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Second World War Prisoners of War collection

Arkansas State University - Jonesboro

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Finding Aid of

SECOND WORLD WAR
PRISONERS OF WAR
COLLECTION

1942-1949

NEAD 033

Archives & Special Collections
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Dean B. Ellis Library
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State University, AR 72467
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Summary Information

Compiled By: Matthew Mayton, July 25, 2023

Creator: Ezekiel Candler "Took" Gathings; Mabel H. Gieseck

Date: 1942-1949; Bulk, 1944-1946

Physical Description: 0.4167 linear feet. The collection consists of 9 folders in 1 document box.

Language: English, German

Abstract

When the United States entered the Second World War, the British government requested the United States house prisoners of war to help alleviate their housing problems. While hesitant at first, the United States built hundreds of camps and transported nearly half a million German and Italian prisoners of war to its soil. Organizations and communities in Arkansas appealed to the War Department and their representatives to establish branch camps and use prisoners in agricultural and timber labor to ease their labor shortage. This collection contains correspondence, reports, and statements to those efforts.

Acquisition

E. C. Gathings turned part of his collection over to Arkansas State University (Jonesboro) after he left Congress, and the remainder of the collection was given to the University after his death in 1979. Rufus R. Hughes, II, donated the Mabel H. Gieseck Collection on April 6, 2000. Materials related to prisoners of war were separated from their original collections to form this collection. Further additions to this collection are not expected.

Processing Information

This collection was processed by Matthew Mayton and completed in July 2023.

Conditions Governing Access

This manuscript collection consists of physical materials. This collection has not been digitized. This collection is open for research use only in the Reading Room. It is not available for request through Interlibrary Loan. Please contact the archive via email (archives@astate.edu) at least a week in advance of your arrival to ensure the availability of the material.

Rights Statement

Copyright has been transferred to Archives & Special Collection. Standard copyright laws (U. S. Title 17) still apply.

Preferred Citation

Second World War Prisoners of War Collection, Item Name and Date, Box and Folder Numbers, Archives and Special Collections, Dean B. Ellis Library, Arkansas State University.

Historical Note

During the Second World War, the United States established prisoner of war camps on its soil; the first time since the Civil War. The presence of these camps was partially due to the request of the British government to help alleviate their prisoner housing problems. The lack of experience and manpower maintaining such camps, increased security fears, and skilled personnel fluent in German and Italian fighting overseas caused the United States to hesitate accepting the request at first. However, with problems organizing such camps overseas and resources being diverted from the front to those camps, it was decided having prisoners of war housed in the United States would be more efficient.

To help alleviate the populous' fears and security concerns, many prisoners were housed in military installations and facilities throughout the South and Southwest. These regions were away from urban and industrial centers producing supplies for the war while construction costs were minimized due to the mild climate. Living conditions were pleasant considering the circumstances and included barrack housing, recreational activities, and educational opportunities for prisoners. Over the course of the war, nearly half a million German and Italian prisoners of war were transported and housed in the United States.

Prisoners of war were required to work in and around the camp, including working in the cafeteria, ground maintenance, and on local construction sites, earning eighty cents a day. Eventually, their labor expanded beyond the camps. Many young men in Arkansas left due to enlisting, being drafted, or to work in industrial jobs to support the war effort. This caused labor shortages in many agricultural and lumber industries. Communities in Arkansas formed organizations and contacted the war department and their representatives to establish branch camps throughout Arkansas to house prisoners of war and ease these shortages. Thousands of prisoners were brought to these branch camps, easing some of these labor shortages.

With the war ending in 1945, the War Department began sending prisoners back home in Europe. Many communities and organizations in Arkansas hoped to keep the prisoners until the young men who left returned. Some camps were able to keep their prisoners longer, but by the summer of 1946, all camps were dismantled and prisoners were sent home. The fair and kind treatment German and Italian prisoners experienced impacted their lives, with some writing and renewing acquaintances with their former captors and others immigrating to the United States.

Scope and Content Note

The Second World War Prisoner of War Collection consists of selected materials pertaining to the establishment of prisoner of war camps in Arkansas and the use of prisoners for agricultural labor. Included in this collection are correspondence between E. C. Gathings, various associations, and military personnel on the need for camps in Arkansas and ensuring the allocation and keeping of prisoners for agricultural labor. There is also correspondence from former prisoners of war to Mabel H. Gieseck.

