“THE PRISONERS ARE NOT HARD TO HANDLE:” CULTURAL VIEWS OF GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR AND THEIR CAPTORS IN CAMP SHARPE, GETTYSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

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This paper explores how perceived cultural and ethnic identities affected the interactions between German prisoners of war and the citizens of Adams County, Pennsylvania during the Second World War. Newspapers articles, oral histories and government documents were analyzed to gauge the level of interaction between and the reception of German POWs who worked in the community as temporary labor relief. The first chapter locates Camp Sharpe geographically within the history of Adams County and Pennsylvania, historically within the larger study of German prisoners of war in America and outlines the development of German culture within southern Pennsylvania. Chapter two provides a chronology of the creation and management of Camp Sharpe and the temporary work camp in Gettysburg. It also details the interactions between German prisoners of war and the citizens of Adams Country, showing that there was ample opportunity for German prisoners and Americans to communicate with each other due to the peculiar policies for prisoner of war labor. The last chapter examines the creation and maintenance of German culture and the existence and influences of several factors that could impact the formation of identity. By acknowledging these factors, this work will explore why German prisoners of war and the citizens of Gettysburg generally responded favorably to each others’ presence and try to account for the varying influences that caused both this reaction and less frequent negative responses.
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CHAPTER I
BRINGING GERMAN POWS TO GETTYSBURG: INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO GETTYSBURG’S EXPERIENCE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania is known to the world as one of the most pivotal locations in American history. There, on the first three days of July in 1863, the Battle of Gettysburg, often called the turning point of the American Civil War, took place and, by most people’s accounts, forever changed the history of the United States. As with most locations of historic significance, the history of Gettysburg both before and after those three days tends to be forgotten or is seen as unimportant. Some aspects of the town's history are given up to preserve others, as is the case with the former Civilian Conservation Corps buildings and the remnants of the World War I training camp, Camp Colt. For this reason, few are aware that during the Second World War over four hundred German prisoners of war lived and worked side by side with the citizens of Gettysburg as prisoners at Camp Sharpe. No scholarly work has addressed the German prisoner of war camp within Gettysburg’s history, and most studies of German prisoner of war camps handle the camps constructed in southern states. By exploring the history of Camp Sharpe, I hope to add not only to the historiography of Gettysburg, but also to the history of the United States home front during the Second World War.

This study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter locates Camp Sharpe geographically within the history of Adams County and Pennsylvania, historically within the larger study of German prisoners of war in America and outlines the development of German culture within southern Pennsylvania. Chapter two provides a chronology of the creation and management of Camp Sharpe and the temporary work camp in Gettysburg. It also details the interactions between German prisoners of war and the citizens of Adams Country, showing that there was ample opportunity for German prisoners and Americans to communicate with each other due to the peculiar policies for prisoner of war labor. The last chapter examines the
creation and maintenance of German culture and the existence and influences of several factors that could impact the formation of identity. By acknowledging these factors, this work will explore why German prisoners of war and the citizens of Gettysburg generally responded favorably to each others’ presence and try to account for the varying influences that caused both this reaction and less frequent negative responses.

Due to Gettysburg’s location in Adams County in southern Pennsylvania, its strong cultural German heritage, and Camp Sharpe’s designation as a work camp, Camp Sharpe makes an interesting subject for analyzing the relationships between German POWs and their captors. This work will examine the interactions between the citizens of Gettysburg and its surrounding areas and German prisoners of war, particularly in terms of real or perceived shared German heritage. In order to analyze these perceptions and relations, I will try to answer a series of questions to gauge how both the citizens of Gettysburg and the German prisoners of war perceived their own cultural identity, and that of each other. The first question is: How did civilians in Gettysburg and neighboring communities view German POWs? To answer this central question there are several aspects that must be considered: whether citizens made a distinction between “German” and “Nazi;” whether they saw the POWs as similar to themselves, or as foreign and thus dangerous. Other, less subjective facets, such as how much interaction citizens had with POWs, the personal background and the education of the citizens will also be considered. These last two factors lead me to the second question that this work will answer: How did language and cultural similarities or differences influence these opinions? In many areas of the United States where prisoners worked and were housed, the local citizenry had no connections to German culture and little accessibility to German-speaking translators, which often led to misunderstandings and frustrations that would greatly impact relations between German prisoners and their captors. In southern Pennsylvania, however, a strong German
heritage survived among many, and the possibility that someone nearby would speak or understand the German tongue was therefore greater. Indeed, the commander of Camp Sharpe, Captain Laurence C. Thomas, spoke and understood German. By evaluating the extent of to which Gettysburgians and the prisoners of war saw each other as belonging, or being excluded from, a certain cultural group, I will be able to discuss what I call “cultural views,” by which I simply mean the perceptions that individuals held of others in terms of that other person’s cultural identity. One’s opinion of others is affected both by how that other person represents his- or herself, as well as the biases inherent in the dominant society, so one’s own background must be included in any discussion of perceptions of identity.

The opinions of the prisoners themselves are of course of equal importance. As temporary, and often unwilling, inhabitants of a foreign nation, how could POWs come to terms with possible conflicts in notions of identity and morality while imprisoned? Would they view their captors as the enemy, or would they be willing to form closer relationships, even friendships? Evaluating the opinions of German prisoners of war has presented historians with methodological problems since historians began examining these cases. It was not until the end of the Vietnam War that the academic world and the public at large began to take a scholarly interest in the experiences of prisoners of war. Throughout the Second World War and the decades that followed, collective consciousness held the opinion that there was “nothing heroic or ennobling about becoming a prisoner of war.” This phenomenon, paired with the desire of many German soldiers and civilians to forget that Hitler and the Second World War had happened and rebuild their lives, led to a long era of silence before former German prisoners

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were willing and able to discuss their experiences.2 Despite the late blooming interest in prisoner of war experiences, it is obvious from interviews with the Germans who returned to visit Gettysburg that their time in the small town had altered their lives. Carl Brantz, returned to Gettysburg in 2001, eighty years old, but still recalling that “I had an experience and what I learned in life was (during) this time.”3 Living and working in the United States, even in a small town like Gettysburg, offered Brantz experiences that were important enough for him to remember over fifty years later. For a young German soldier, Gettysburg appeared both unexpected and strangely familiar, aspects of prisoner of war life that he was able to take advantage of because he spoke English.

For the reasons stated above there are relatively few oral histories given by former prisoners of war and even these present special problems. As with all oral histories, the questions of the reliability of memory, the desire to paint oneself in a positive light, and the skewing of answers to fit the expected outcomes of the interviewer, must be used in evaluating the merit of those oral histories.4 Many of the available oral histories were given by émigrés to the United States, who would most likely have a more positive view of life in America and might have a stronger fear of being viewed negatively for thoughts or actions from their time as prisoners. But, as oral historians are quick to remind skeptics, other forms of historical documentation are just as likely to be biased. Other information about German Prisoners of War may be obtained through a variety of sources. In the case of Gettysburg, local newspapers often carried articles discussing events related to the camps, government and military officials kept extensive documentation concerning the condition and behavior of prisoners, and items confiscated from prisoners, such as postcards and diaries, are held in the collections of

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Gettysburg College, The Adams County Historical Society, and the National Archives. All of these sources have their own problems and biases. Both the media and the military would have strong incentive to cast a positive light on camp experiences, and the German inmates interviewed would likewise be likely to self-censor their answers when held in captivity by foreign officials. Confiscated items are biased in the opposite way, postcards and diaries exhibiting anti-American thoughts and behavior would be more likely to be confiscated than those that embraced the ideals of the American military.

Despite the censorship inherent in such an enterprise as housing enemy prisoners of war, the segregation of prisoners from the local citizens was impossible under the conditions by which German prisoners were brought to Gettysburg. Camp Sharpe and the tent camp on the Emmitsburg Road were designated as work camps. Prisoners worked harvesting a variety of crops from apples to peas, as well as in a local canning factory. The close proximity of German soldiers with civilians of Gettysburg inevitably led to interactions that could become either positive or negative experiences. For this reason, the final questions that I will address are: How did Camp Sharpe alter the community around it and how did opinions of German POWs change as a result? For many people living in Gettysburg and the surrounding area, the experience of German prisoners living so close by remains a central theme of their wartime memories. Joan Thomas, daughter of the camp’s commander, recalled that “we were quite fascinated by the Germans.” Revere D. March, who used prisoner of war labor to cut pulpwood, called his interaction with German prisoners “a great experience,” marveling at the skill and variety of

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5 Sara Fuss, “Gettysburg’s WWII Prisoner of War Camp,” Emmitsburg Area Historical Society, [http://www.emmitsburg.net/archive_list/articles/history/gb/war/ww2_prisoner_camp.htm](http://www.emmitsburg.net/archive_list/articles/history/gb/war/ww2_prisoner_camp.htm).

occupations of the prisoners. The same holds true for Americans living on the home front all across the country.

Providing transportation, room and board for prisoners of war was a massive challenge for the Allies during the Second World War. For the United States, as latecomers to the war, still reeling from the attack on Pearl Harbor, the idea that the military would soon be responsible for hundreds of thousands of enemy soldiers was extremely low on their list of priorities. Fighting a two front war on a global scale, setting up systems of rationing, tense relations with the British, reorganization of the War Department and many other administrative duties, it wasn’t until the sudden influx of German POWs after the Allied success in North Africa that the United States military began to plan extensively for the care of what would eventually turn out to be nearly a half a million Axis prisoners of war, over 400,000 of which were German.

German POWs were a mixed blessing by anybody’s standards. The Allied insistence on adhering closely to the Geneva Convention of 1929 required that vast amounts of money, resources, and manpower be relegated to proper feeding, housing, clothing and guarding of prisoners. The Geneva Convention stated that, “Prisoners of war shall be lodged in buildings or huts which afford all possible safeguards as regards hygiene and salubrity,” that the, “food rations of prisoners of war shall be equivalent in quantity and quality to that of the depot troops,” and that the captors must provide, “clothing, underwear and footwear.” Further resources were allocated voluntarily to reeducation programs (which, Judith Gansberg argues effectively, violated the spirit, if not the word, of the Geneva Convention), which included movie nights and

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7 Revere D. March, interview by Adams County Historical Society, World War II POW Camps, Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg, Pa.
the ability to take classes in many subjects, often for college credit. The United States had numerous reasons to devote so much time and money to German POWs. Undoubtedly the military hoped that educational programs would convert some prisoners to American democracy, and indeed, many of the prisoners who completed these programs were later some of the first to be sent back to Europe, supposedly to help with rebuilding at the war’s end, though they more often ended up imprisoned in British or French camps under worse conditions. Perhaps the strongest reason behind maintaining the conditions outlined by the Geneva Convention was fear of retaliation. If German POWs were poorly treated, the Allies could not expect their own men to be treated well if captured by the enemy. The mutual fear of mistreatment of one’s own men created a relatively stable atmosphere through much of the war, allowing for ten prisoner exchanges between 1942 and 1944.

