Three Love Stories

The Town of Sweden had an ad in the *Hamlin Clarkson Herald* asking for war time love stories to help it celebrate its 200th birthday. That gave me an idea. Why not report on some war time love stories that took place in the Hamlin CCC and POW camp on Moscow Road?

George Lake couldn't wait for the war to get his love story in this collection. In the fall of 1936 twenty-one-year-old George enlisted in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) so that his Mom could get $25 a month while he helped to build Hamlin Beach State Park. He lived in Medina and promised his girlfriend Hazel that he'd come home every weekend to visit her. He'd leave after work on Friday and head back to camp on Sunday.

Medina is not just down the road from Hamlin, but sometimes he got a ride with someone who worked at the camp and sometimes he would hitch-hike. Once he walked the entire way! He wore his shoes out and the bottoms fell off halfway back. When he finally arrived at camp, very late, he put on the tops of his shoes and laced them up so that no one would know what happened. Quite often George wouldn't make it back to camp on time and he'd be assigned a lot of extra K.P. duty. But George didn't mind. It was all worth it!

Many CCC enlistees signed up for several six month hitches of duty, but after one hitch, George had spent enough time away from his true love. He went back to Medina and married Hazel. He passed away in 2003.

About three years ago when I arrived at the CCC camp site to clear away some more of the "jungle" that still covered the site, I saw a 92-year-old woman wandering around the old parade ground. It was Hazel! Her daughter was helping her along. Under her arm Hazel had one of those long, skinny group photos taken with a special lens. It was folded in half along a heavy crease, and she opened it up to show it to me. She pointed to George who was one of the crinkled up, unrecognizable faces on the crease.

She said she just wanted to walk where George had walked between the weekend visits to see her. I took her to the exact spot where George was standing when the photo was taken in the spring of 1937. Hazel came back to the camp with different family members two more times after that. I think she can give the tour without me now.



Center section of Hazel's folded photo. George Lake, smack dab center, Group CCC picture 1937.

A little over a year ago, Hazel had the crinkled faces professionally repaired and also had a copy of the repaired photo made for me. It too will be on display in the future museum.

When Heinrich first saw Hamlin, he was 20 years old. Fresh out of high school he had enlisted in

the German Army and became a prisoner of war in North Africa two years later. He was in the first batch of German POWs to arrive in the Hamlin camp from Fort Niagara. That was June of 1944 and three years ago I waited anxiously for my first letter to arrive from Germany from him. I could hardly wait to finally find out where the barbed wire fence had been placed around the old CCC camp and the exact location of the guard towers!

When the letter came everything was about the women who worked in the Duffy Mott canning factory. Not a single word about the fence or the guard towers! (That information would have to wait until letter number three!) Instead, Heinrich wrote, "The young women at the canning factory were very curious about us and we were very lonely. Soon they began to write their names on their uniforms in lipstick. Then they wrote their names on OUR uniforms in lipstick!" A little farther on he wrote, "I think Nellie was in love with me."

After a while he was transferred to the tomato fields (in Parma). I can only wonder why? But he went on to say that he eventually got his hands on an envelope and stole a US stamp (It was illegal for a POW to use the US Mail.) He wrote a letter to Nellie and bribed a guard to mail it. But Nellie never got it. It went straight to the Commandant of the Hamlin POW camp.

Heinrich was called before the Commandant and was told that he would be sent back to Fort Niagara to the "jail" there, but before he could be processed for the trip, the Commandant changed his mind. He felt that "the Hamlin camp could do more for Heinrich than Fort Niagara could" and assigned him to permanent kitchen duty in the mess hall.

It wasn't long before Heinrich traded identities with a friend to work his buddy's night shift at the canning factory. A guard caught a glimpse of Heinrich and Nellie together from the walkway above a secluded area of the factory. They stood motionless for a while and the guard slowly walked away. Later that night, Heinrich passed the guard in a hallway. The guard just looked at Heinrich, shook his head, and continued on.

Heinrich went back to East Germany after the war and still lives there with his wife Renate. But his story has inspired me to try to find out what happened to Nellie. So far, no luck!

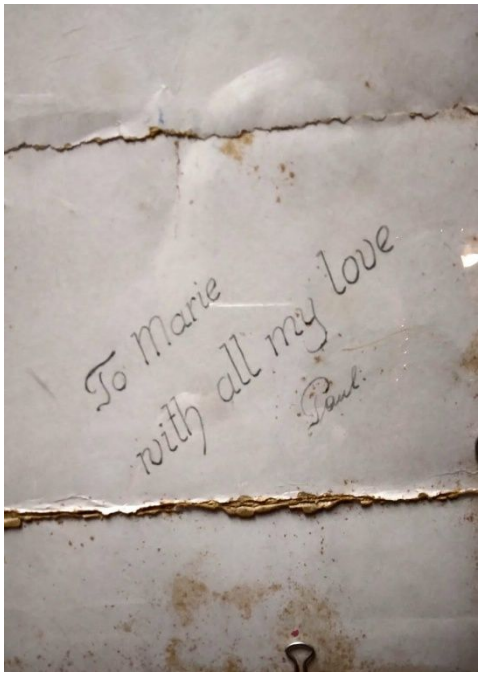
Then there was Marie. She was a 20-year-old Hamlin girl who learned to speak German from her family. She worked at the Duffy Mott factory when the POWs arrived.

One of the POWs assigned to the Duffy Mott team as a crew leader needed an interpreter and Marie volunteered. They fell in love, but when the war was over and the Hamlin POW camp closed in January of 1946, the Geneva Convention said he had to be sent back to where he had enlisted. Many of the German POWs did fill out the necessary paperwork to come back to America but Marie's boyfriend must have been returned to what became communist East Germany. The Russians wouldn't let anyone leave for any reason! Marie never saw him again.

But her POW boyfriend had painted a beautiful portrait of her while they worked together at the canning factory. On the back he wrote in very neat script, "To Marie With All My Love." She kept the painting until she passed away in 2007. Friends of hers recently turned the painting over to me and it will soon be on display in the Friends of the State Park's future farmhouse museum

next to the CCC/POW campsite on Moscow Road.





Gottfried Schulze did some research after he went back to Germany. He was able to find out the full name of the painter that painted the picture of Marie--Karl Schmöle. Karl was born 2/20/1911 in Cologne. Gottfried was in contact with Karl's son, but he was not able to find any other pictures or recordings from Karl's time as a POW. Ed recently looked closer at the original painting, and it was signed by K. Schmöle, P.O.W. Paul must have asked Karl to paint the picture for him. Wonder if they all worked together at the Duffy Mott canning factory?