Topic Selection:
History is often simplified to the memorization of names and dates, facts that at times are taught lacking the necessary contextualization or additional details. This methodology plagues the field as students decide for themselves that history is boring and lacks any real connection to their own lives. Contextualization of historical facts can improve understanding and allow for greater participation in the ongoing discussions that dominate much of history, the historiography of a particle event or subfield of history including libraries.

Early in the course we briefly touched on library historiography, the study of the continuing discussion taking place among library historians as one of my history professors has described the study. From “Subject and Historiographic Characteristics of Library History” to “Our Historical Enterprise: Shifting Emphasis and Directions,” we can grasp the gist of the discussion that has taken place till relatively recently in time. But a historiography only goes so far in engaging readers, other tools in the historian’s tool chest can provide that additional engagement between interested learners and the history. One of those tools that receives mixed reviews generally from historians is the use of historical fiction. Placing oneself in the past through a written story or other mediums can engross audiences in ways other tools may not be as well received.

Using a historiographical study in combination with creative writing exercises, the intention of this work is showcase this methodology using the limited topic of World War II era prisoner of war camp libraries. A relatively minor topic for most, POW camp libraries played an important in the life of POWs and maintaining their moral in oppressive circumstances. World War II POW camp libraries presents a well-defined topic are for discussion.

Problem Statement:
Individuals interested in library history should have an understanding of the evolution of the subject area with a focus on ongoing discussion driving the topic they are focused on. But merely presenting the historiography can turn off some audience members who may be better engaged through alternative presentation styles including short stories, poetry, as well as video, audio, and living history presentation. Combining multiple approaches can reach allow the presentation to reach the maximum number of audience members without losing the historical focus.

Need for Study:
Major world altering events are generally at the center of any history course, the events and people who impact the shaping of our world. This often leaves holes in the research, especially the lives of historical actors who have left center stage. Prisoners of war are often relegated to very minor notes in historical discussions until mistreatment or other horrifying event occurs. World War II POWs experience the war very differently from the moment they were captured until the end of their time as prisoners. Part of their experience included how they spent their time and kept up their moral under less than ideal circumstances. Camp libraries are typically
included as part of the discussion of moral, a piece of the story that few hear about until they take a course such as S580.

Strengths and Limitations of Approach:
The approaches used for this work have their own strengths and limitations, some of which I believe cover for the other. Combining the more academic historiographical approach with the creative writing approach offer readers a twofold cover of the same topic, allowing them to focus on their preferred presentation style. Utilization of historical fiction opens up the possibility of engaging audiences including the typical history student but present its own issue of adding fictionalized accounts that could be mistaken for facts and create confusion on the part of the reader. However, this use of the human imagination allows for a more human visage that can be lost in the historiography. Using the historiography as the basis of facts for the creative writing portions may allow for richer stories that fit the current understanding of the history.

Methodology/Process:
For this project I focused first on compiling the historiographical portion to gain a better understanding of the setting for the creative writing portion. Reading the available materials, largely articles, including those that only remotely interacted the topic, gave me the feel for what the historical environment was where I intended to place characters, intending to create as accurate a portrayal of events as possible.
Historiography

Prisoner of War Camps in World War II were principally governed by the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Most of the waring powers operated under these accords with several noteworthy exceptions principally on the Eastern Front of the war in Europe between the Soviet Union and Axis forces. Elsewhere the convention was largely upheld and POWs given a modicum of normal life within their confinement. One aspect of their captivity that has been given only minor consideration is the impact of books on the moral and wellbeing of the prisoners. Whether sent directly by friends or gathered by organizations such as the Red Cross or the protecting powers, books became a common sight within POW camps on both sides of the conflict and this accumulation of books resulted in the creation of camp libraries. This was not the first or the last war where libraries were constructed in prisoner of war camps. A common site in World War I, camp libraries also made appearances in the American Civil War and the Napoleonic conflicts of the 19th century (Blondo, 1993).