Placement of the camps became an issue of major debate throughout 1943. At the start, security was the major concern of the War Department, though as time progressed, security was relaxed in favor of more effective use of POW labor. Camps were to be placed in isolated areas, 150 miles from Mexican or Canadian borders and 75 miles from coastlines; ideally the same distance from vital industrial areas and shipyards. The areas should be easy to guard, for this reason they were often located near military installations, or, as in the case of Camp Sharpe, on a former military camp. Finally, for practical reasons, two-thirds of camps were installed in the south, where the government hoped to save on heating by keeping the prisoners in a milder climate. The first camps were built to accommodate 1000 to 5000 prisoners, though the

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increased use of POWs for labor in remote areas led to the creation of numerous smaller camps that usually held less than 500 men.13

The following of the Geneva Conventions mandates was not always welcomed; from local to national levels, periodicals were rife with articles commenting on how German prisoners were well fed and living the good life while brave Americans were “neglected and starving,” feelings that were exacerbated as Nazi atrocities became known at the war’s end. Worldwide food shortages and the United States government’s desire to lessen the growing national complaints led to a drop in food rations at the war’s end, but never so low as to incite German retaliation against American POWs.14

But the Geneva Convention also worked to the advantage of the United States, because it allowed for the employment of prisoners of war under certain conditions. This work was vital as the entry of men into the armed forces left vast labor shortages throughout the United States and allowing POWs to work was a way of lessening the financial burden due to maintaining the prisoners.15 Section III outlined which prisoners could be employed, what jobs they were allowed or barred from and how they should be treated and compensated. As one would expect, only healthy POWs could be compelled to work. Respect of rank was maintained; officers could not be made to work unless they requested to, non-commissioned officers could be compelled to take only supervisory jobs and clear rules were laid out for ensuring limited work hours and at least one 24 hour period of rest per week as well as proper pay.16 Two further rules were ambiguous enough to allow for quite a bit of leeway when assigning POWs to tasks. Article 31 stated that, “Work done by prisoners of war shall have no direct connection with the operations

16 “Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.”
of the war.” 17 As one could imagine, both the U.S. military and POWs who were unwilling to work stretched the meaning of these words to their own benefit. Prisoners could refuse to do work by claiming that it was directly related to the war effort, while the military would take the word “directly” in its most literal sense. 18 The second rule was that prisoners could not be employed in, “unhealthy or dangerous work,” a stipulation that was often ignored at the ground level even if backed officially by the government. 19 Employment in agriculture or factories was relatively safe, but other jobs, such as the lumber industry in the south, became incredibly dangerous. Not only were the POWs working in an unfamiliar climate, far hotter, more humid than their native land, and infested with biting insects, but the work of logging and in sawmills was difficult for the untrained, particularly due to the lack of German speaking supervisors. 20 However the military responded that the work was no more dangerous for POWs than for American civilians and was a necessary job. The United States was not the only nation short on labor that was using and abusing the rules of Geneva; the Germans went so far as to “release” POWs, effectively making them civilians, not covered by the Geneva Convention and thus open to full exploitation by the Nazis. 21

As seen above, the Geneva Convention was far from perfect. The treaty’s wording was often vague enough to allow for loopholes, some of which worked in the favor of captors who were looking for ways to cut corners. Another shortcoming was its inability to distinguish between different types of prisoners. Article four stated that, “Differences of treatment between prisoners are permissible only if such differences are based on the military rank, the state of physical or mental health, the professional abilities, or the sex of those who benefit from them,”

17 “Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.”
18 Krammer, Nazi Prisoners of War, 80-81.
19 “Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.”
ultimately limiting the military’s ability to separate prisoners. By making no allowance for distinction by ideology, and specifically allowing for “the organization of intellectual and sporting pursuits,” the United States was limited in their ability to separate out or segregate ideological Nazis from the rest of the POW population.

Many of the problems inherent in maintaining the German prisoners of war according to the Geneva Convention have been thoroughly examined by historians. The two earliest scholars to study the problem of German POWs in-depth were Arnold P. Krammer and Judith M. Gansberg, both of whom published their monographs on the subject in the late 1970s. Krammer’s 1979 work *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* continues to be the classic study of German POWs in the United States. While nearly all subsequent works focus on a particular aspect of the POW experience or a particular location, Krammer attempts to cover the entire subject from capture to repatriation across the entire United States. He focuses on the difficulties of holding prisoners of war, such as how unprepared the United States was, the difficulties that arose when trying to adhere to the Geneva Convention and the problems of German POWs being housed together and lacking the ability to properly communicate with their captors. However he stresses the positive outcomes despite the numerous problems, showing how many ex-POWs looked back fondly on their time in America and the ultimate success of the main goal of the Geneva Convention: humane treatment of prisoners.

Krammer’s contemporary Judith M. Gansberg published her own monograph two years before Krammer, though he had been writing articles on the subject for several years previously. Gansberg’s work, entitled *Stalag U.S.A.: The Remarkable Story of German POWs in America* is a more focused book examining POW life in terms of the United States reeducation program instituted by the Prisoner of War Special Projects Division, arguing that despite a wholesale

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22 “Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.”
attempt to reeducate German POWs to American democratic ideals, the program’s success was limited. She remains critical of the U.S. military, painting them as being slow to realize that German and Nazi were not synonymous and overly forceful in trying to convert POWs. Ultimately she finds that the American attempts to reeducate German POWs was only moderately successful, but in the end had little effect on the lives of Germans when they returned to Europe.

The 1980s saw a lull in scholarly works on German POWs. The early 1990s, however, saw the start of a new type of history, monographs dedicated to specific POW camps or the particular states. Allan Kent Powell’s *Splinters of a Nation: German Prisoners of War in Utah* started a trend that would grow to include works about the states of South Carolina, Missouri, Florida as well as individual camps such as Camp Cooke in California and Camp Stark, New Hampshire. In general these works tend to follow the same template, providing a chronology from the arrival to the repatriation of German POWs, including numerous anecdotes, interviews and newspaper clippings that provide an interesting narrative for someone from that part of the country, but, in general, adding little to the interpretive or theoretical implications of enemy prisoners interacting with local populations. In some cases this is understandable, not all camps were work camps, so in many areas, such as Camp Cooke, only guards had a close interaction with prisoners, and even then the camp organization made it so that only designated POWs (often those with the best English skills) worked closely with American officials. But many camps did allow prisoners to leave the camp to work with or near the local populace, but the author chooses not to delve beneath the surface of these interactions.

Another limitation of much of the present literature is its relegation to the southern United States. While this is to some extent to be expected, given that two-thirds of the camps were located in the south, there seems to be a dearth of literature exploring the experiences of
POWs and communities in the north. Only two monographs exist concerning POW camps north of the Mason-Dixon line and south of Canada: Allen V. Koop’s *Stark Decency: German Prisoners of War in a New England Village* and David Fiedler’s *The Enemy Among Us: POWs in Missouri during World War II*. I hope that my work will begin to fill this hole in the study of German prisoners of war by looking at an area of the country that is not only further north than scholars of German POWs normally venture, but also had a strong tie to German culture and language, creating a dynamic far different from many southern examples.

On June 17, 1944, *The Gettysburg Compiler* ran an article stating that a German prisoner of war work camp was to be built along the Emmitsburg Road, on the fields of Pickett’s Charge. The U.S. military transported fifty men from nearby Camp George G. Meade, in Maryland to construct what would become a temporary work camp, intended to be in place until November “to allow the prisoners to take part in the harvesting of crops and processing of foods in the county.”24 While the building took place these men were housed at the National Guard Armory along Confederate Avenue, which would become a second POW camp, Camp Sharpe. Immediately interest was evident and Captain Laurence C. Thomas, commander of that camp as well as Camp Michauex just north of Gettysburg, asked local newspapers to remind citizens that “the prison camp at Gettysburg is a military reservation just as any Army camp and is thus restricted for all visitors. No one may park along the Emmitsburg Road within the area of the camp.”25 After the war, Laurence Thomas, then a Major, made an annotated sketch, showing the camp layout. Four hundred by six hundred feet marked by a nine-strand barbed wire fence, with the shorter end running parallel to the Emmitsburg Road (running north to south), each corner of the camp had a guard tower.26 About a month later on July 15, *The Gettysburg Compiler*

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24 “Work Camp is Being Built by Prisoners,” *Gettysburg Compiler*, June 17, 1944.
25 “Work Camp is Being Built by Prisoners,” *Gettysburg Compiler*, June 17, 1944.
26 See Appendix for a reproduction of Major Thomas’ sketch.
announced that the POW camp on the Emmitsburg Road was nearly complete and listed some of the locations where prisoners were already working. From July through November about 400 prisoners worked on farms and in factories in Gettysburg and the surrounding area, canning peas, in July and August after which they began processing the fruit crop at the C.H. Musselman and Knouse Corporation plants. At the end of the year’s bountiful apple harvest about half of the camps’ inmates were sent to other camps, leaving about 200 POWs to be transferred to Camp Sharpe, where barracks provided more appropriate housing than the tent camp on the Emmitsburg Road. During the winter months the POWs worked cutting pulpwood. In late spring of 1945, 350 new POWs arrived in Gettysburg, continuing to work in canneries and cutting pulpwood.27

Why was Gettysburg chosen as a site for a work camp? As the above quoted article states, labor was needed to help with the incoming harvest. The relatively small number of POWs in America during 1942 had made it easier for the government to employ prisoners according to the Geneva Convention. However, by mid-1943, the influx of German prisoners of war and the increasingly drastic labor shortages in American agriculture and industry forced the U.S. government to reanalyze the methods used to find employment for POWs. The War Manpower Commission (WMC) created in 1942, was the government’s attempt to bring the departments of War, Navy, Agriculture, Labor, Selective Service, Civil Service, and the War Production Board together, with the duty of, “formulating plans and programs to establish national policies to assure effective mobilization and maximum utilization of manpower in the prosecution of the war.”28 Initially, the WMC concerned itself with prioritizing industry to assure that enough labor would be available for necessary jobs, mostly in industry and directly

27 Fuss, “Gettysburg’s WWII Prisoner of War Camp.”
tied to the war effort. Other areas of labor suffered from a lack of workers, and the arrival of thousands of German POWs seemed the ideal solution. The office of the Provost Marshal General, the Department of Agriculture and WMC joined together to try to come to terms with how to best use this labor. A careful balance had to be reached between organized labor, which feared that the influx of prisoner labor would lead to drops in wages and a preference for POW workers over free ones, and the necessity of providing labor to industries that needed it. Certain rules were put into place to protect free workers and adhere to the Geneva Convention, “prisoners of war should not be hired out on contract where they would compete with free labor,” that is, a POW can only be hired if there is no free worker available, which would also solve the problem of wages by removing POW competition, though the agricultural sector would continue to oppose paying the prevailing wage to POWs.29 By 1943 agricultural labor was in dire demand and POWs began to be removed from other nonessential jobs to work in agricultural areas like Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

Gettysburg was also ideally suited for other reasons. The town of Gettysburg was located about midway between the interrogation camp, Camp Micheaux and Fort George G. Meade, which housed on average over 1500 Axis prisoners of war from 1943 to 1946.30 In line with military security measures Gettysburg was an isolated, rural area, far from major industry, borders and the sea, though it had a convenient rail connection for easy transportation of soldiers. Gettysburg had also been the site of two army camps during the First World War, when the Gettysburg battlefield was under the jurisdiction of the War Department, Camp Colt, also located along the Emmitsburg Road, and Camp Sharpe, on Confederate Avenue.31 Later the Civilian

Conservation Corps used the barracks of Camp Sharpe for housing, maintaining them so that, when the military searched for a new location for a work camp, they found Gettysburg well qualified to house POWs.

