



Historic Gloucester

Newsletter of the

**GLOUCESTER
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

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MERRY CHRISTMAS



To all members and friends of the Gloucester Historical Society we extend our heartfelt good wishes for this holiday season.

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President’s Report

By Glenn Clark

For those who observe, a sacred season approaches. It is a time of fellowship, family, giving and worship.

In this edition of Historic Gloucester, we tell a story of hope, kindness and forgiveness, a story behind the world calamity that was World War II. We tell the story of the more than 34,000 German prisoners of war who came to Canada, many of whom ended up working on Gloucester farms from 1943 to 1946. Canada tried to set an example of how to treat prisoners. It firmly followed the rules of the Geneva Convention, which outlined the treatment of prisoners of war. As Christmas 1941 approached, there was no question that the German prisoners would receive a Roast Turkey dinner. And our kindness was rewarded with hard and honest work on farms, in lumber camps and elsewhere. After the war, many of the prisoners returned to Canada as immigrants and their legacy continues to this day. There were exceptions, and when a mob chased German diners from a Montreal restaurant, Gloucester’s own Harry Woodburn chastised the behaviour as unacceptable for a great country in a letter to the editor in 1945. The overall story has a heart warming feeling that is in keeping with the Christmas season. At the end of the story, I have provided links to a variety of videos on this subject. Please consider watching one or more of them. I have also included a link to the British video, “The Germans We Kept”. At one point, it speaks of how British families welcomed German prisoners into their homes to celebrate Christmas. How could this be after the brutality of war? The evil of war did produce some good.

We are looking forward 2020 as we consider more new stories and ideas. Please stay tuned.

I wish everybody a Merry Christmas and a healthy and happy New Year.

THE GLOUCESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY HISTORY ROOM WILL BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
 BY APPOINTMENT ONLY DURING THE WINTER MONTHS
 LOCATION: 4550B BANK STREET (AT LEITRIM ROAD)
 FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT Mary Boyd at 613-521-2082 or boydmary172@gmail.com

Historic Gloucester is published by The Gloucester Historical Society. It is intended as a Newsletter to members of the Society to provide interesting articles on Gloucester’s past and to keep them informed of publications available, upcoming events and other items of general interest. Comments and suggestions regarding the Newsletter are always welcome.



Gloucester Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the City of Ottawa.



One of the former prisons where German Prisoners of War were interned.

The Enemy Living Amongst Us in Gloucester

Prisoners of War and Farm Policy during World War II

By Glenn Clark

When World War II began on September 1, 1939 and Canada officially declared war 9 days later, little did we know or expect that Nazis would be living amongst us within a year. During the early months of the war, there was little more than small skirmishes along the western front on the German border and some relatively minor naval and air battles at sea. It was often referred to as the 'Phoney War'.

This all changed with the sudden invasion of France through Belgium starting on May 10, 1940. It was a massive defeat as the French army and the British Expeditionary Force rapidly retreated and faced a tenuous evacuation from Dunkerque between May 27th and June 4th under massive aerial bombardment from the Luftwaffe.

As the fighting began, German prisoners-of-war were captured. They were initially placed in camps in England but with the possible invasion of the United Kingdom imminent and the Battle of Britain about to begin, it was considered safer to move them to more distant parts of the Empire including Canada.

On June 19, 1940, Prime Minister Mackenzie King announced that Canada had agreed to accept German Prisoners of War and civilian internees. The following day, the Duchess of York set sail for Quebec carrying 2,112 civilian prisoners, 168 German officers and 368 of other ranks.

Camps were quickly established in many locations across Canada, often in former jails, schools, hospitals, resorts and forts. New internment facilities were also built, usually modelled after military camps except with the addition of fences and barbed wire. Most were in remote locations but not in all cases.

