

Seneca Army Depot Story – Impact Upon the Local Community
by Seneca County Historian Walter Gable

All people are affected in some way by the nation's involvement in a war. Seneca County was affected by World War II, however, more than most sections of the country because the county was the site of two new military institutions in the early 1940's. One was the Sampson Naval Station. The other was the Seneca Ordnance Depot, the subject of this article.

One major impact was discussed in a previous article in this series of articles on the Seneca Army Depot—the forced relocation of over 100 farm families to make way for the actual site of the munitions depot.

The impact on the community by an influx of so many temporary workers was also very great. The proprietor of Kendaia's General Store reported his business increased 400%. In the nearby village of Romulus, there was an increase in sales of 150 to 200%. Five new businesses were opened, including a 24-hour restaurant. The Romulus Post Office's mail volume doubled, much of it due to workers sending money home by postal orders. Geneva's population doubled within a year. The children of the workers enrolled in area schools and often switched to another school as their dads found a new temporary residence.

The towns of Varick and Romulus suffered a loss in their taxable property base. The Depot took 4,128.9 acres in Varick, causing a \$2,414,600 loss in tax assessment. The 6,006.8 acres in Romulus caused a loss of \$1,802,580 in tax assessment. Even the Seneca County Board of Supervisors had to delay its budget preparations for 1942 because of the sudden loss in taxable property.

Completion of the Depot construction hardly came just in time. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, brought the United States actively into World War II. In July 1943 there were 2511 civilian employees at the Depot, coming from 60 nearby communities. There were more than 600 women Ordnance workers (called "wows") operating trucks and fork lifts, etc. Beginning in May 1944, over 260 Italian Prisoners of War were employed at the Depot, one of 184 such war-prisoner units at 60 stations in the U.S. These war prisoners were paid wages provided for all POWs, according to the Geneva Convention.