Another aspect of Gettysburg that made the area well suited to the housing of German POWs was the area’s strong tie to German culture. The colony of Pennsylvania saw the arrival of a large number of German immigrants, “attracted by William Penn’s promise of a Pietist State” comprising a full third of the colony’s population in 1750. These German immigrants had a strong religious and educational culture including churches, periodicals and schools. For a time the early German and English settlers of Pennsylvania lived in a dual or pluralist culture, united by a shared desire for religious freedom but either separated culturally or living bilingually. But American dependence on England led this German enclave to begin to assimilate into the English speaking culture around it. Control by Great Britain led to disputes about citizenship in which Germans, often not considered citizens, lost land and wealth, which caused many Germans to choose to become naturalized British citizens and to assimilate culturally English ways. In the second half of the nineteenth century a new wave of German immigrants entered the United States, a flood that continued through the turn of the century.

The First World War, however, led to a distrust of all things German among non-German ethnic groups and greatly encouraged assimilation so as to avoid the difficulties of being associated with the enemy. At the time, German immigrants made up the largest non-English speaking group in the country and were, as a whole, proud of and eager to protect their German heritage. It was only with the United States' entry into the First World War that other Americans began to show an outright and often violent reaction to all things associated with

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Germany: "German cultural symbols were debased; instruction in the language was practically eliminated in schools; the use of German language was restricted on the state and local levels; German-language newspapers were harassed and censored." Many German immigrant groups gave up ties to their native culture in order to limit discomfort in their adoptive one. Name changes occurred frequently, subscriptions to German newspapers were cancelled and families stopped speaking German both in public and at home.

The 1920s saw a moderate revival of some German festivals that had stopped during the Great War, but the onset of the Great Depression and Hitler’s rise to power stifled even these. German culture in the New World was based upon religion, in contrast to other ethnic groups such as African Americans or Chicanos, who could unite against social or economic injustice and thus were less willing to take political action to defend their heritage. As German churches began to realize that ethnicity hindered rather than aided their causes, they were usually willing to give up those cultural idiosyncrasies rather than join together with the small core of German politicians, who were encouraging German-Americans to show their displeasure of their discrimination at the ballot box.

Adams County’s experience with German culture followed the same basic format as Pennsylvania as a whole. German immigrants were the first to settle in what would become Adams County, though shortly thereafter an influx of Scotch-Irish immigrants arrived, and it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that a new wave of German immigrants, mainly from eastern Pennsylvania, came and settled in and around Gettysburg, forming relationships with the “Pennsylvania Dutch” heritage just to the north. Two major institutions helped to maintain German culture in Gettysburg and the surrounding area: religion and education. Most of the

35 Luebke, “German-American Leadership Strategies,” 52.
38 Bloom, A History of Adams County, 6.
Germans settling in the area were Lutheran and used the house of worship as a house of learning as well. While this was not particularly unusual for the time, it did lead to a continuation of use of the German language and maintenance of German culture until the development of secular community schools.\textsuperscript{39} Even after schools and churches became separate, they maintained some aspects of German culture separately. As late as the 1860s sixty percent of the county’s church membership belonged to the “German Protestant” sects, Lutheranism and Reformed, with some services being held in German until after the turn of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{40} The Lutheran Theological Seminary, founded in 1826, and Gettysburg College, originally called Pennsylvania College, founded in 1832, both were based in strong German tradition. Reverend Samuel Schmucker, founder of both institutions, was of German stock and most of the original faculty was German as well. Although in both schools English was the language of lectures, German remained prominent. At Gettysburg College, German was the first foreign language to be taught, not Greek or Latin, as was the fashion of the day. Indeed, Gettysburg College was founded as a “German College” as a way to both preserve German language and bring Germans into contact with other ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{41} Although German as a primary language had died out in most areas by the time of the Second World War, interest and identification with German culture did not suffer the massive blow that it had during World War I. At Gettysburg College, for example, the Deutsche Gesellschaft, a student organization designed to promote the speaking of the Pennsylvania German dialect, continued to meet every month during the war to watch and discuss a different German film and to advertise their meetings in the college newspaper. In 1942, the United States’ first full year at war with Germany, saw this organization join the

\textsuperscript{39} Bloom, \textit{A History of Adams County}, 27.
\textsuperscript{40} Bloom, \textit{A History of Adams County}, 341.
nationwide German honor society Delta Phi Alpha.\textsuperscript{42} It would appear that Gettysburgians had learned to differentiate between German and Nazi long before POWs arrived.

While the citizens of Gettysburg responded to the start of World War II and the appearance of German POWs in their midst in similar ways to citizens in small towns across the country, Gettysburg’s proximity to Washington, D.C., as well as the existence of the battlefield under government jurisdiction, created a unique environment where preparation for war was apparent even before formal declarations of war were made. In May 1940, the first Second World War era proposal for using the battlefield for the training of military personnel was submitted, though it did not come into existence. Gettysburgians were further reminded of the reality of war by the steady stream of American soldiers, who passed through Adams County between New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, D.C. and the numerous forts of the region. Portions of the battlefield would eventually begin being used for military training, and temporary housing of soldiers, as they had been during the First World War.\textsuperscript{43}

But viewing Germans on newsreels was far different from having them in one's midst. The defeat of Hitler's \textit{Afrika} Corps in 1943 was going to have a lasting effect on many citizens of Gettysburg. The United States saw an influx of German prisoners of war sent from Europe to ease the burdens on Great Britain of housing and feeding POWs in regulation with the Geneva conventions. Gettysburgians would show a mixture of curiosity and apprehension when several hundred of the German enemy were housed and employed in Adams County.

\textsuperscript{42} Glatfelter, \textit{A Salutary Influence}, 641.

\textsuperscript{43} Bloom, \textit{A History of Adams County}, 370-371.
CHAPTER II
GERMAN PRISONERS IN THE COMMUNITY AT GETTYSBURG

As stated above, the original plans for a prisoner of war camp in Gettysburg called for a temporary camp for the summer season of 1944 to aid with the harvesting and processing of various local crops, which would eventually include cherries, peas and even pulpwood. By this time, the citizens of Gettysburg had become accustomed to trying to fill labor shortages in the agricultural and lumber industries. In September of 1940, two Selective Service Boards were installed in Adams Country; by May of 1945, they had registered over 12,000 names on their voluntary draft rosters.44 To get an idea of what this meant for the industries of Adams County, bear in mind that the 1940 census set the municipal population at 39,435, meaning that nearly a third of the population had volunteered for some sort of war service.45 John D. Augustine, who was ten years old in 1943, recalled that “During World War II all of us were old enough to work. We worked in the orchards during the harvest season…The orchard farmers were hard-pressed to find enough labor to harvest the fruit during the war years so they relied on school children.”46 The need for labor would increase as the war continued, extending into the first harvest season after the war’s end. On May 26, 1945, the Gettysburg Compiler outlined the urgency of the labor shortage: “Everywhere the farm labor situation is the most critical since Pearl Harbor. Food production goals are at a new high and the labor pool is declining so we must count more and more upon volunteer workers, many of them women and strong young people.” The Farm Labor office also planned to set up camps for temporary Jamaican workers and for urban high

44 Bloom, A History of Adams County, 371.
46 Email with John D. Augustine, “My Recollections of the Gettysburg German Prisoner of War Camps During World War II” interview by author, March 6, 2008, Gettysburg, Pa., email, in possession of author.
school students during peak harvest times since the labor shortage could not be eased by locals and the German prisoners of war.47

Due to the acute labor shortages throughout the country, gaining access to the labor of prisoners of war was far from a simple task. The War Manpower Commission did not institute set policies for regulating, and thus allowing, “contract labor,” until August of 1943, when both the number of interned prisoners of war in the United States, and the shortage of civilian manpower, had both increased sufficiently to make the formal employment of prisoners of war by private companies cost effective for both the companies and the United States government. By this time government concerns over national security were outweighed by the clamoring of both agriculture and industry over the lack of available workers.48 Contract labor allowed private enterprises to enter into a contract with the United States military to employ prisoners of war, but specific regulations had to be put into place, both to secure the prisoners, and to ease the concerns of laborers, who worried that the competition of prisoner of war labor would lead to a decrease in wages.

After a would-be employer applied to and had shown that there was a labor shortage in his region to the War Manpower Commission or the Department of Agriculture, these two agencies would send lists of employment opportunities and recommendations for new camps to the Provost Marshal General’s office. Prisoners were not to be contracted out in areas where they would compete with free labor, and those who were employed, had to be paid the prevailing minimum wage. As time went on, once a contract was agreed upon, the commanders of the individual POW camps handled day to day changes and difficulties between the workers and the

47 “Shortage of Farm Labor; Seek Pupils,” Gettysburg Compiler, May 26, 1945.
employers, such as determining who would provide transport and which prisoners would work at which location.49

On May 13, 1944, the Gettysburg Compiler ran its first article hinting at the possibility of prisoners of war coming to work in Adams County. Reporting about a meeting on May 9, it said, “thirty-five Adams and York county canners met Tuesday in Hanover with Truman B. Thompson, state rural industries supervisor, and other officials in an attempt to complete plans for securing workers from outside the county to help in the canneries during the forthcoming harvest season.”50 At that time, availability of prisoners of war in Adams County was far from certain. Although the military did send officials to attend the canners’ meeting, the War Manpower Commission had not yet designated how many prisoners would be allocated to agriculture in the eastern states, or which regions would receive this added labor. Nor was there universal approval for the use of prisoners of war. Recruitment of free labor from other areas was the first plan for easing labor shortages although some did show a willingness to use prisoner labor.51

Once the farmers and canning companies in Gettysburg had reached an agreement with the War Manpower Commission to employ German prisoners of war, the United States military had to arrange a location for a camp for those German workers. Ideally, a balance between cost effectiveness and upholding the Geneva Convention had to be struck. This was best achieved through an agreement with the National Park Service to erect a camp for prisoners of war. The National Park Service (NPS) had a history of working closely with the United States Military; during World War II this cooperation included the leasing of the former CCC camp to the War Department, where it housed United States soldiers from November 1943 until July 28, 1944. It

49 Lewis and Mewha, History of Prisoner of War Utilization, 102, 107.
50 “War Prisoners May Work Here,” Gettysburg Compiler, May 13, 1944
51 “War Prisoners May Work Here,” Gettysburg Compiler, May 13, 1944
was at this time that the area was renamed Camp George A. Sharpe, informally shortened to Camp Sharpe. 52 New regulations in May 1944 allowed for the erection of tent camps to “allow speedy movement from one site to another to meet peak seasonal demands in agriculture.” 53 In May 1944, the National Park Service also granted the War department permission to set up a prisoner of war work camp on the battlefield, along the Emmitsburg Road, which would follow the new regulations for tent camps. Interestingly, although the permission for the camp was given to the War Department, the land itself was leased to “a group of local food processors.” 54 Sources of the time remain silent as to why the local businesses, rather than the War Department, leased the land. John Paul Bland offers a more recent explanation in conjunction with the Harrisburg Patriot News, stating that “Starved for labor after three years of war, ‘the businesses…paid to have the camp bring POWs to the area to work.’” 55 What remains unclear is why the National Park Service, or indeed the War Department, was willing, as Bland implies, to let business purchase labor. More likely it was a compromise between the War Department and the local businesses to lower the cost of employing POWs as the War Manpower Commission regularly took into account the expenditures and “nuisance factors” of employing prisoners of war when setting wage rates.

