actually attend classes at the University of Alabama. Prisoners could also sign up for correspondence courses through the same schools that provided this service to the American military.

"At any given time, almost half of the prisoners were enrolled in courses of some type. After the war, the POWs' course records were sent to Germany so that they could get credit in Germany for the courses taken while POWs. Many of the prisoners had earned credits that allowed them to finish high school or to get college degrees.

"According to military code, it was considered the duty of any captured military personnel, including Americans, to try to escape. There were around 2,000 escape attempts made from the camps in the United States. These were all by individuals or small groups. There were no mass breakouts, although there were several elaborate tunnels discovered under the fences at some of the camps in the southwest. There were 80 recorded escape attempts from the camps in Alabama No civilians or military personnel were ever harmed in these escape attempts but, unfortunately, several prisoners were shot and killed while trying to escape. Two prisoners were killed while trying to escape from Aliceville. They were buried with full military honors with an honor guard of American soldiers who fired the traditional 21-gun salute.

"None of the Alabama escapees ever got very far and most captivity within a few hours. A small group did manage to get as far as Memphis where they enjoyed a few days freedom before being discovered. Most of the escapes were not well planned and were just spur of the moment decisions. Many simply walked away from work details where security was lax. Over half of the prisoners who escaped ended up turning themselves in to the police or to local citizens or they just walked back to the camp.

"In October of 1944, the entire prison population was deeply saddened to learn of the death of the former commander of the Afrika Korps, their much beloved Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. Even though he was the enemy, he was held in high esteem by many of the allies as well. At Camp Aliceville, a committee of POWs approached the camp commandant to ask it was all right for them to conduct a parade and memorial ceremony in the camp. The commandant not only gave permission on but asked if it would be all light for an American officer to also give a eulogy.

"The prisoners conducted a formal military parade with bands playing traditional German march music. A number of German officers and an American officer gave speeches. Many of the American officers from the camp attended the ceremony. A German artist had painted a huge portrait of Rommel which was displayed above the speakers' platform. Searchlights from the guard towers illuminated the portrait throughout the night.

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German POW's *(continued)*

(Continued from page 12)

"There are few records of prisoners being brutally mistreated the POW camps. In the early days, there were some instances of prisoners being mishandled by their guards, but as relations improved, these situations virtually disappeared. There was one case where a guard at a camp in Colorado went berserk after learning of his brother's death in Germany and firing his gun into the camp, killing several prisoners.

"Overall, 830 Germans died while in captivity. Many of these deaths occurred because of injuries or diseases that the prisoners had before their arrival at the camps. German POWs were buried in 53 different cemeteries in the United States. The largest number are buried in the Chattanooga National Cemetery. There is a small cemetery on Ft. McClellan that contains the graves of 26 POWs who died in Alabama.

POW's from the Afrika--Korps Camp Alice.

"When the prisoners first started to arrive in Alabama, there was some animosity shown by the local citizens, especially those had lost loved ones in the war. The prisoners would sometimes be jeered or cursed as they marched down the streets to the camps. At that time, fraternization between the prisoners and American guards and citizens was strictly forbidden. As time passed though, and as the Americans learned more about the Germans, they discovered that the prisoners were just fellow human beings who were tired and lonely, and most of them wanted nothing more than for the war to end so that they could go back home.

"After a while, these regulations regarding fraternization were mostly ignored and many Alabamians formed lasting relationships with the prisoners they associated with. Relations grew especially strong at the work camps and on farms where Americans and Germans worked side by side. It wasn't unusual for farmers to have German work crews to their home for lunch. The prisoners probably enjoyed fried chicken, black eyed peas, turnip greens and cornbread for the first time.

"There is a story of a Baldwin County farmer who loaned his car to a group of prisoners so that they could take a drive through the country.

"Many of these friendships lasted for decades after the war and many Germans have returned to Alabama to visit with the friends they made here. Reunions have been organized in Aliceville to bring former prisoners, guards and other camp workers, and local citizens together.

"Following Germany's surrender in May of 1945, America began to repatriate the POWs back to their homelands. This was a slow process however, and many of the prisoners didn't leave Alabama until late in 1946, and then over half the prisoners were retained in POW status and required to work in postwar projects in Great Britain, France, and other European countries. Many didn't get back to Germany until 1948.

"Repatriation was a bitter-sweet experience for most of the prisoners, for now they had to face return to a devastated homeland and endure near starvation conditions during the long recovery years. Many had also lost family members and friends, whose fates they would not learn for months, if ever. Many Alabamians received letters from former POWs telling them of the deplorable conditions that they found on their return to Germany.

"After the last POWs had left the camps, the Army Corps of Engineers began the dismantling process. Slowly, the camps were torn down and any usable materials and supplies were sold as scrap or used for other government projects. Almost nothing remains of any of the Alabama camps. There may be a small monument or plaque at some of the sites. The towns of Aliceville and Opelika have made special efforts to preserve the history of the POW camps that were located there. The Aliceville Museum and the Museum of East Alabama in Opelika have collections of many of the records, artifacts, uniforms, and pictures from the camps as well as interesting displays depicting what life was like behind the barbed wire. The museum at Aliceville also exhibits some of the artistic works of the POWs such as paintings, sketches, handicrafts, musical instruments, and sculpture.

"I am sure that the humane treatment that the German POWs received while in the United States, in spite of the war still raging and in spite of vast political differences, had a lasting effect on postwar German values and of their perception of the United States. Most POWs took with them back to Germany views and ideas about the United States that, for the most part, were very positive. There were many lessons that were learned from the American people about the American way of life and about how caring and generous Americans can be. I expect that some of the most enduring lessons of all took place in settings similar to those of the farm houses in Baldwin County, where POW workers were sometimes invited in to join an American family for dinner."

THE NEWSLETTER FOR
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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