When internees arrived, they were assessed on how strong their Nazi beliefs were. Re-education was a part of the program within the camps, but there were also opportunities for work, recreation, education courses and social activities. German officers were not obligated to work. The men were also entitled to continue to wear their military uniforms. The camps were mostly run by prisoners themselves, by rank and with a degree of military discipline. The guards were from the Veteran's Guard of Canada, who were World War I veterans considered too old for active service. These guards, who shared a military background with the internees, often befriended the prisoners or acted as father figures. The prisoners cooked for themselves, cleaned the barracks, organized work, recreation, sports teams, orchestras and plays. For those who were not ideological Nazis, military order could present problems, and some sought to be moved to other camps, which were not as dominated by Nazi officers. The prisoners also organized themselves by their pre-military trades. For example, former tailors mended uniforms when necessary.

A small stipend was given out for work performed, which could be used to purchase items at the camp canteen. Standard clothing was provided including pants with a red stripe and shirts with a large red bull's eye on the back. This would clearly identify a POW if they escaped from the camp.

Many of the German prisoners were surprised by the conditions. They expected far worse. The camps often included amenities based on prior uses of the building. In one case (Bowenville), there was even an indoor swimming pool. If the camp was on a body of water, there were opportunities for swimming during the summer months. Space usually allowed for sports fields as well as gardens.

Escapes were expected as this was part of military duty. However, an Ottawa Citizen article title from December 21, 1940 said it all: "Many Prisoners will Try to make Escape, Few will be Successful".

Canada is a huge country with sparse population and a harsh climate for a good portion of the year. Unarmed prisoners, with distinctive clothing, poor English skills and often in a remote location, were overwhelmingly easy to recapture and were a minimal threat to the public. On some occasions, they returned to their camps of their own volition.

Only one prisoner escaped and successfully returned to Nazi Germany. He was Franz Von Werra, a dashing young Luftwaffe pilot, who jumped out the window of a prisoner train just outside of Smiths Falls. He then hitchhiked to Johnstown on the St. Lawrence River near Prescott and crossed the partially frozen river in a stolen boat using his hands as paddles. This was in the dead of winter of January 1941. At the time, the United States was still neutral and a safe haven for Nazi escapees. He became the talk of the town while in the United States and would exaggerate his escape from his Canadian captures. Before extradition back to Canada could be arranged, he escaped to Mexico and then South America. He eventually flew back to Germany where he received a hero's welcome. He was killed in a plane crash in October 1941. His story was immortalized in the 1957 movie titled 'The One that Got Away' starring Hardy Kruger. Movie Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lvx8cStNxo>.

During the period of American neutrality, a few other prisoners made their way to the United States, but none were able to return to Germany. Following the attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941 and the subsequent American declaration of war, the United States ceased to be a destination for escaped German prisoners of war from Canada.

Early prisoners, particularly Luftwaffe pilots and U-boat crews were very arrogant given the early and rapid battle successes over the British and French. They would taunt their guards and tell them that their release was imminent and predicting the defeat of the British Empire. This behaviour gradually softened when victory did not come as quickly as thought.

Canada was a signatory of the 1929 Geneva convention and they took their responsibility of good treatment of prisoners seriously. Nutritious food was provided, comparable to what was offered to those in the Canadian military and was supplemented by produce from camp gardens. In some cases, prisoners ate better than Canadian civilians who faced food rationing.

During the early years of the war, a few escapees were shot and killed when they resisted arrest, but that practice was quickly ended when camp deaths could be used as propaganda back in the home country. The camps were periodically moni-

ored for violations under the Geneva convention by Swiss officials and reports were generated that could potentially get back into Nazi hands. Poor treatment in Canada could seriously affect the way Canadians were treated in German camps.

Following the disastrous Dieppe invasion in 1942, many Canadian POWs were shackled in Germany. The Canadian government reacted in kind by having a similar number of German prisoners shackled. This led to a standoff at the camp in Bowmanville, Ontario where German prisoners barricaded themselves in barracks. This required intervention by military personnel. With the real possibility of escalation of poor treatment of POWs in Germany, Swiss officials negotiated with the British and Canadian governments to end the practice of shackling. This was implemented on December 12, 1942. The hope was that the German government would do likewise.