Construction of the tent camp on the Emmitsburg Road began in earnest in June of 1944. Captain Lawrence C. Thomas was placed in charge of the new camp in Gettysburg and would later also take over control of the POW interrogation camp Pine Grove Furnace in Cumberland County. 56 Conditions in the camp were periodically overseen by military officials, but violations of Army policy remained throughout the camp’s existence. On December 8, 1944, a memo from

53 Lewis and Mewha, Prisoner of War Utilization, 127.
54 Lewis and Mewha, Prisoner of War Utilization, 219-220.
56 Bland, Secret War at Home, 35.
the Office of the Provost Marshal General outlined the conditions at Gettysburg during the transfer of German prisoners of war from the tent camp on the Emmitsburg Road to the newly set up Camp Sharpe, which had been inspected at the beginning of November. Inspectors found several safety and health violations, including, "soft drink bottles and food stuff," scattered about the camp and "homemade stoves installed which presented a fire hazard." In addition, the camp was cited for preventing prisoners from giving and receiving mail in accordance with the Geneva Conventions. 57 Despite the camp commander's assurances that the camp would be brought up to regulations, the removal of the homemade stoves and distribution of mail received and blank postcards for the prisoners to write to loved ones, within six months security was once more lax, leading to a small fire when a water heater malfunctioned on June 2, 1945. During the following month's inspection, it was found that, although the "military courtesy of both American Army personnel and the German prisoners of war is excellent," prisoner mail was once more not being collected in compliance with army regulations. 58 The violations of army regulations can be traced to several sources. Many guards found their detail boring and felt that the German prisoners of war liked the Gettysburg region and were therefore unlikely to try to escape. As the war progressed, perpetually less fit soldiers were put on guard duty, including crippled or mentally unstable war veterans, or those who were bitter because they were found unfit for overseas duty. The installation of a recreation room for the guards in July of 1944 probably also created a distraction and weakened discipline within the camp, as did the attempts of local citizens to come into contact with the German prisoners of war.

Much of the information that the local community received about the newly arrived prisoners of war came from Captain Thomas through interviews for local newspapers and

occasional public talks. When about 50 German prisoners of war arrived at the site of the new camp to begin its construction, curiosity ran high as citizens slowed down to gawk at the men as they worked. In keeping in line with the stipulations of the Geneva Convention of 1929, which stated that prisoners of war “shall at all times be humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence, from insults and from public curiosity,” Captain Thomas asked the *Gettysburg Times* to publish certain regulations concerning the new camp. June 17, 1944, both the *Gettysburg Times* and the *Gettysburg Compiler* published the following statements: “The prison camp at Gettysburg is a military reservation just as any Army camp and is thus restricted for all visitors. No one may park along the Emmitsburg Road within the area of the camp and cars must slow down while passing the camp.” Locals, naturally, took advantage of the second regulation. Joan Bryce remembers, as a thirteen year old, driving past the camp on Sundays with her family, recalling how her father would slow the car as much as possible so that everyone could get a good look at the prisoners, who, she added, were found to be quite attractive by many local women.

In early August, when seasonal crop conditions led to a lack of work for the 250 German prisoners of war then in Gettysburg, Captain Thomas, too, spoke out about women’s interest in the prisoners, saying that “the nuisance of women loitering about the camp had let up considerably but that an alert lookout is being maintained to prevent a recurrence of the habit of many women driving to and remaining near the camp site.” This fascination that women had with the German prisoners of war was not an occurrence limited to southern Pennsylvania. Across the country the lack of men caused an understandable interest in the German prisoners to arise. While most young, healthy American men were overseas fighting the war, those deemed

59 “Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War,” Article 2.
60 “Work Camp is Being Built by Prisoners,” *Gettysburg Compiler*, June 17, 1944.
61 Interview with Joan Bryce, interview by author, December 29, 2007, Gettysburg, Pa., digital recording.
62 “More Prisoners of War Expected Here this Month,” *Gettysburg Compiler*, August 12, 1944.
too old or too mentally or physically unfit for combat were left at the home front. These men were often put in charge of guarding prisoners of war, a policy that became more extreme as the war drained manpower from both civil and military industries. The contrast between the tanned, healthy German prisoners and the often crippled or mentally unstable American guards was not lost on the United States military; regulations were put in place demanding that prisoners of war remain fully clothed in their prison uniform (normally a blue garments with the letters “PW” stamped clearly across them) while in camp, which served a dual purpose of making prisoners of war clearly identifiable from civilians, and keeping their bodies hidden. These regulations, however, served little purpose in an agricultural area like Gettysburg, since prisoners were still allowed to remove their shirts while working in the fields.

Captain Thomas reassured the local populace that there was little risk to having German prisoners of war housed so close to the community. “The guards,” he told the Gettysburg Compiler, “are present not only to prevent the prisoners from escaping, but to protect the prisoners themselves. Under the terms of the Geneva conventions regarding war prisoners no one may talk to the prisoners or question them. The guards are instructed to prevent such attempts.” In Captain Thomas’ view, the local populace was less mistrustful or fearful of the prisoners than it was curious about them. Perhaps it was this curiosity that led to Captain Thomas speaking before local community groups such as the Gettysburg Lions Club. In this particular talk in early July, Captain Thomas once more reiterated the need for citizens to control their curiosity, saying, “They cannot be subjected to the curious and cannot be interviewed.”

Despite the tendency of citizens of Gettysburg to be more curious than frightened, there was a similar distrust as that seen in other parts of the country where prisoners were employed.

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64 Reiss, “Bronzed Bodies,” 483.
65 “Work Camp is Being Built by Prisoners,” Gettysburg Compiler, June 17, 1944.
66 “Tells How War Prisoners are Treated Here,” Gettysburg Compiler, July 15, 1944.
Across the country there were complaints that the prisoners were being treated too well and that United States soldiers were not being treated as well by enemy governments. Others worried about sabotage or poor quality work from the German POWs. To the first accusation Captain Thomas made a reply typical of the United States military:

We are bound to treat them with the same care and consideration given our own men because we are bound by the Geneva regulations. We know our men are not receiving the same treatment in enemy prisoner camps. Even if the Geneva rules were followed, they would not get the same treatment we deal out here because the standards of the Axis armies are so much lower than ours.67

This adherence was vital, since most German prisoners of war were either already familiar with their rights under the Geneva regulations, or became aware of them rapidly once interned.

The second concern could only be assuaged with time and experience. Both the local businesses and the federal government benefited in the end from the employment of German prisoners of war. In some industries, however, concerns arose that German prisoners of war were being paid more than free laborers. Local employees at a furniture factory contrasted the pay of these prisoners in orchards and canneries with the thirty-seven and a half cents paid per hour to the factory workers. The issue came to a head in January of 1946 when the workers staged a strike, which lasted into February, when the workers and the union failed to attain any concessions from the company.68 In many ways, the company was unable to do much about prisoner of war wages. By the Geneva conventions, prisoners could not be paid more than 80 cents a day, of which the majority was given to the government to pay for the costs of housing and feeding the prisoners. Ten cents of which were put into an account for the prisoners to spend in the camp post exchange, so that POWs, should they escape, would not have significant amounts of cash, this pay was issued as coupons. In Gettysburg, however, most German prisoners, who worked locally earned one dollar a day, leaving an excess of twenty cents that

67 “Tells How War Prisoners are Treated Here,” Gettysburg Compiler, July 15, 1944.
68 Bloom, A History of Adams County, 392-393
reverted to the United States government as well. The United States government received over $138,000 from the work of German prisoners of war for the first full five months of work in Gettysburg. The government was pleased by the increased revenue, while employers were happy to have the extra labor. No other workers’ groups complained about differences in pay. As was said upon the dismantling of the camp in 1946, “while initial reaction to the POWs in 1944 was mixed, they had become generally well-received by 1945.”

As the weather turned colder in the fall of 1944, the War Manpower Commission needed to determine what to do with the German prisoners of war, as climatic conditions would not allow for the continued housing of POWs at the tent camp on the Emmitsburg Road. In early September, the number of prisoners at the camp had risen to over 500, with more being brought in temporarily to meet the demand for agricultural labor and workers for the local canneries. The additional prisoners were not expected to stay beyond September 30 and were housed in the local armory on West Confederate Avenue because the tent camp had reached maximum capacity. The tent camp had been erected under the plan of the prisoners of war being temporary seasonal employees, but by mid-September, plans were underway to create a more permanent POW camp for winter use. On September 15 a memo was sent from Gettysburg National Military Park to the director of the National Park Service informing the director that, “Recently the Army has been considering the suitability of Camp NP-2 [Camp Sharpe] for housing War Prisoners during the winter. We have not yet received a formal request for this use.” The very next day this plan was confirmed in local newspapers, which stated that about 200 prisoners of war might stay for the winter season “for the completion of the apple season in the county as well as most of the

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70 Bland, *Secret War at Home*, 36.
71 Unrau, *Administrative History*, 221
72 Memorandum for the Director, National Park Service, September 15, 1944, World War II POW Camps, Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg, Pa.
wind-up work in the packing houses,” after which they would be transferred to cutting pulpwood, the supply of which was low because of the interrupted importation from Europe.73

Starting January of 1945, over 160 of the 200 remaining prisoners of war were occupied in cutting wood on land in Adams and Franklin counties, an assignment expected to last six months. Captain Thomas was transferred to the interrogation camp in Pine Grove Furnace and command of Camp Sharpe was given to Captain James W. Copley. German prisoners of war showed far less enthusiasm for this work than for work harvesting crops or canning, both of which allowed perks such as eating while one worked or smuggling fruit or vegetables back to camp. Across the country the lumbering industry had been heavily hit by the lack of manpower, but it was also one of the areas where the use of prisoner labor was least successful. Few Germans had the knowledge or experience necessary to safely and efficiently fell trees. In southern states there were fewer interpreters, and overseers were preoccupied with meeting quotas. German prisoners were forced to perform heavy physical labor in an unusually hot and humid environment without proper training. Under these conditions, working in the lumber industry became truly dangerous for prisoners of war. Some German prisoners of war and various American committees and individuals, complained that the work was so dangerous that it violated the Geneva conventions.74

