

MORMON PIONEER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA (MPNHA)

For more information:

Monte Bona

Director, Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area

801-699-5065

Email: montebona@hotmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 7, 2016



CCC/POW camp restoration in Salina tells incredible story, needs public support

Thanks to dedicated volunteers, a former Citizens Conservation Corps/Prisoner of War camp near Salina in northern Sevier County, the site of what is known as the Midnight Massacre, is being restored to near-original condition.

The impetus for the project came from Salina Mayor Dustin Deaton, who had the dream of turning the buildings (which were being used to store city property) into a museum.

“It’s an important part of our history and it shouldn’t be forgotten,” Deaton said.

Built to house CCC employees during the Great Depression, the camp gained notoriety during World War II when it was being used to as a POW camp for 250 German prisoners.

(At that point, all but three of the original CCC buildings had been moved to the Japanese internment camp at Topaz, near Delta.)

On July 8, 1945, two months after the war ended in Europe, Private Clarence Bertucci, a guard stationed at the camp, opened fire with a .30-caliber machine gun on 43 tents where the POWs were sleeping.

In 15 seconds Bertucci peppered the barracks with 250 rounds because, he later said, he “just didn’t like Germans.” He killed six POWs and injured 23, three of whom later died at the Salina hospital. Bertucci was later declared insane by a military panel and sent to a New York mental hospital.

Deaton dismisses criticism from people who consider the incident a stain on the history of Salina and say the camp shouldn’t be restored.

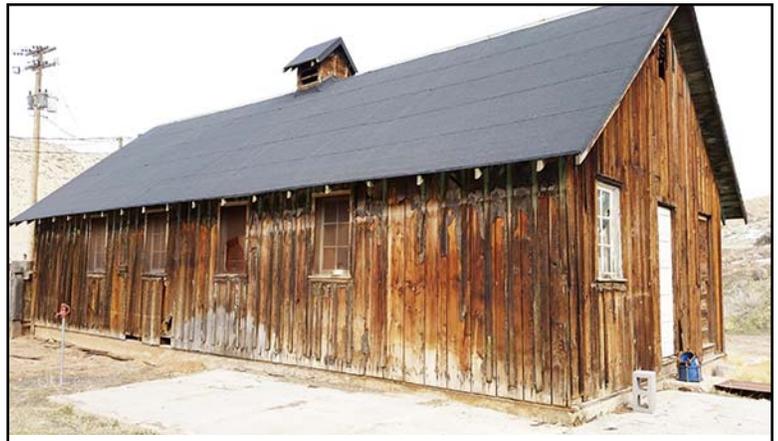
“The individual who created the problem wasn’t from our area; he was just stationed here. What needs to be remembered about that night is that the citizens of Salina pulled together and carried the injured prisoners seven blocks to the hospital and cared for them there,” he said.

Deaton approached Dee Olson, a retired engineer and someone with a reputation for getting a job done right, to spearhead the project.

So far, Olson and his trusty band, including his daughter Tami Clark who has a degree in interior design and has studied historical preservation and restoration, are exceeding all expectations.

Over the past several months, the group has transformed the buildings from glorified storage sheds to near-original condition. Their goal is to have the project finished by July, but it all depends on the donations that come in.

The first building to be restored was the commander’s quarters and office, which included a kitchen, shower, bedroom, dining



The Salina CCC/POW camp restoration project is bringing an important piece of history back to life.



Volunteers from the community have pitched in to help on the project.

“Energetic Great Depression-era young men from crowded cities across America came West in response to President Roosevelt’s call to conserve America’s great natural resources,” MPNHA Director Monte Bona says. “They ate, slept, laughed, worked and played in these important buildings, which are being restored to help tell their story.”

“Those young men, many of whom served in WWII, would have never imagined that this place of memories would become a POW camp, a place where enemies of war would wait out the great conflict. History and our heritage are full of irony.”

As a small rural city, Salina hasn’t been in a position to donate funds, Mayor Deaton said, but instead has donated labor in the form of crews who have worked on the project many times.

Donations have come from unexpected places including a recent \$10,000 check from the family of Bert and Doris Olsen, formerly of Axtell, a town just north of Salina.

If local volunteers get the remaining funding in time, they can probably get the job done by their target date, Tami Clark said. It’s just that the team’s focus and skills are on restoration, not on fundraising. The volunteers do have a Facebook page, and the city is accepting donations at city hall.

As the group prepares to bring the museum to life, they need of items from the period, including office furniture and equipment, WWII uniforms and items related to the war, tools and other items for the motor pool building, and anything related to the CCC.

At present, the only thing the group has representing the CCC era is a hat with a CCC logo, local historian Norm Rollingson said.

Once it’s finished, the museum will be open for tours by appointment and on city holidays, Deacon said.

“There’s a lot of history in these small towns to participate in and learn about,” he said. “It’s a great family event to be able to go see theses historic buildings and teach the children about what happened there.”

Tours may for media outlets be arranged by contacting Linda Petersen at (801) 554-7513. For more information, contact Tami Clark at 817-903-1710 or MPNHA Director Monte Bona at (801) 699-5065.

To donate or lend items for the museum, you can contact Norm Rollingson at (307) 413-6498.

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The Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area includes 400 miles of glorious scenic byways, a vast array of wildlife, the best of western living, cattle and sheep ranches, and colorful mountain vistas, all within a trip on Utah Heritage Highway 89.

area and office space. It will be staged like it was originally. A display honoring the POWs who were shot during the July 1945 incident will be placed in the kitchen.

The second building, originally a bunk house for CCC crews and later a barracks for guards at the POW camp, will contain a model of what the camp looked when it housed the POWs as well as an area to show a movie about the camp’s history.

Work is just beginning on the third building, which was a motor pool and repair shop. The group has already restored an original WWII Jeep and Army truck to be displayed there.

Of the \$103,000 needed for the project, the team has received about \$70,000 in donations from groups and individuals, including \$25,000 from the Snow College Foundation and Mormon Pioneer Heritage Area (MPNHA). Salina is located in the heritage area.



This original photo shows one of the injured POWs being loaded onto an ambulance.