Internment camps were scattered across Canada, and one opened in the immediate Ottawa area. In 1939, the City of Hull built a new jail in the Val-Tétreau district adjacent to Gatineau Park. The building still exists today and is now known as the Hull Detention facility. The building remained unopened in October 1940 when the City of Hull offered it to the federal government. The new jail was considered too expensive for the city to operate at the time. This became the Hull Internment Camp, also known as Camp 32.

Other camps in Eastern Ontario were located at Fort Henry in Kingston (Camp 31), and at Centre Lake near Petawawa (Camp 33). Later in the war, others were established as work camps. One of those was located north of Thurso Quebec in the Singer Sewing Machine Company's lumber tract. This was known as Camp 15 on the shore of Long Lake, now known as Gagnon Lake, a few miles north of the village of Duhamel. There, German prisoners worked in the woods and assisted with the construction of the Thurso and Nation Valley railway. This followed accusations that the railway had used child labour for railway construction. The Fort Henry camp, being an ancient facility, was later closed following prisoner complaints and they were transferred to the camp at Bowmanville, Ontario.

The major priority in the early years of the war was to mobilize a sizeable army, navy and air force. The young men of Canada were encouraged to volunteer, however, a problem began to arise that

required a solution. Many of those who were enlisting were from rural Canada, and farm women were also being attracted to work in city war industries. This was going to impact food production. An Ottawa Citizen article on July 24, 1943 charted a 30% decline in the male agricultural work force between August 31, 1939 and January 30, 1943. There was also a 10% decline in the female workforce. A crisis was looming. Not only did Canada need to feed its growing armed forces, it needed to continue to feed its civilian population and send additional food to the United Kingdom, which was facing serious food shortages caused by blockades of European agricultural markets.

Various ideas were explored to solve the labour shortage. They considered using teenagers, military personnel while in training, and civilians as 'weekend' farm workers. The troops proved to be an unpopular option when farmers faced considerable red tape and had to pay 'army wages', considerably higher than the rate usually paid for help with the harvest. However, one further idea was also considered. The use of prisoners of war. This was first explored during the winter of 1942/43, after the risk of flight to the United States ended. By this time, many of the prisoners were sufficiently trustworthy and welcomed the additional freedom and meaningful work in exchange for extra pay.

This plan was implemented for the 1943 growing season and with an internment camp located in Hull, many prisoners were offered to Ottawa area farmers including in Gloucester Township. Initially, prisoners were expected to report back to camp daily but this was quickly found to be impractical. On August 5, 1943, an Order-in-Council was announced allowing German prisoners to reside on the farms where they worked [*Ottawa Citizen*, August 5, 1943 p.1]. By this time, the program was already popular, and more farmers were asking for prisoners. They were also being employed in lumber camps where a similar labour shortage existed. The internees were paid a sufficient amount to avoid suppressing standard wage rates while also not competing with the regular civilian workforce for jobs.

The use of prisoners increased for the 1944 season and was credited with increasing the food supply and the availability of lumber products. But the program was not without problems. Not every

German prisoner was suited to farm work. There were incidents and escapes.

Many Gloucester farmers employed prisoners. George Waldshutz was employed on the farm of William Nolan of the Metcalfe Highway near South Gloucester but was injured in a hit and run car accident while walking along the highway. His injuries were not considered serious [*Ottawa Citizen*, August 24, 1944 p.1]. A similar incident involved another German farm worker hit by a car near Carp. On another occasion, a prisoner of war was 'fed up' after working on a farm in North Gower and was found hitch hiking back to the Hull Internment Camp. Ottawa area residents willingly picked up prisoner hitch hikers who were wearing their distinctive clothing [*Ottawa Citizen*, May 27, 1944 p.2].

Disagreements could arise between farm hands and the farm owners and German POWs were no different. One such incident involved a Merivale farmer and his German farm worker. A disagreement escalated into fist fight. The farmer was not seriously injured but police were called. The POW was escorted back to the internment camp where he was found guilty and given a sentence of a 28-day detention and the likely loss of outside employment opportunities [*Ottawa Citizen*, March 26, 1945 p.1].