Materials in this collection were originally part of the Ezekiel C. "Took" Gathings Congressional Papers and Mabel H. Gieseck Collection. Due to interest and demand, these materials were separated from their original collections and became its own collection.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged in two series:

Series 1: E. C. "Took" Gathings Materials: The "E. C. 'Took' Gathings Materials" series contains correspondence pertaining to the establishment of prisoner of war camps in Arkansas and the efforts made to allocate and retain prisoners for agricultural labor. This series was originally part of the Ezekiel C. "Took" Gathings Congressional Papers and was kept separate from Mabel H. Gieseck's materials.

Series 2: Mabel H. Gieseck Materials: The "Mabel H. Gieseck" series contains correspondence, records, and statements pertaining to German prisoners of war housed at the prisoner of war branch camp located in Wynne, Arkansas. It highlights efforts made by farmers and associations to establish a camp in Wynne for farm labor and the productivity of the labor. It also includes letters written by former prisoners of war to Mabel H. Gieseck. This series was originally part of the Mabel H. Gieseck Collection and was kept separate from E. C. "Took" Gathings' materials.

Related Materials

Researchers interested in this collection may also wish to consult the following resource in Archives & Special Collections holding:

- Robert Whitlow Papers: Robert Whitlow was a resident of Jonesboro and reporter for the Memphis Press-Scimitar newspaper. He visited the prisoner of war camp at Arkansas State College and spoke with some of the prisoners. This collection contains correspondence with former prisoners of war.
- Archives & Special Collections houses "POWs in Arkansas," a short documentary by Mike Bowman. This documentary can be accessed on VHS, DVD and digital and is non-circulating.

Other materials in Archives & Special Collections holdings may relate to this topic. Please contact Archives & Special Collections at archives@astate.edu for further research assistance.

Researchers may also be interested contacting and visiting the following archives:

- University of Arkansas Archives & Special Collections: The University of Arkansas houses some collections pertaining to prisoners of war housed in Arkansas. These collections include "World War II Prisoner of War Records" and "German POW Letters."
- Arkansas State Archives: The Arkansas State Archives may house items related to prisoners of war and Japanese internment camps.

Subjects

- Agriculture
- Agriculture--Labor productivity
- Agricultural laborers
- Convict labor

- Correspondence
- Cotton
- Ex-prisoners of war
- Military administration
- Military orders
- Prisoners of war
- Prisoners of war--Labor
- Prisoners of war--Germany
- Prisoners of war--Italy
- Prisoners of war--United States
- Prisoner-of-war camps
- Telegraph
- World War, 1939-1945
- World War, 1939-1945--Prisoners and prisons
- World War, 1939-1945--Prisoners and prisons, German

Names

- Cross County Farmers Association
- Five Counties Harvesting Association
- United States. Army
- United States. Army. Eighth Service Command
- United States. Office of the Provost Marshal General
- United States. War Department
- United States. War Department. Office of the Under Secretary of War
- Cross County (Ark.)
- Wynne (Ark.)
- Adams, H. R.
- Bryan, B. M., Jr, Brigadier General
- Byrd, Daniel B., Colonel
- Cooke, Rose Lou
- Crain, John E.
- Donovan, Richard, Major General
- Fisher, R. A.
- Frazier, Waldo
- Gathings, E. C.
- Gieseck, Mabel H.
- Hollan, J. Ed
- Knappenberger, H. C.
- Oliver, A. W.
- Patterson, Robert Porter, 1891-1952
- Proctor, W. B.
- Rolfe, Elliott A.

Collection Inventory

Series 1: E. C. "Took" Gathings Materials

Box 1:

Folder Number	Folder Name	Dates
1	Arizona's Rejection of a Business's Articles of Incorporation	1943
	Scope and content: Materials in this folder pertain to Arizona cancelling and rejecting the articles of incorporation for Gila River Co-Operative Enterprise, founded and operated by Japanese-Americans.	
2	Correspondence on Establishing Prisoner of War Camps	1942-1944
3	Correspondence on the Treatment and Condition of Prisoners	1944-1945
4	Correspondence on the Allocation and Retention of Prisoners of War	1944-1945
5	Correspondence on the Allocation and Retention of Prisoners of War	1945
6	Correspondence on the Allocation and Retention of Prisoners of War	1945-1946

Series 2: Mabel H. Gieseck Materials

Box 1:

Folder Number	Folder Name	Dates
7	Correspondence About German Prisoners of War	1944-1946
8	Reports and Statements	1944-1946
9	Correspondence from Former Prisoners of War	1946-1949