The German prisoners of war held at Gettysburg were no more enthusiastic about cutting pulpwood, but their situation was improved by the similarity of climate with their native country. At first, stated Revere D. March, owner of mountain lands in Orrtanna, where German prisoners of war were employed in cutting lumber, there were no interpreters. Prisoners, ignorant of the proper way to cut the trees, performed their tasks in the way that was easiest for them. They “cut without stooping, wherever they stood,” until, according to March, “a German prisoner was sent

73 “May Keep 200 Prisoners of War for Winter Season,” Gettysburg Compiler, September 16, 1944
74 Fickle and Ellis, POWs in the Piney Woods, 700-701.
as an interpreter and they re-cut!”75 Although the Gettysburg Compiler published reports showing “that the prisoners were ‘doing good work,’”76 Revere March remembers having to enforce government regulation that set standards of cutting one half cord a day or being put on water. This policy of “No Work, No Eat” arose in 1943 in response to minor slow downs and stoppages of work among prisoners of war and was used in Gettysburg both during the construction of the first tent camp on the Emmitsburg Road, and during the pulpwood cutting as remembered by March.77

Since the regulations for prisoner contract labor specified that it could not inhibit the hiring of local or recruited free labor, prisoners of war and local citizens often worked side by side. German prisoners of war worked in surprisingly close proximity to Americans, particularly in canning factories, so close, in fact, that friendships and romantic relationships could result. At a canning factory in Orrtanna, Pennsylvania, where prisoners from Camp Sharpe worked, a German prisoner passed notes to a young woman, Pearl Cease, and later fled to that family’s home when he and a fellow German prisoner escaped from camp.78 Other prisoners, who were employed at the B.F. Shriver Canning Company in Littlestown, Pennsylvania during the summer of 1945 worked together with local citizens and talked openly with one of the free laborers, often asking questions about the area. This employee, Stella Schwartz, was a college student at Goucher College. The German prisoners took to asking her questions about math and science, as well as offering to exchange personal belongings to gain possession of books.79 In both these cases, despite military regulations encouraging a separation between civilians and prisoners of

75 Revere March, interview by ACHS.
76 “Nazi Prisoners from Camp Here Cutting Wood,” Gettysburg Compiler, February 10, 1945.
77 Krammer, Nazi Prisoners of War in America, 111.
war, no attempts were made to stop the prisoners from talking to, and even exchanging items, with local civilians.

Employers often worked closely by the prisoners of war. Military guards were not obligated to oversee the work of prisoners, but only to make sure that there were no escape attempts and that no civilians were injured by the enemy, though they often did not even fulfill these roles. One guard “wanted to drive the tractor instead of guarding,” feeling that the prisoners liked the work so much that they were unlikely to try to escape.80 Others were overly watchful, such as one who, despite having no ammunition in his weapon, gave prisoners resting under a tree in the tomato field that they were supposed to be harvesting, “a choice to go back to work or line up to be shot.”81 Many employers chose to befriend the German prisoner of war workers, feeling that they would receive a better quality and quantity of work if the men were treated kindly. Russell Weaver, who employed German prisoners as agricultural workers throughout 1945 recalled paying the prisoners an hourly wage, but he would also, "give them cigarettes--They worked faster then!"82 In general, the workers and employers who interacted with the German prisoners of war on farms and in factories found them to be decent workers and relatively little trouble.

Another frequent source of interaction between German prisoners of war and local citizens in the area occurred during transport of the prisoners to and from worksites. Each employer made an individual agreement as to how German prisoners of war would be transported to and from jobs when contracting for POW labor. Most often in Gettysburg, the employer ended up providing transportation, the form of which depended on the number of prisoners to be moved. In one case Donald Weaver, son of Russell Weaver, whose description

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80 Russell Weaver, interview by Adams County Historical Society, World War II POW Camps, Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg, Pa.
81 John and Stella Schwartz, “Memories of German Prisoners of War,” interview by ACHS.
82 Russell Weaver, interview by ACHS.
of employing German POWs is shown above, transported his father's sixteen workers in the "back of [a] pick-up truck." A local school bus driver, Walter Shoemaker, transported prisoners in his school bus; in another they rode in the truck to a local farm to cut wood. In these last two cases, local citizens had opportunities for direct interaction with the German prisoners. In the first case, it was discovered that German prisoners employed in the canning factory had been filling their lunch bags with sugar from the storehouses. Upon recovering over 100 pounds of sugar from searching the prisoners, factory employees had to speak with the prisoners to learn why they were stealing so much sugar, eventually learning that the POWs “used the sugar in a process to make home brew.” In this instance, the truck, driven by Fred Warren, got into an accident with another vehicle, injuring two of the German prisoners being transported. Here the prisoners had to talk not only with the police and camp guards, but also with the drivers of both vehicles and Dr. Crist, who performed x-rays on the prisoners. Differences arose as to how many prisoners were actually injured, with the prisoners and police reporting that five had been, while camp guards claimed that only two were.

The surrender of the Axis Powers did not mean the end of prisoner of war labor. All of the Allied nations who housed and employed prisoners of war delayed repatriating their charges through 1945 and into 1946 to fill the desperate need for labor in countries ravaged by war and lacking manpower. While the need was in many ways greater in Great Britain and France, where basic infrastructure and housing could often be lacking due to bombings and battles, the United States, with large numbers of men stationed in Europe and Asia, felt the continued shortage of manpower for industry nearly as keenly. Despite their country's surrender, little changed for the day-to-day lives of German prisoners of war. They continued

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83 Russell Weaver, interview by ACHS.
84 Russell Weaver, interview by ACHS.
85 “2 Prisoners of War Hurt in Accident,” The Gettysburg Compiler, February 3, 1945
to work in canneries, harvesting crops, cutting pulpwood and performing agricultural maintenance. The last of the German prisoners of war left Gettysburg in April 2, 1946, traveling first to camps in Olmsted Field and Tobyhanna Military Reservation, and then on to New York City where they were shipped back to Europe.\textsuperscript{86} During the existence of the prisoner of war camps in Gettysburg, local desire for prisoner labor always exceeded the number of men available. In 1945 alone, "697 prisoners were used by canning plants, 373 by pulpwood operators, 426 by orchard owners, 88 by farmers for filling silos, cutting corn, and harvesting grain, and 178 by fertilizer, fruit-packing, and cold storage plants."\textsuperscript{87} The buildings, which had once housed German prisoners of war, would be employed for the next few years as housing for other transient laborers, most notably Jamaicans, who had worked in Adams County in the summer of 1945 as well. Interestingly, German prisoners of war left a much larger impression on the citizens of Gettysburg than did the arguably more exotic Jamaican population, as will be show below.

\textsuperscript{86}Krammer, \textit{Nazi Prisoners of War in America}, 255
\textsuperscript{87}Unrau, \textit{Administrative History}, 220-221
CHAPTER III
CULTURE AND THE RECEPTION OF GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR

The two chapters above have discussed the background and reasons behind the creation of German prisoner of war camps in Gettysburg, the regulations that affected their creation and operation and the extent to which local citizens interacted with the German prisoners of war. This final chapter will address issues of identity and cultural assimilation to show to what extent the underlying existence of German culture was one of the factors for the generally positive reception of German prisoners of war and the equally fond view that German prisoners of war had of their temporary home. Some aspects of identity, such as age, background and linguistic ability, as well as social and psychological phenomena such as racism in Adams County and the stresses of prisoner of war life among German soldiers will be explored for their influence on how Adams County citizens and German prisoners reacted to their surroundings.

Undoubtedly, there are several reasons that account for the widespread acceptance of German POWs in Adams County. Primary among these was the sheer practicality of bringing German prisoners into the area: the need for labor to bring in harvests of peas, beans, cherries, tomatoes and other agricultural products, to can those goods for the war effort, and later to cut pulpwood. Since Gettysburg and the surrounding region represented primarily an agricultural area, the necessity for labor could easily overcome local distrust of Germans, as seen by the enthusiasm with which the local farmers and canners attempted to secure German prisoner of war labor. Along with the practical necessity of German labor were the official assurances of the United States military, and especially Captain Thomas, that the prisoners were constantly under guard, both in camp and on work assignments, and therefore posed no threat to the townsfolk. News of prisoner escapes was often hushed up and only reported on after the prisoners had been recaptured. Newspaper announcements of the arrival of German prisoners of war were not met
with outbursts by the local citizenry; indeed there was no apparent response to the news in any of the local periodicals.

Another, perhaps less obvious reason for the positive reaction to German prisoners of war, and the one with which this chapter will deal, is the general perception of the German prisoners of war as being culturally similar to the citizens of Gettysburg and the surrounding area. This perception is based on several factors, such as appearance (dependent upon race), the ability of prisoners and Americans to communicate with one another, the prisoners’ own reactions (and openness) to their new surroundings, as well as the existence of underlying German cultural characteristics among much of Gettysburg’s populace. This final chapter will address the reactions and perceptions of German prisoners of war by the citizenry of Gettysburg and, to a lesser degree, how the prisoners themselves viewed their captors and employers.

At least one historian has already examined the effects of a shared culture, primarily in the form of language, on the relationships between American citizens and German prisoners of war. Lauren Hahn’s work addressed the friendships that formed between William Teichmann, the owner of a peach orchard in Michigan, and the eight German prisoners of war, who were employed there between 1943 and 1945. Teichmann developed close bonds with these prisoners, bonds that stretched into the postwar years through a series of letters sent to America from the Germans once they returned to Europe.88 This article addresses several situations that were also present, to varying degrees, in Adams County. The German prisoners of war were employed harvesting peaches, similar to the apples, peaches and cherries that were grown in Gettysburg. German prisoners of war preferred agricultural work, so morale was higher when they were employed in that branch of industry. Teichmann offered incentives above the hourly

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wage required by the Geneva Convention. The prisoners were allowed to eat as much fruit as they liked and were often given other things, such as cigarettes; both of these material benefits were offered in Gettysburg as well. Hahn also stresses the importance of language, noting that it was primarily Teichmann’s ability to speak German that endeared him to his workers.\textsuperscript{89} As will be addressed below, the ability to understand each other was central to relationships between the German prisoners of war and the citizens of Gettysburg.

