

POW camp in Williamston, NC

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A World War II prisoner of war camp in Williamston, North Carolina.

By Martha Elmore of Joyner Library at East Carolina Library University (2009):

"By 1943, the U.S. government had thousands of Italian and German prisoners who were in need of housing in areas away from the war theatre for security purposes. It was decided to bring the prisoners to the United States and house them in POW camps, which solved the security problem and eased the economic problem of feeding and clothing the prisoners in overseas prisons.

Eventually there were one hundred camps set up throughout the nation which housed a total of 130,000 German and 50,000 Italian prisoners of war. North Carolina had fifteen branch camps and two base camps. The original inhabitants at this camp were Italians, but after assimilation problems they were replaced by German prisoners in the spring of 1944. The German prisoners participated in work release programs regulated according to the Geneva Convention rules and they were paid for their labor. Many of the prisoners worked as farm laborers and they proved to be hard workers.

Most accounts of the time indicate that the prisoners and the Martin County residents worked out a successful working relationship that also involved culture exchanges. The photograph below is one of several of the Williamston POW camp found in this collection and is believed to have been taken by Eugene Rice.

Sources for this description were an article written by Elizabeth Roberson titled "Our Friends the Enemy" that appeared in the August 1984 issue of *The State* magazine and an article by Iris N. Cooke titled "World War II Prisoner of War Camp" in the *Martin County Heritage* book. These publications can be found in the North Carolina Collection."



Citation (Chicago Style):

Rice, Eugene. *WWII Prisoner of War Camp, Williamston, N.C., 1943-1945*. Photograph. *Francis M. Manning Collection*. Greenville, N.C. 1943. East Carolina University. <https://library.ecu.edu/specialcollections/2009/08/07/wwii-prisoner-of-w....>

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