The limited scholarly treatment of this topic may be linked to the general saturation of the market by texts on World War II, discussing various elements including the Holocaust, Hitler’s rise to power, the dropping of the atomic bomb, life on the Homefront and the ebb and flow of military events. POWs are often given more limited attention than other soldiers though their stories are as necessary for understanding the conflict and human history as any.

The historical discussion of prison camp libraries of World War II started during the war as authors such as John Mason Brown (1945) wrote on the treatment of POWs, in his case German prisoners in the United States, and referenced the means provided to the prisoners for entertainment as well as education on top of the work they were forced to perform. Publishing information on the state of prison camps was not new to 20th century warfare: during World War I articles appeared in both The British Medical Journal and The Public Health Journal informing the public about the conditions under which prisoners on both sides were being kept (1916). Both journals referred to the presence of camp libraries for use by the prisoners, but kept their writing to mere observations of what was present and refrained from much interpretation.

It took nearly a half-century before prison camp libraries started to take center stage in academic writings. A cursory look at prison camp libraries occurred in Frederick Steilow’s article from 1990 on the relationship between the American Library Association and the Library of Congress’ newly appointed director, Carl Milam. While initially wary of Milam and his political wrangling, the ALA eventually had a rapprochement with the administration and worked with them in the preservation of library materials and the role libraries and librarians would play in the war effort including the establishment and maintenance of libraries at military posts, commands, and prison camps both for Axis and Allied prisoners.

General studies of prison camp life continued to dominate the historiography throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s. Among the scholarly articles to appear during this time period with minor references to prison camp libraries were S.P. MacKenzie’s “The Treatment of Prisoners of War in World War II” (1994), Robert La Forte’s “Resistance in Japanese Prison Camps during World War II” (2003) and “What the Angels Saw: Red Cross and Protecting Power Visits to Anglo-American POWs 1939-194” by Vasilis Vourkoutiotis (2003). All three
authors cited prison camp libraries as factors influencing prisoner moral but do not get into the details of how the libraries were formed, operated, maintained, and specific titles that populated the shelves. The same general perspective held true for Germany POWs held in the United States. Barbara Schmitter Heisler (2007) in “The ‘Other Braceros’: Temporary Labor and German Prisoners of War in the United States, 1943-1946,” gives an account of the conditions under which German prisoners spent the war once they were transported to the United States. Comparison to German held prisoners occurs with key differences being cited, including the rapid growth within U.S. POW camps of university supported education courses. German universities provided, beginning in May 1944, rubrics for German POWs to follow allowing them to gain official credit for coursework and maintain proficiency so when they returned to Germany after the war they could resume their studies or practices.

From the general to the specific the sources that predominated among the literature were letters, diaries, camp reports and other official documents that have survived from both sides as well as neutral parties. A major alteration in approach taken by those scholars who focused in on camp libraries was parsing these sources for commentary specifically pertaining to libraries, a slightly more daunting task.

During this same period a handful of library specific articles did appear and provided some answers to the above questions. Among the first was Ilkka Makinen in 1993 with “Libraries in Hell: Cultural Activities in Soviet Prisons and Labor Camps from the 1930s to the 1950s.” While many of the individuals imprisoned in the Soviet Union during these decades were natives deemed criminals or enemies of the state by Joseph Stalin and his associates, Makinen’s work provides a wonderful example of how a historian can utilize the establishment of libraries in prison camps to showcase the mindset of the prisoners and what attracted them as readers. Many of the titles are Russian in origin with certain well known artists including Chekov and Tolstoy as well as more local serials. With “Libraries in Hell” the motif of camp libraries and their collections as means of diversion, improving moral, and mental escapes become the central themes of the scholarship.

The first principle text dedicated to World War II prison camp libraries (an article had appeared in 1997 about prison camp libraries in World War I) was by David Shavit, “‘The Greatest Morale Factor Next to the Red Army’: Books and Libraries in American and British Prisoners of War Camps in Germany during World War II.” Using a quote from an American servicemen’s diary, Shavit directs the reader through his title to grasp the importance of access to books and a quasi-library system to Allied POWs in Germany. Where previous authors had noted the existence of POW camp libraries, Shavit provides details on the daily operations and propels the reader into the camp libraries through POW writings. Although the focus is on the camp’s themselves, details are provided for the near-continuous operations occurring in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland to ensure an adequate supply of books, materials for book repairs, and that the books being sent would make it through rather than being discarded by censors of both armies.

