

Week set to honor local World War II refugees

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Seventy years ago, World War II refugees started to arrive at a temporary hostel at the Scattergood Friends School campus in West Branch.

From April 1939 to March 1943, 186 refugees, including 23 children, from Nazi-occupied Western Europe came to the hostel while the school was closed because of economic hardships.

The Cedar County Historical Society will commemorate the arrival of the first refugees with a week of events beginning Sunday.

"It's amazing how many people I speak with who don't know this event happened in Cedar County," museum coordinator Sandy Harmel said. "We need to educate people that it took place. The story needs to be told and retold so we don't forget it."

Two TRACES "bus-eums" -- 40-foot school buses converted into mobile museums -- will come to the Cedar County Historical Society Museum grounds, 1094 Highway 38 N., just north of Tipton, as part of the week's events.

TRACES, based in St. Paul, Minn., is a nonprofit educational organization that works to gather, preserve and present the stories of people from the Midwest and Germany or Austria who encountered each other during World War II, according to the organization's Web site.

On Sunday, TRACES Bus-eum No. 3 "Held in the Heartland: German POWs in the Midwest, 1943-46" will be on the museum grounds from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Scattergood Friends School will host a reunion the same day for former guests, staff, descendents and other interested parties. Michael Luick-Thrams, author of "Out of Hitler's Reach: The Scattergood Hostel for European Refugees, 1939-1943" and the founder/director of TRACES, will present a slide show about the hostel during the event. At 6 p.m. Sunday, Steve Feller will present "WWII POW Camp Money Used in Iowa" at the museum. Feller, a physicist who also teaches at Coe College, has researched the various kinds of camp money used during World War II for 30 years.

The public opening and dedication of the "Far From Hitler's Reach" permanent exhibit at the Cedar County Historical Museum will be at 7 p.m. Wednesday. Luick-Thrams will present a slide show and program about the hostel.

From 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. April 18, TRACES Bus-eum No. 1 "Behind Barbed Wire: Midwest POWs in Nazi Germany" will be on the museum grounds.

The "Far From Hitler's Reach" exhibit is a life-size replica of an early 1940s house, including a small porch and inside furnishings. Starting on the outside of the house, winding through the inside and out the back, panels tell the complete story about the Scattergood Hostel through texts and pictures, Harmel said.

Scattergood Friends School, a college preparatory boarding high school, was founded in 1890, according to the school's Web site. In the wake of the Great Depression, leaders closed the school in 1931 and reopened it in September 1944.

The American Friends Service Committee suggested in 1938 using the Scattergood campus as a hostel for European refugees, according to the school's Web site.