In evaluating the perceptions of Gettysburgians and prisoners of war toward each other, a brief look at assimilation theory will be useful. The last two decades have seen a renewed analysis of cultural assimilation. Sociologists in particular have reexamined the relationships between economics, cultural dominance, and ethnic and cultural integration in both recent and older waves of immigration to the United States. One of the major changes has been increased interest in studying dominant ethnic groups. Ethnic identity and cultural assimilation have long been studied from the perspective, or with a focus on, immigrant ethnic groups or cultural enclaves. Recent research has begun to argue for the importance of studying the dominant culture and how it changes as a result of absorbing other ethnic groups. While much of this research is aimed at studying “new immigration,” that wave of immigration, which started in the mid-1960s and continues to today, some of this new theory can be used when looking at earlier eras of immigration, or as this work will use it, for examining the differences and similarities between groups of people.

Alba and Nee, in their reassessment of assimilation theory, make two arguments that can help to explain the generally positive relationships between German prisoners of war and the citizens of Gettysburg. The first of these is the argument that the older era of assimilation “is specific to a set of historical circumstances that characterized mass immigration from Europe but

\textsuperscript{89} Hahn, “Germans in the Orchards,” 172-174.
does not, and will not, apply to contemporary non-European immigrant groups.” This argument implies the creation of a shared American identity based on having one’s ancestral roots in Europe. The shared identity may be weak, or not consciously present to the average citizen in Gettysburg, but the idea of having one’s origins in the same part of the world (Europe) in an era where racism against African Americans and Asians was high, could have lead Gettysburgians to look upon German prisoners of war as racially and culturally similar to themselves. Their second argument is for what Alba and Nee describe as “ethnic influences on the mainstream American culture,” which they claim are happening constantly. Briefly explained, this theory posits that assimilation and acculturation is a two-way street. The dominant ethnic group assimilates aspects of other ethnic groups, which lose their association with the origin ethnic group over time until these traits become accepted as part of the dominant culture. This theory is not always easy to prove, but does explain why some German prisoners of war were able to be accepted into the culture of southern Pennsylvania without the citizens necessarily recognizing a formal cultural similarity.

To defend any of the above arguments, a thorough understanding of ethnicity is necessary. One sociologist, Ashley W. Doane, Jr., defines two important elements of ethnicity as “a group affiliation based on a sense of peoplehood (i.e., belief in common ancestry, shared history, and joint destiny) and that it is expressed in relation to other such groups within a society.” He clearly distinguishes ethnicity from “nationality,” which is “a group identity or sense of peoplehood linked to a defined territory and a political state.” Central to his argument is that members of a dominant ethnic group, that is, those who wield the power to create or

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91 Alba and Nee, “Rethinking Assimilation Theory,” 141.
perpetuate institutional advantages, are not consciously affected by ethnicity on a day-to-day basis.94 This argument is useful when analyzing the interactions between the citizens of Gettysburg and the German prisoners of war when paired with Alba’s and Nee’s arguments above. Ethnic identity is taken for granted, and members of that group do not think about their ethnic identity. If this is true it may also be true that as long as German prisoners of war showed similar characteristics to Gettysburgians, the citizens of the region would have little reason to question the ethnicity of the prisoners of war. As will be argued below, linguistic differences could become a reminder of cultural difference, leading to problems that were not present when prisoners of war and Gettysburgians could easily communicate with one another.

Where Alba, Nee and Doane discuss ethnicity at a group level, other scholars have chosen to analyze it at the level of the individual. Mary C. Waters made a break from mainstream views on ethnicity by viewing the voluntary aspect of ethnic identity. Rather than seeing ethnic identity as something with which one is born (based on one’s lineage), she argues that, as a sociologist, she must “study ethnicity from social, situational, or rational points of view, seeking to understand the forces in society that create, shape, and sustain ethnic identity.”95 One’s ethnic identity may change over time depending on societal and personal changes. In the case of America during both World Wars, Waters’ argument backs up the widespread tendency of those with German heritage to downplay their German ancestry. Some traits that Waters associates with German identity, however, were widespread in Gettysburg and among the German prisoners of war. Most of these were social values that were evident when German immigrants first arrived in southern Pennsylvania and appear to have been absorbed into the dominant culture of the area in keeping in line with the theories of Alba and Nee. Some of

95 Mary C. Waters, Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 17.
these values, such as the importance of family, Waters argues are inherent in most ethnic groups.

Two other traits that are attributed to Germans are clearly evident in interactions between German prisoners of war and the citizens of Gettysburg. The first is the importance of education; the second is the tendency to be hardworking.96

The first German immigrants in Adams Country arrived in the 1730s, bringing with them a strong tradition of Lutheranism and education. The early schools in Gettysburg and the surrounding area were usually operated in conjunction with the Lutheran church, which had 8 congregations in the area by the year 1800; these schools provided training in religious matters as well as teaching rudimentary reading and mathematics.97 Indeed, the church usually served also as the schoolhouse and congregations often purchased many more acres than the church actually needed, which were then farmed to provide income with which to pay the minister and schoolmaster.98 By 1776, about one-third of Pennsylvanians were German or Swiss and it was these two groups that provided much of the original support for the founding of what would become Gettysburg College (in response to the formation of Scotch-Irish Dickinson College nearby) as a “German College,” that would preserve the German language in Pennsylvania while also encouraging the unity of all ethnic groups in southern Pennsylvania.99 The College’s connection to German culture would remain well into the nineteenth century. In 1844 it was described as “the first Literary Institution sustained principally by Germans, that has survived an ephemeral existence, having the support of the largest German Church in this country and situated in the heart of Pennsylvania.”100

96 Waters, Ethnic Options, 137.
97 Bloom, A History of Adams County, 6, 22, 27.
100 Minutes of the Alumni Association, September 18, 1844, quoted in Glatfelter, A Salutary Influence, Vol. 1, 175.
German prisoners of war, in general, shared this desire for education, often showing incredible enthusiasm for educational opportunities from language courses to college textbooks. Camp authorities encouraged prisoners to organize educational programs, particularly in larger camps, where the prisoners were not being sent out to work. Educational programs were seen as a diversion, and German prisoners whose minds were occupied with learning had less time to think about sabotage or escape. Of course the government sought opportunities for “democratic indoctrination” with mixed results; in general the prisoners were more interested in practical knowledge than ideological matters. Ever desires of reading material, German prisoners of war responded favorably to inexpensive German books offered for sale by the United States government. These works by authors, who the military felt showed integrity or whose works had been banned under the Nazis, often sold out within hours of arriving in camp canteens.\(^{101}\)

In Gettysburg, as well, many German prisoners of war were eager for educational opportunities. Marcus Ritter, who was the plant manager at Knouse Foods, a local cannery, recalled that the German prisoners “learned Eng. [sic] faster than we learned German.”\(^{102}\) Indeed several Gettysburgians commented upon the cleverness or mechanical skill of the German prisoners of war, who not only built the original tent camp on the Emmitsburg Road but also were able to build and improve machinery in some situations. Marcus Ritter recalled that “Some showed marked mechanical skill. One made a device from a blueprint.”\(^{103}\) In another cannery, B.F. Shriver Canning Company in Littlestown, Pa., the prisoners were very inquisitive and because “most of them could speak some English as well as carry on a conversation” they asked a lot of questions “to gain knowledge of the area.” Some even claimed to have “purposely

\(^{103}\) Marcus Ritter, “Plant Manager at Knouse Foods,” interview by ACHS.
surrendered to the Americans to get a chance to see America.”104 Stella Schwartz, a college student at the time, was often approached by prisoners, who, knowing that she was a student, asked about getting books about mathematics and science. The German prisoners were so desirous of these materials that they were “willing to sacrifice their pilot wings and other valuables for the above books.”105

If the German prisoners of war fulfilled the German stereotype of valuing education, can the same be said of the stereotype of being hard workers? At least by the standards set by the citizens of Adams County, the German prisoners of war were good workers, particularly if they liked the job or the employer. Once the initial problems of language barriers and disagreements over how Geneva regulations should be carried out had been solved, most employers agreed that the German prisoners of war were “good workers.”106 The worth of prisoners of war as laborers must have been proven to potential employers, who not only willingly accepted the extra hassles that having prisoners as workers entailed (providing transportation, having to have guards) but also desired to continue to employ German prisoners of war even when other workers became available.

While the above traits are rather general and may be attributed to other ethnic groups to varying degrees, there was a German cultural influence present in Adams County. In most cases it is subtle, having a German name, such as Joan Bryce's maiden name of "Hartzel," John and Stella Schwartz, and Marcus Ritter. Other reminders were cultural, as with John Augustine's mother, who "did not spend much time discussing her German ancestors but her heritage was reflected in her cooking."107 Augustine's enjoyment of his mother's cooking allowed him to have

104 John and Stella Schwartz, “Memories of the German Prisoners of War Working at the B.F. Shriver Canning Company,” interview by ACHS.
105 John and Stella Schwartz, “Memories of the German Prisoners of War Working at the B.F. Shriver Canning Company,” interview by ACHS.
106 Russell Weaver, interview by ACHS.
107 John Augustine, “My Recollections,” interview by author.
some positive associations with German culture that would be reflected in his curiosity towards the German prisoners. Another Gettysburgian, Jack Corbin, held strong ties to his German heritage. His "Pennsylvania Dutch" family would "speak in broken German, you know, Pennsylvania Dutch, so again German wasn't a dirty word in my mind . . . so I didn't fear all Germans . . . we knew the difference between Nazis and Germans."\(^{108}\) Although the purity of their German heritage had been diluted and absorbed into the larger culture of Pennsylvania, many of those who left interviews about their memories of the German prisoners of war agreed that many shared the same Pennsylvania German heritage. So although the German prisoners of war were a novelty in some ways, they also were culturally familiar to some citizens of Adams County.

The German prisoners of war had something else in common with most of the citizens of Gettysburg: race. Even locals without German heritage accepted the German prisoners as a racial equal and culturally similar. German prisoners of war “anders als die ‘farbigen’ Männer hatten ... kein deutlich sichtbares Zeichen vorzuweisen, das sie als Gruppe stigmatisierte, ihre Andersartigkeit bezeugte und damit die Zuweisung eines untergeordneten Status im alltag möglich machte.”\(^{109}\) Adams County was a predominantly white society; the 1920 census listed 295 African Americans, less than one percent of the population. That number would fall to 250 by 1940, but triple in the forty years after the war. Adams County in general and Gettysburg in particular, had, unsurprisingly long practiced racial discrimination in housing and employment. Almost all African Americans in Adams County worked in agriculture, and indeed the increase in the black population was mostly due to the arrival of migrant workers from the south during

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the 1960s. As a small and visible minority, African Americans were relegated to low wage jobs and often shown far less respect than the German prisoners of war, despite the latter position as enemies during wartime.