During both World Wars the Australian Army organized official libraries under the umbrella of the Australian Army Education Service (AAES) a forerunner of the current Royal Australian Education Corps. Australian soldiers in the field had access to a greater number of
books than many of their counterparts. This extended to some of the prison camps where Australians were held including Changi Camp in Singapore, noted for having one of the largest libraries among World War II prisoner of war camps. The premier work on Australian soldiers and military libraries is A. Laugesen’s piece from 2006 “Finding “Another Great World”: Australian Soldiers and Wartime Libraries.” Unlike Shavit, Laugesen is not completely rooted in the prisoner of war camps but dedicates a section of his writing to them, to provide a complete overview of the importance and use of libraries by Australian soldiers in the two World Wars.

There is not an extensive literature on prisoner of war camp libraries. However, in recent years more researchers are turning to these libraries as another means of studying World War II and the experiences of the common soldiers. These studies can also provide insight from a library angle showcasing the importance of libraries to modern society, mental health, and their use as a means of overcoming difficult situations.
References


Excerpt from the diary of Corporal Lewis Mitchell (25), 97th Bombardment Group 8th Bomber Command; January 23, 1943

Prisoner of War – Stalag Luft I, Barth, Germany

Another snowy day. Get up, get out, roll call, all present and accounted for, back in, wait around, all clear. The monotony of it all could drive a man nuts, but the boys don’t let you get that far in. Frank’s got his mouth organ for a tune or Harris, good ol’ Harris, gives us a little Shakespearian sonnet. Took the guards a while to grasp that it wasn’t code or nothing just a little love ditty, turns out the head sergeant before the war was one of them academics at the University of Berlin teaching literature so he talked it all out and fixed to get Harris a copy of Shakespeare so they could compare notes. Somehow that had got left out of the deliveries, strange that seeing as the Brits seem to have at least a dozen copies per plane they send up. Odd that those never get delivered to the camp library, though maybe the commandant is just not a fan of the bard. Perhaps for the Bosch its Wagner or the Grims or nothing, though they seem alright with histories and natural things.

Great, winds come up so the windows blows open and now snows all over the table. There goes Fred and Jim’s chess game; Jim had that queen right where he wanted but now its rolling under his bunk.

“Darn it Frank, put down that organ and close that dang window!” Jim can’t stand when he loses and here he was about to win.

Frank shuts the window but soon the door will open and Sargent Schultz will come to collect some poor saps for yard detail. Luckily I did my share yesterday so soon as he shows and goes I will head off to get a look at the new Red Cross book load, maybe they finely got Darwin’s Origin of Species been wanting to get at that since I finished the general biology text from California. Might as well get a look at the original argument before I judge the later stuff. Also good to give myself a little escape from winter in Barth and get to the tropic, might see a few turtles on my imaginary trip. Better to be in off the coast of Ecuador than the Baltic Sea, though who knows maybe one of these days we will see the Red Star coming from over the waves.

Sargent Schultz shows up right on schedule, 8am sharp, grabs his men and they are off into the snow to make the camp look more presentable. Supposedly some bigshot from down the line is showing up for an inspection tour, not a Swiss delegate from the Protecting Powers but not an SS man either. Just some Luftwaffe bureaucrat who will sign off on what he sees and doesn’t see, we may get praised or punished, but what’s the point in worrying as not much has changed in the 5 months I have been here since being shot down over Dusseldorf. But with Schultz and gang in tow gone, time to head over for the recreation hall and the small amount of leisure I can get in the books.