A more serious incident involved prisoners from the Thurso lumber camp at Long Lake. But it was more a breach of military discipline than a risk to the public. On March 15, 1944, a complaint was filed when prisoners were brought to Buckingham Quebec by one guard for dental treatment and afterwards drank beer in a nearby tavern then picked up 4 girls in a restaurant and hired a car to drive them to Thurso where they met a second guard and all of them got drunk together at the local hotel. Investigators were called in. Prisoners were strictly forbidden from fraternizing with guards and civilians [*Ottawa Citizen*, March 20, 1944 p.1]. At a court marshal on April 8th, two members of the Veteran's Guard were found guilty of several charges. Coincidentally, the Thurso camp was closed on April 5th on completion of the work at that location, and on the same day, two POWs escaped. Both were recaptured the following day. Long Lake is very remote. The prisoners were relocated to another project in Ontario where labour shortages were more acute than in Quebec [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 10, 1944 p.17, April 7, 1944 p.1].

German prisoners were known to have been employed at the dairy farm of George Kemp at Leirtrim, the Robert pig farm located on the site of today's St. Laurent Shopping Centre, the Woodburn dairy farm on Cyrville Road, the Perrault dairy farm on Navan Road, and as previously mentioned, the Nolan farm at South Gloucester. I am sure there were others.

Despite the use of prisoners, the labour shortage remained, and able-bodied civilians were encouraged to apply for work in critical industries including agriculture. Accommodations were also extended to sons of farmers who could make application for a postponement of mobilization [*Ottawa Journal*, July 11, 1944 p.19]. This latter case applied to Gloucester resident Douglas Clark who was returned to his father's Rideau Park (Alta Vista) farm just before mobilization from Halifax.

The end of war in Europe on May 8, 1945 did not bring an end to Canadian internment camps. The war continued in the Pacific and it was necessary to bring order back to mainland Europe before returning Canadian soldiers' home, let alone returning prisoners of war.

There were discussions of when to repatriate them, but dates were deferred through 1945. Those working in outside camps and on farms continued to do so. By this time, the bulk of the 34,664 German prisoners were either working in industrial camps or on farms or doing bush-work. An estimated 18,000 to 19,000 were employed on farms.

The end of war did not bring escapes to a halt. On July 23, 1945, two prisoners failed to report to a North Gower farm as arranged, but they were soon picked up by the RCMP [*Ottawa Citizen*, July 23, 1945 p.10]. A further two German farm workers were reported missing on September 1st, one from the Thomas Gamble farm of Britannia Bay and another from the Wallace Brothers farm of Fallowfield [*Ottawa Citizen*, September 3, 1945 p.2].

On September 7th, German prisoners were rounded up and asked to do another job, to move their own personal effects between office buildings in Ottawa. "This was the first time they (POWs) have invaded a Government building to work side by side with the Ottawa service (civil serv-

The rules concerning fraternizing with the enemy were finally relaxed on September 29, 1945 when the press was welcomed into the Hull camp to meet the prisoners. They no longer had the arrogance that they displayed when they first began arriving in Canada in 1940 [*Ottawa Journal*, September 8, 1945 p.1]

As repatriation became closer to reality, many German POWs began to express interest in remaining in Canada to start a new life. Returning home to a war-ravaged and defeated country where family may no longer remain was not appealing to everybody. After years in Canada, most had acclimatized to their new country.

The first 2,753 POWs boarded ship destined for England instead of Germany. They arrived on February 20, 1946. While in England, they were expected to work on building houses and other war reparations for up to a year [*Ottawa Journal*, February 20, 1946 p. 5]. Most repatriated prisoners were expected to do the same. By November, 4,000 remained, and most were merchant seamen and would have been happy to remain in Canada. But the desire to keep these workers at 'prisoner rates' was to suggest that Canada supported slave labour [*Ottawa Journal*, December 12, 1946 p.4]. All the men had to go home.