This acceptance of German soldiers as racially and therefore culturally similar can be demonstrated through a comparison with another group of temporary workers, who helped to fill Adams County's labor needs during and immediately after the Second World War. In the summers of 1945 and 1946, Jamaicans were brought into southern Pennsylvania as temporary agricultural laborers. They were housed in an old CCC camp in Franklin County in 1945, with a camp being set up in Adams County in 1946. Despite two summers of hard labor, relatively few sources about the time these men spent in southern Pennsylvania remain today. While the German prisoners of war show up in many oral histories today and frequent newspaper articles at the time, the Jamaican laborers are absent from the memories of locals. When asked if they remember seeing or interacting with the Jamaican laborers, interviewees were surprised to hear that there had been temporary Jamaican laborers in Adams County. Only two newspaper articles address these workers. On May 26, 1945 a lengthy article outlining the need for volunteer agricultural laborers announced in passing that "arrangements are underway to establish another work camp for Jamaicans this year at Old Forge," a significantly shorter announcement than the three paragraph-long article of a year earlier announcing that "War Prisoners May Work Here." In February of 1946, however, the Jamaican workers were afforded a longer article in the local newspaper. In this article the reporter makes clear that the German prisoners of war were preferable to Jamaican workers. Indeed, the very start of the article shows that Jamaicans were a second choice: "With prisoner of war labor apparently not to be available for 1946,

farmers in Adams County are seeking to establish a camp for Jamaican workers somewhere in the county."112 The central section of the article, entitled "Divided Opinions" makes a more direct comparison between the two groups of workers. The secretary of the county Emergency Farm Labor committee, who announced the plans to employ Jamaicans temporarily, was quoted as saying "Some of the farmers who used Jamaican labor were not very well pleased with the way they performed. They were very hard to control and at times some of them were very undesirable to work with," while, "all reports we received from employers of prisoners of war were that they were entirely satisfactory."113 The Jamaican workers were put in direct comparison with the German prisoners of war, without concern for differences in culture or background. Because so few records remain regarding the Jamaican workers, it is impossible to ascertain to what extent they were differently treated. The one sentence afforded them in Bloom's *A History of Adams County, Pennsylvania*, states that they "were brought into the country for the harvesting of fruit."114 But whether they were given higher quotas or worse working conditions due to their race and their lack of protection from the Geneva Convention cannot be judged.

When evaluating German perceptions towards the citizens of Gettysburg, several problems present themselves. While people living in Adams County and employing German prisoners could be interviewed both at the time and in the years since the Second World War, much of the information regarding the thoughts and perceptions of the German prisoners of war comes second-hand, through newspapers, military reports or the memories of Americans. Unlike American citizens at the time (and now) the German prisoners of war would have felt pressure to self-censor anything they said due to being under the control of the United States government or

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because of the geo-political situation in the years after World War II. Censorship would also have been exerted in the military and media of the United States, distorting “generally positive encounters” due to “the need for secrecy and thus the maintenance of opposing sides” which “encouraged the us/them duality instead of mitigating it.” With these limitations taken into consideration, it is still possible to get some idea of the interactions and opinions of German prisoners of war towards America in general and towards some specific citizens of Adams County.

For both the German prisoners of war and the citizens of Gettysburg, the ability to understand one another was essential for good relations. People with the ability to speak both German and English were, therefore, highly important. In several cases German prisoners were set to work performing tasks that were alien to them, such as cutting pulpwood, and could not carry out the task until an interpreter was sent to explain it. Likewise, an ability to understand one another was necessary within camps. The prisoners of war were aware of the Geneva Convention and "quick to seek flaws in the manner in which its provisions were followed" but problems were quickly straightened out, helped along by camp commander Captain Thomas' ability to speak and understand German. As seen with Jack Corbin above, speaking German (or English in the case of the prisoners of war) made that person more open to the experience of interacting with someone from another country, particularly among the younger generation. The German prisoners of war who worked in Gettysburg ranged in age from thirteen to sixty-five, and there was often a strained relationship between the older and the younger. Those prisoners who spoke some English seemed eager to use it, and did on many occasions; they

116 Revere March, interview by ACHS.
learned quickly, both about the English language and about any other subject that caught their fancy. In general these prisoners were younger, between eighteen and twenty-five years old.

Both friendships and love affairs arose in situations where the German prisoners of war were in close contact to Americans. Despite the U.S. military's reassurances that the German prisoners of war were carefully guarded and therefore posed no threat to the local populace, relationships between guards and prisoners soon became lax, with the guards feeling that the prisoners were unlikely to run away because "they liked this area and enjoyed living here."119 Employers soon learned that treating the German prisoners well meant higher productivity, so special incentives such as cigarettes were commonly offered and overseers looked the other way when prisoners ate fruit or other crops during the harvest. This led to prisoners performing tasks beyond their set duties, such as improving on or building machinery in canneries or creating oil paintings. As described above, most of the English-speaking soldiers were eager to question locals closely about all manner of topics and offer "souvenirs" in return for books.

Sadly not all German prisoners of war were content in Adams County. Just before the German prisoners of war were moved from the tent camp on the Emmitsburg Road to winter quarters at Camp Sharpe, in November of 1944, a German prisoner of war committed suicide in an apple processing plant in Aspers, about ten miles north of Gettysburg. Thirty-eight year old Private Georg Hartig “took his life by hanging himself from a rafter on the second floor of an apple shed at the Aspers plant” an act that can be interpreted several ways.120 Over seventy German prisoners of war were listed as suicides by the U.S. military, but whether all were truly suicides and what the reasons the prisoners had for taking their own lives remain mysteries.121 

Internal frictions between ideological Nazis and anti-Nazi prisoners, shame at having been

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119 Russell Weaver, interview by ACHS.
120 “War Prisoner Hangs Self in Aspers Plant,” Gettysburg Compiler, November 11, 1944.
121 Krammer, Nazi Prisoners of War, 173.
captured and boredom are some of the reasons given for the many unexplained suicides. While I in no way expect to solve the mystery behind Hartig’s death, this incident provides an entry point to examine the internal dynamics of camp life in Gettysburg.

One of the main reasons given for suicides among German prisoners of war in America during the Second World War was harassment of anti-Nazi prisoners by ideological Nazis. While ardent Nazis were almost always in the minority, they tended to be the most boisterous and aggressive prisoners, seeking to exert influence over the internal camp structure. Since the American government’s POW camp system was designed around prisoner self-government with representatives who parleyed with the camp guards (thus minimizing German-American interaction), the system was relatively easy to infiltrate. Abuses were prevalent in camps even after the government began attempted to segregate prisoners by political ideology in late 1944, since the process of classifying prisoners was highly subjective and dependent upon the prisoner’s cooperation. Since the quality and number of guards were seldom sufficient to meet optimum standards, threats, beatings and even murders occurred with alarming regularity. It is felt by many scholars that at least some of the many deaths labeled suicides were, in fact, murders.

It is possible that there was some ideological friction in the camps at Gettysburg. The first group of prisoners brought to work in Gettysburg were soldiers from the Afrika Corps, some of the first German prisoners of war to come to America, were considered some of the hardest and most political German soldiers, respected by guards in camps throughout the country for their discipline and strength. Marcus Ritter, who managed these men at a canning plant, commented in a later interview that the men “from Rommel’s Afrika Corps” were “tough babies”

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122 Hudnall, “Historical Analysis.”
123 Hudnall, “Historical Analysis.”
124 Krammer, Nazi Prisoners of War, 149.
by which he meant that they were physically strong. Revere March also remembered the German prisoners being from the *Afrika Corps* and related mixed experiences cutting pulpwood with the prisoners, as well as hostility between the prisoners. The prisoners of war, he recalled, “refused to admit they knew English” but the interpreter was friendlier and painted an oil painting of Revere’s daughter. So some prisoners of war were willing to be friendly and work, while others, either truly or to slow down the cutting, showed an unwillingness to work for the Americans. Problems amongst the German prisoners of war were evident in Revere’s memory that “sometimes the younger fought the older,” which shows a generational, and perhaps also ideological, heterogeneity within the prisoner population. A further divide was between ethnic groups. In July of 1945, four prisoners of war from Camp Sharpe requested transfers to a Polish prisoner of war camp, stating that although they had fought for the Germans, they were members of a Polish minority within Germany. As trademarks three of the four were described as “very religious” (the fourth was “very active in church affairs) and all four were labeled “anti-Nazi” by the interviewer. Within even a small work camp like those in Gettysburg, there existed numerous ethnic and ideological identities that complicate the ability of a historian to analyze how the German prisoners reacted to their captivity and how German prisoners of war and Americans interacted. Was Georg Hartig an anti-Nazi who could not take the harassment of his fellow prisoners, or is there another explanation?

Two other reasons might explain the suicide of Georg Hartig, both psychological in nature, shame and boredom. Because nearly all of the sources available about the prisoner of war camps in Gettysburg come from the perspective of Americans, the validity of either (or both) of these cannot be ascertained. The problem of shame or guilt at having been captured was

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125 Marcus Ritter, “Plant Manager at Knouse Foods,” interview by ACHS.
126 Revere March, interview by ACHS.
rooted in the mentality of the German military of the time. Becoming a prisoner of war was not only a shock; it also could cause the prisoner to fear for his life. Added to this was the German military’s group identity, which saw any aid to the enemy to be shameful. To be captured meant to be a failure, failing to meet the ideal of the German soldier, to be rendered helpless. This helplessness was magnified and "intensified as the war progressed. The letters from home were full of reports of terrible devastation" for which the soldiers could do nothing.128

The second problem, boredom, could magnify the first by allowing time to “obsess about things that were out of the prisoner’s control,” which could cause them to sink into depression.129 Boredom was, on the other hand, a fairly easy problem to solve, although it was to some extent dependent upon the talents and abilities of the prisoners themselves. Camp Sharpe, as a work camp, would have been less prone to having bored prisoners, since they worked six days a week for at least eight hours a day. In their free time, mainly on Sundays, John Augustine recalls seeing the prisoners “sitting on the steps of the Armory playing guitars, playing cards and drinking beer.”130 Joan Thomas, daughter of the camp commander, recalled that they “played soccer constantly” and at night one of the prisoners sang opera.131 Other soldiers bought or bartered for books or passed their time in the illicit activity of making “home brew” with sugar secretly smuggled from the canning factories.132 Another popular form of amusement in camps across the country, due to the inability of the authorities to properly punish it, was to plan and attempt to escape.

While it was true that many German prisoners of war enjoyed living in Adams County, this did not deter escape attempts. In some cases it actually had the opposite effect. In Gettysburg the temporary camp on the Emmitsburg Road and Camp Sharpe had a surprisingly

128 Hudnall, “Historical Analysis.”
129 Hudnall, “Historical Analysis.”
130 John Augustine, “My Recollections,” interview by author.
132 John and Stella Schwartz, “Memories of German Prisoners of War,” interview by ACHS.
high number of escapees, though only two did so while the United States and Germany were still at war. In total Gettysburg saw four separate escape attempts involving a total of seven German prisoners. Most large camps had three to four escape attempts the entire war, so Gettysburg was above average for a smaller work camp. Three factors aided the United States military in securing German prisoners of war: the strict hierarchy of the German military, the popularity of recreational and educational programs, and the geography of the United States, which made it necessary to travel a long distance to leave the country. This first factor did not seem to be as strong in Gettysburg; there was a strong generation gap present among the German prisoners that undermined Nazi discipline. The second seems to hold true; German prisoners at Gettysburg played sports and games and read hungrily, but they were also incredibly curious about the area itself, a curiosity that only seems to be present in parts of the nation where the local populace is accepting of or friendly towards the prisoners. Gettysburg, being in the north and on the east coast was in the minority in terms of having prisoner of war camps, so it is possible that German prisoners felt their chances of getting to New York and aboard a ship to Europe would be greater. Under the Geneva Convention it was legal for prisoners of war to try to escape, and was even seen as a soldier's duty. The number and quality of guards both lessened during the war, making escape more likely and less challenging. Revere March recalled that while cutting pulpwood there was “one guard to every five when they started. One for every one hundred when they left cutting.”  