I set out accompanied by Jim, Frank, and Todd. Jim and Todd are brushing up on their teaching theories so when the war ends they can get right back into the classroom. I don’t know about Frank but I am pretty sure he likes the feel of the library plain and simple, it does have a bit more
of a homey type feel for those of us who went to college and I hear his folk are pretty well to do
so perhaps his home was filled with books too. We only had a couple of hours in the morning to
devote to reading, not necessarily an issue seeing as otherwise we would of run out of books to
read and reread weeks ago. The ‘librarians’ can only repair the books so fast and new books
don’t come in as quickly as we would like. Though rather have them take time then get those
player piano like works we used to get, those censors sometimes get out of hand. Occasionally
someone runs across a mystery that is going to remain a mystery to all of us seeing as you can’t
make out the story with whole chunks missing.

We get to the rec hall, had to pass by Corporal Markus who can’t quite stand the library thinking
his own brother now being held in the states is just being used to dig up dirt and moving it to put
it back in the ground. Now I am sure that is not what the captured Germans are doing but seeing
as I do not really know or could prove it best to leave it alone. Once we got inside I headed
straight for the science shelf and rejoiced to find Darwin right where he should be. I know my
old science teacher would be shocked to see me here reading a science text by my own choice
but when you have a better teacher you have a more inspired pupil. Luckily I got there when I
did, seems I am not the only one interested in evolution seeing as about three men came in
during the period, went to the shelf and then turned toward me asking for the book when I was
finished. Sorry fellas, it’s going to take more than a couple of hours for me to finish this work.

I was able to make a dent in the work by the time Corp. Markus told us we had to return to
barracks before mess call. I made sure to note where I left off and went to grab a loaner from the
bin for a little night reading. I grabbed one at random and now I get to see what mess some
British detective has to get his people out of this time. Here’s hoping its more exciting than the
last one, who could be that frightened of a dog?

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Lawrence got out of the cooler this afternoon. First thing he does? Come over to my bunk and
see if I still have that ratty old Washington biography he was reading. Sure I still had it, wasn’t
going to be the one to hand that back to the ‘librarians,’ someone else can have that discussion.
Apparently he got pulled from it just as he reached the good stuff, here comes the Revolution!
The beatings he gave those Hessians sure look goods while we sit here in under the eyes of their
cousins. Boy wouldn’t it something if the army pulled a Trenton on Barth? Yeah, yeah fairy tale
ending, sheesh what got that into my head? Oh right, Tommy came in talking about princesses,
dragons, and magical swords. If the Brits still had Arthur I guess we would be out of here
quicker.
We considered ourselves lucky. While we would have preferred a victory of course, getting stuck in this place was better than being shipped inland or lost at sea. Far better to be stuck here than having to go work on that bloody railway through Burma.

Who knows how long we will be stuck here? Rumors of the war are few and far between. One day we hear Americans are running wild through the islands, next the Japanese are in Victoria and California. I doubt the rumors but after a time, these Japanese staff keep dragging us back into the war.

Escape from this world would be tremendous yet there appears very little we can do, where would you run? So we try for what we can. The chapel was completed this week and Warren painted a marvelous mural for us. A great place to read if you ask me, though they keep us so tight to the cells that’s there little time to enjoy this wonder.

Oh, the time between calisthenics and forced work are so fleeting yet I would not trade them. The library, or rather the bare cell no larger than my own that I share with the lads, is the other wonder of our camp. Filled with books that were here before the war or gathered from elsewhere since the occupation began, it’s the finest library that our men can use though the works pale to what the AAES provided. But the selection is just as good, easily enough to escape from this life for just a while. Oh the wonders of the book, literature is our life where many before did not appreciate the written word. The Bard of Avon may be the pride of England but we can count as our own our own word smiths. Robbery Under Arms continues to be counted among the most used work. Ah love, danger, and the bush are what one yearns for in this jungle prison. Though his story starts no better than our own stuck in jail before he is executed, hopefully we receive a better fate.

Passing from the cell, I head across the yard to the library. Luckily no one else is in there now, I can take my time to peruse the texts for just the right novel. The choice is narrowed only slightly by language, a clear connection to home. Among the works in English I may yet find something I have yet to read, though each day those odds decrease. Maybe I need to ask down the line, see what has been borrowed.