A December 11th letter to the editor of the *Ottawa Citizen* written by Harry Woodburn of Cyrville Road in response to a rush on German diners in a Montreal restaurant, indicated that Canada could not be a great country as long as unruly actions continued against people of different backgrounds. His experiences with German prisoners on his own farm were only positive.

The final repatriation was scheduled for December 22, 1946 but was delayed into early January. On December 30th, 24-year old Arthur Scheffler scaled a 20-foot stone wall to escape from the Hull camp. He had only been there for 4 days [*Ottawa Citizen*, December 30, 1946, p.3]. By February 11, 1947, only 23 POWs remained in Canada. Any of the prisoners who wished to live in Canada were required to return home and apply for immigration from their home country. It is estimated that 10% of the POWs would eventually do so.

A March 8, 1948 RCMP report indicated that of the hundreds of escapees, only 12 remained at

large. Three were from the Ottawa area, and two had escaped from Gloucester farms. Included were Egon Rosel who had escaped from a Cyrville farm on September 30, 1945 and Emil Beauchshadt who had escaped from Hurdman's Bridge on June 16, 1946 [*Ottawa Journal*, March 8, 1948 p.30]. One of the twelve, Willy Gottschalk was captured in Montreal in March 1949 where he was working in a chemical plant but in the end, he was the lucky one when the federal government allowed him to remain in Canada legally [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 19, 1949 p.12].

The Hull Internment Camp, which had held prisoners of war for over 6 years was finally returned to the City of Hull and its planned opening as a civilian jail, its original purpose, was planned for the spring of 1950 [*Ottawa Citizen*, November 1, 1949 p.20].

The final press report on prisoners of war appeared in the *Ottawa Journal* on January 15, 1955. The last prisoner of war had been released from penitentiary following a prison sentence for camp murder and returned to Germany in December 1954. Of the 12 reported missing in 1948, six remained at large, three of whom were believed to be in the United States including Emil Beauchshadt who had escaped from Hurdman's Bridge. Egon Rosel, escaped from Cyrville was amongst the three still believed to be at large in Canada.

Do you have any stories or photographs of German prisoners of war in the Ottawa area? Please consider sharing them with the Gloucester Historical Society. We would love to hear from you.

The following are stories and videos including German POW interviews, which explain this story in more detail. You may enjoy watching them.

Further resources.

The history of the Thurso and Nation Valley railway including the prisoner of war involvement in building the railway in 1943-1944 <https://churcher.crcml.org/thurso/tnvrhist.htm>

The Enemy Within (video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPc-F6mZsAQ>

Camp 30, A Prisoner's Paradise (Bowmanville, Ontario) (video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bu5FUjpPu0>

Secret Alberta, POWs on the Prairies (video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fZS-1v-kE8>

Whitewater German Prisoner of War Camp -- Canada's Greatest Summer Job (Manitoba) (video) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0PhC312ZAw

World War II Prisoner of War Camp in Medicine Hat (video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KuYIH6bO3A8>

Stuka pilot interview: Life as POW in Canada (video) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xG7ktX6_cUI <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwWd0ISE8VM>

The Germans We Kept (UK video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65y5fHco6oI>



Prisoner of War shirt worn in Canada

Lost Coronation Park

By Glenn Clark

Perhaps the earliest park in Gloucester Township was created on the grounds of the township hall at Billings Bridge. This was the site of the original Gloucester Agricultural fair grounds of the late 19th century. The park consisted of lawns, flower beds and shrubbery and was maintained by the Billings Bridge Horticultural Society.

The park was named Coronation Park on May 14, 1937, just two days after the coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother [*Ottawa Citizen*, May 17, 1937 p.5]. In the fall of 1939, Mr. & Mrs. T.F. Ritchie donated a silver trophy for the Horticultural Society daffodil show and the society decided to plant several hundred daffodil bulbs in the park [*Ottawa Citizen*, October 7, 1939 p.34].