On July 7, 1944, two German POWs, Thomas Kostaniak (27 years old) and Axel Ostermaler (22 years old) escaped from the Emmitsburg Road camp and hid in a drainage pipe under the road. The next day The Gettysburg Compiler reported the escape; according to that

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133 Revere March, interview by ACHS.
134 Kramer, Nazi Prisoners of War in America, 114-116.
135 See Major Thomas' sketch in the Appendix.
article, the Federal Bureau of Investigation had already been brought it. Locals were told that the fugitives were wearing their prisoner of war uniforms "blue denims, shirt and pants, with the initials PW" and that they could not speak English well. Rumors quickly spread that the prisoners had been shot, while the authorities received a telephone call from a local woman, who had "been asked for food by a youthful stranger dressed in blue whose speech could not be understood." On July 15, 1944, the two were captured about twenty-five miles from Gettysburg. Unlike later escapes, the authorities released no information about the fugitives except that "they seemed in good spirits and smiled continuously in the York police station." Neither the prisoners themselves nor Captain Thomas seemed to find the escapes particularly serious. When asked about the incident Captain Thomas “note[d] with a smile that the Gettysburg camp has now dropped to third place in the nation in number of escaped prisoners.” From the start Thomas had assured the citizens of Gettysburg that the German prisoners of war posed little threat to the surrounding area, showing more concern with the number of women who loitered near the camp; he continued to support this view despite the continuance of escape attempts.

The next two escapes, were the least and most successful. During the second week of October, 1945, two German prisoners of war escaped from the local camp and were caught while sitting on the curb in front of the Plaza Restaurant, perhaps a mile from camp. Two camp guards "who were in town, noticed the two men, thought they looked familiar and picked them up." It seems doubtful that these two men really intended to escape; more likely they were bored and sought some excitement. Another prisoner, however, escaped around the same time, though camp guards were uncertain of when it happened exactly. Since the guards had not been aware

136 "Find no Trace of Prisoners Who Fled Camp," Gettysburg Compiler, July 8, 1944.
137 "Nazi Prisoners Are Captured in York County," Gettysburg Compiler, July 15, 1944.
138 "Nazi Prisoners Are Captured in York County," Gettysburg Compiler, July 15, 1944.
of the escape of the two men found locally, and since the men were immediately recaptured, they did not inform the police. Imagine everyone's surprise when on October 27, 1945, Wilhelm Schmidt "a blond, heavyset man, dressed in bedraggled muddy clothing, staggered into the Brooklyn candy store...of Louis Dvorkin." He reportedly asked for a "cop" and was handed over, "tired and hungry" to the FBI.139 There is no follow up to this story, probably due to the embarrassment it must have caused the camp guards and military authorities to have three prisoners of war escape without notice, having one make it all the way to Brooklyn, New York and only be captured when he turned himself in.

When caught, prisoners were either happy and pleased with themselves, or scared and happy to be back in camp. These opposite reactions were often related to the prisoners' ability to speak English and the necessity to do so. Since prisoners of war were normally not given money (though the occasional employer had been known to give small cash bonuses, despite their illegality), German prisoners of war who were trying to make good an escape would have to either steal or ask for anything that they might need. In the two cases above, the four men involved had little need to speak English. The first two, who made it about twenty-five miles before their recapture, made good their escape in July, when gardens and orchards could provide sustenance when their linguistic skills roused suspicion. The second two cannot even be proven to have been trying to escape, though they had managed to scavenge new clothes, so perhaps they hoped to blend into the local populace or, more likely, simply wanted an adventure to relieve the monotony of day to day life. Since so little is known about Schmidt's escape, we can only guess that he had moderate English skills to have reached New York undetected (and his use of the term "cop" rather than "police"), but the man's poor condition shows that he either could not pass as American or did not try.

In the last escape attempt of German prisoners of war in Gettysburg, knowledge of
English played a central role from beginning to end. In this unusual and sensational case, local
citizens helped two German prisoners of war to escape. On January 3, 1946, Hans Harloff and
Bernard Wagner escaped from Camp Sharpe and remained free until the following Monday,
January 7. Harloff, who spoke English, claimed that the two men had no destination in mind,
nor friends from whom they could expect help. It soon came out that this was a lie and on March
9, Byron Cease, his wife, and his daughter Pearl were arrested by the Federal Bureau of
Investigation. The family had not only provided food and clothing for the two fugitives, but had
also been transported by Byron Cease from his home to the hiding place where the FBI
eventually captured them. The Cease family was brought to court where it was revealed that
Harloff had sent the nineteen year old Pearl notes in English, saying that he wanted to meet her,
beginning an exchange, which culminated in Harloff asserting that he "was going to escape to be
with her." All three Ceases "warned them to go away" when the fugitives appeared on their
doorstep, "Pearl and her mother gave them their meals, however, and the father took them to an
abandoned house a few miles away." Such cases as this were not unheard of at the time, but
were usually highly publicized and could lead to sentencing to death for treason if such aid were
given during wartime. The Cease family was fortunate in that it could be shown that they gave
aid unwillingly, and that the war was over so that their aid was no longer a treasonous act. Their
crime could have had a maximum penalty of ten years in prison or a fine of $10,000, but
ultimately they were given suspended terms "since the war was over when the escape was made"
and "in view of the good reputation borne by the family in Adams Country."

The two prisoners of war in this case genuinely expected help from the Cease family, and they received it to a limited degree. This implies a high level of trust on the part of the escapees. The Cease family was torn between its desire to help the two men and fear of breaking the law. Pearl Cease was able to overcome any fears of spending her life with Harloff, but this did not extend to willingly committing a crime. She would not actively try to thwart Harloff’s escape, but did try to convince him to rethink his actions. The Gettysburg Compiler reported that “the German told the girl he was going to escape to be with her. She warned him against the attempt and asked him to go back to Germany and then return to this country for her.”142 Harloff and his companion were determined to stay in the United States, saying upon recapture that “they liked America, wanted to see more of it and hoped to reach a large city and stay in this country rather than return to Germany.”143

For two of the German prisoners of war, their experiences in Gettysburg were so rewarding and unforgettable that they did choose to come back to Adams County some years later, though not to live permanently. Of course, those few ex-prisoners who had worked across the nation and who returned were those who had pleasant memories of their time in the United States. In Gettysburg, their returns allow a small insight, however one-sided, into how some German prisoners of war regarded their time in Adams County. Of the two former prisoners of war who visited Gettysburg, one, who had been a sergeant during the war, visited the Knouse Food plant where he had worked, talking with his former manager, but not attracting much attention or leaving any impression of his thoughts on returning to the place where he had once been imprisoned.144 In 2001 another former prisoner of war, Carl Brantz, returned to Gettysburg as an eightieth birthday present from his sister. He was interviewed by The Gettysburg Times and

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143 “Escaped POWs Recaptured ‘Like America,’” Gettysburg Compiler, January 12, 1946.
144 Marcus Ritter, “Plant Manager at Knouse Foods,” interview by ACHS.
recalled his time in Gettysburg. Brantz embodied many of the characteristics that helped German prisoners of war to accept, and even enjoy, their time working in Adams County. He was young, being in his early twenties during the war; he spoke English, which he had learned in school in Switzerland. This second trait caused him to be assigned as an interpreter at Camp Sharpe, having to interact with both his fellow prisoners and the American military. He felt that he had the right to speak for many of his fellow enlisted men, saying “in Gettysburg, we had a good time,” though he was aware that military discipline placed the burden of decision making on his sergeant’s shoulders: “I was just an interpreter and didn’t have to make any decisions. My sergeant was in charge of it.” Brantz said that from the experience he had “learned a lot” and “would give back not one little thing,” a feeling that is backed up by his desire to “see the camp once more.” For him, and for many other young prisoners of war, their time spent in Adams County was a central event in their short lives, helping to form who they were and how they interacted with the world around them.

Upon the departure of the last of the German prisoners of war in April of 1946, the site of the temporary work camp on the Emmitsburg Road returned to its original appearance. The Civilian Conservation Corps buildings continued to be used over the next few years to house other temporary workers, mostly Jamaican seasonal laborers. Today, there is no physical reminder of Camp Sharpe or the tent camp on the Gettysburg battlefield. In 2003, the National Park Service demolished the Home Sweet Home Motel, where Captain Thomas and his family lived during their time in Gettysburg. The old CCC buildings, too, have been taken down; boy scouts camp on the site where once German prisoners of war lived and worked. In both

145 Reiner, “German POW pays nostalgic visit.”
146 Reiner, “German POW pays nostalgic visit.”
cases the National Park Service acted in the name of restoring Gettysburg to its Civil War appearance. The American Civil War and Lincoln's famous address overshadow Gettysburg's later history, but as the World War II generation grows older, it becomes more important to remember that for many citizens of Adams County and for a few hundred German soldiers, another war touched their lives in an unforgettable way. For Adams County, German prisoners of war were at once exotic and familiar, likeable enemies, who provided necessary labor in a time of war. For the prisoners, their time in the United States offered the shame of defeat alongside the relief of safety from battle; Americans, too, were in many ways strange, but in some ways familiar. The farms of Adams County became areas of shared work and mutual understanding.


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Major Laurence C. Thomas, who had commanded both the temporary camp on the Emmitsburg Road, and the more permanent Camp Sharpe, sketched out this map of the first tent camp, with the annotations that follow handwritten on a separate sheet.

A nine strand barbwire fence enclosed the camp site – approximately 400 feet north/south and 600 feet east/west. The squad tents for housing of guards were located adjacent to the compound on the south side of camp.

All construction, even to the design and layout of the sewage disposal plant, was effected by prisoners of war who were first quartered at the National Guard Armory.

Maximum 400 prisoners of war
July, August, September, October and November, 1944
Minimum 80 prisoners of war Guard personnel 60 enlisted men 5 officers.

Note: Two escapees used tube under the highway to make their escape to the vicinity of the rock wall at the High Water Mark, July 5, 1944.¹⁴⁸

Major Laurence C. Thomas
Commander, Third Service Command¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Major Thomas seems to be mistaken about this date. According to The Gettysburg Compiler, the two prisoners of war escaped on July 7, 1944.
¹⁴⁹ World War II POW Camps, Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg, PA.