I see among the piles though an American text on their Civil War, guess I will have a go at reading up on their little brotherly spat. Better than another romp through the woods of Scotland on the way to deal with that treacherous Macbeth. So I grabbed the biography of Gen. Lee and head back across the compound, playing demur to not attract unwarranted attention. I pass a guard but he seems more interested in the actions of others down the path, it looks like another group is being moved out of camp, the poor bastards.
Excerpt from the diary of Corporal Wilfried Schumacher (20), 155th Rifle Regiment, 90th Light Infantry Division, Afrika Korps; June 1, 1944

Prisoner of War – Camp Perry, Port Clinton, Ohio

We finished planting the bushes for that camp beautification project today, why we are wasting our time with this work they will never explain. Always some excuse just to put us to work, though better they say than what our comrades are doing in the west where there is only corn. All day corn, all night corn. At least here we have the lake though they do not allow us much opportunity to utilize it, fearful of escapes. But why would we go to Canada? South I hear there are Germans who might welcome one more from Bradenburgh but that is but a dream. Maybe this war will end, though writing that statement every day is becoming more and more of a chore.

Rather my time is better spent preparing for that day, continuing my study of mathematics for the university exams. Wondrous news greeted us upon our return! The academies in Germany have sent through the Red Cross the requirements for our work here to translate into credit back home. Now my classwork that I left behind will not be wasted! Though it may be difficult to return to the University of Heidelberg perhaps I could get back through Munich or Berlin, though papa may be unwilling to see me go to that city. Of course it matters less if what they say is true, that the cities are burning. Why must they attack the citizens?

But that is a topic for other days, listening to Wilhelm speak of the ethics is such a struggle. I must spend more time in the library to escape him. There is an escape. The lessons on book binding are proving more of use and interest than I had previously expected. It is especially necessary since we still do not have enough books. So few are sent and even fewer are allowed in. I understand that the Americans are organizing movements to send books to their captured in Germany, perhaps the people are unable to provide these gifts or the blockade denies their transport. All we have to rely on is the YMCA and they do not have enough here in Ohio I must assume. We are luckier for access to works in German than the Italians, where the Italian immigrants have gone it must not be here.

I am working through the On Formally Undecidable Propositions of Principia Mathematica and Related Systems, it is wonderful that the university allows for such advanced works though it would be better in the original German. These Americans butcher the translation, it is more difficult than it should be. Kurt Gödel is a genius of the Germanic race, so why can I not grasp the principles he so clearly presents? Maybe my background studies are not as solid as I had previously surmised. This is when a greater library collection would prove most beneficial, or at the very least one of those who run the store to know what they are talking about when it comes to higher math. I may have to ask Sebastian for more assistance, though he tends to complicate what I do not already understand and what I at least think I know.

Oh but tomorrow is another day, another opportunity for me to learn.

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Wilfried set aside his diary to focus on his self-assigned homework. For a twenty year old the opportunity to improve his worth while sitting in prison camp was a way to get out of the war for just a bit of time. He preferred it compared to the usual entertainment. After a while American propaganda films held no interest. Math was a different world, one that left the war behind, far behind.

As he worked through theorems the others in the barracks occupied themselves with other activities. Wilhelm continued to lecture those at the south end on the morality of war and the justification of conflict that had led to them all being held a world away from their homes, homes that might be burning at that very instant. The talk attracted fewer and fewer numbers each week as others simply lost interest in the topic. There was hope that a new delivery of books the next day would provide an alternative, although the last delivery contained little novels instead mainly language books.

It would soon be time for lights out and Wilfried saw little hope of making much headway with his problem. Perhaps it was time to switch tracks and read something more light hearted. He searched through the bunks to find Harald and his copy of the *Canterbury Tales*. The quest though proved unsuccessful, for the work had been left out in the rain by a careless reader, ruining it for others. Once again the shortage of books came back to haunt the enthusiastic reader.