An *Ottawa Citizen* article on April 11, 1946 (Page 10) explained the history and plan for the park. The land had originally been low and had

been filled in, levelled and seeded. Trees and shrubs were strategically planted, and the lawn featured a bench and bird bath. On one side, a flower bed featured 1,000 tulip bulbs and crescent flower beds near the entrance were planted with daffodils for spring and geraniums in summer.

Following the annexation of Billings Bridge on January 1, 1950, the City of Ottawa took over Coronation Park with plans to expand and improve the park especially along Sawmill Creek [*Ottawa Citizen*, March 22, 1950, p.5 and *Ottawa Journal*, March 22, 1950 p.10].

The park was put up for sale along with the old Gloucester Township hall and fire station in October 1960 [*Ottawa Citizen*, October 26, 1960 p.62]. The new township hall at Leitrim opened on June 16, 1962. All the old buildings and the park were demolished shortly thereafter.

A new Coronation Park was developed on Station Boulevard in Riverview Park and opened in 1963 [*Ottawa Journal*, May 16, 1963 p.2].



Coronation Park, Billings Bridge. One of the old Gloucester Township buildings is in the background



Cyrville Bus Lines

By Glenn Clark

Another in our series on public transit in Gloucester, today, our topic is Cyrville Bus Lines.

Bus service to Cyrville was first mentioned in the *Ottawa Citizen* on April 14, 1926. Service operated during the winter of 1925 – 1926 between Cyrville and the Plaza adjacent to the Chateau Laurier. The service was withdrawn the previous week in April and the bus was transferred to a route between Ottawa and Prescott. The Cyrville service was subsequently operated by the Ottawa Electric Railway.

The Cyrville Bus line was first specifically mentioned in the *Ottawa Citizen* on July 25, 1928. The route through most of its history ran from the village via St. Laurent Boulevard (then known as Baseline Road), McArthur Avenue, Montgomery Street, Cummings Bridge, Rideau Street to a terminus at the corner of George and Dalhousie. The owner was Cleophas Trudel [*Ottawa Journal*, September 18, 1946 p.13].

With the proliferation of bus service starting in the mid 1920s from beyond the city limits, Ottawa City Council decided to tax bus service at the rate of 1/10 cents per passenger mile within the city limits. At the time, the Cyrville service had one bus [*Ottawa Citizen*,

October 6, 1928 p.2].

After almost 25 years of service, the Ottawa Transportation Commission purchased the Cyrville bus line and its four buses for \$50,000 effective January 1, 1951 [*Ottawa Citizen*, December 22, 1950 p.1]. The switch-over of service took effect on December 26, 1950. The new terminus was at Connaught Place adjacent to the Chateau Laurier during peak hours and at the corner of Rideau Street and Charlotte during off-peak hours [*Ottawa Citizen*, December 23, 1950 p.23]. An extra zone fare of 5 cents was implemented for those living beyond the St. Laurent Boulevard and McArthur Avenue intersection but offered free transfer privileges that did not exist under the previous independent bus line [*Ottawa Citizen*, January 8, 1951 p.21].

Not everybody was happy with the new service, with the streetcar transfer at Rideau and Charlotte, the extra zone fare and the hourly off-peak schedule [*Ottawa Citizen*, November 22, 1951 p.34].

Hurdman's Bridge Bus Line

There were two 1928 references to a Hurdman's Bridge and Overbrook Bus Line operated by Mrs. Gorman [*Ottawa Citizen*, October 6, 1928 p.2, November 30, 1928 p.2]. It is known that the bus service via River Road through Overbrook to Hurdman's Bridge was later provided by the Eastview Bus Company.

To renew or become a new member, please complete this form and return it to the address below with your cheque. Memberships may also be purchased on our website.

Membership Form—Gloucester Historical Society/Société historique de Gloucester
(Membership year runs from April 1 to March 31.)

Please note that we are adding a new category of long term (10 year) membership and discontinuing life memberships. Current life members will continue to be honoured. Details are below.

Annual Membership/ - \$20.00 for one year..... 10 year Membership \$150.00

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Donations are always welcome. We are a registered charitable organization and provide tax receipts.

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