

# PREJUDICE & MEMORY: A HOLOCAUST EXHIBIT

## 1 About the Exhibit

Stand at the “gate” to enter the Holocaust exhibit.

I’m Renate Frydman, project director and curator for the “Prejudice & Memory” exhibit.

In the years since 1960 when I first began speaking about the Holocaust, audiences have most responded to the personal items – a singular family picture, a passport with a red letter “J,” a letter stating when and where grandparents were sent to be killed.

The Holocaust exhibit at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force brings the millions down to the singular faces. They are your neighbors from all parts of the greater Dayton area. Now you know someone living right next to you could be a survivor, a liberator or a “righteous Gentile.”

In collecting these many pictures and artifacts, I learned once again stories of incredible courage, of horror and sacrifices, of loss and rebirth.

I am amazed at the trust contributors had in giving me the only picture of a parent or family member to use in this exhibit. I tried to treat each one with the reverence it deserves.



I am grateful for the benefactors who made this exhibit possible and to the Boonshoft Museum of Natural History for having the vision to premier this exhibit in September 1997.

The two-year period of collection and of building this exhibit was intense and fulfilling. We present it to the people of this area as a memory of the past and a hope that prejudice will diminish in the future.

With the firm belief in the resilience of the human spirit and the hope for a better tomorrow, I ask that you join me in *Tikum Olam*, helping heal the world.



## 2 Introduction

“Prejudice & Memory: A Holocaust Exhibit” is made up of the photographs, artifacts and memories of people who live in the Dayton, Ohio, area. Among the contributors are concentration camp survivors and their families, liberators – soldiers who helped to free those held in concentration camps – and “righteous Gentiles” – non-Jews who helped Jews during the Holocaust. It is one of the few exhibits in the U.S. compiled to demonstrate one community’s connection

with this terrible event and to affirm the belief that learning about the Holocaust is the first step toward preventing its recurrence.

## 3 History of the Holocaust

Stand on the opposite side of the granite wall of photographs.

Within this exhibit is a wall of photos and other artifacts that provide an in-depth history of the Holocaust.

The first panel, titled “Prejudice and Lies,” provides an historic overview of the Holocaust. Survivors of the World War II Holocaust and their families are living among us. They are European Jews who have survived the Nazi effort to systematically exterminate the world’s Jewish population between 1933 and 1945. Their stories and artifacts shared in this exhibit remind us that we must be ever watchful to prevent its recurrence to people everywhere.

Germans were proud of their cultural heritage and some came to believe that they were superior to other people and nations. After losing World War I and being forced to pay heavy reparations, many Germans were angry because people were out of work and food was scarce. High inflation impoverished the middle class as people were forced to bring wheelbarrows full of money to pay for a loaf of bread. The Germans looked for someone to blame for the loss of the war and for their troubles.

The Nationalist Socialist Workers Party, or Nazi Party, led by Adolf Hitler, gave the German people a comfortable answer. He blamed the Jews. One in six Jews had fought and 12,000 died alongside other Germans in World War I. Many others received awards for heroism. He claimed the Jews were intent on destroying the German people. Logic was replaced by emotions. The truth was replaced by old lies and prejudice.

## 4 “The Terror Begins”

Hitler came to power legally in January 1933, promising to remove Jewish influence from German life. In April 1933, Germans burned Jewish books and forced most Jewish government employees and professionals to leave their jobs. Jewish life was further restricted by September 1935 by the passage of the Nuremberg Laws. These laws identified Jews by the religion of their grandparents. Some people who practiced Christianity discovered they were now classified as Jews who lost all rights of citizenship. Hitler also decided to “improve the purity of the Aryan race” by killing all German adults and children who had physical or mental disabilities.

After 1937 Jewish children were not allowed to go to school, swim in public pools or even play on public playgrounds. Germans forced Jews out of their businesses and required them to wear a yellow star for identification. As things got worse, many left Germany but others stayed behind hoping things would get better. Some who wanted to leave could not obtain entry into other countries.



Wikipedia

The Nazis found an excuse to organize large scale violence against the Jewish people. When a Jewish teenager shot a German diplomat in Paris, German authorities immediately instigated mob violence on November 9 and 10, 1938. Thousands of Jewish businesses were destroyed and synagogues burned. So many store windows were smashed and homes ransacked that this night became known as *Kristallnacht* or Night of Broken Glass. Many Jews were beaten and at least 91 killed, and authorities sent over 30,000 Jewish men between the ages of 16 and 60 to concentration camps.

After Germany invaded Poland in 1939, they forced Polish Jews out of their homes and into closed-off neighborhoods called ghettos. Many families had to leave everything behind. They could only bring what they could carry. Food was scarce and the ghettos were very crowded.

In many ghettos, the Germans forced the Jews to work making supplies and munitions for the German army. Many Jews were worked to death. Others died of starvation or were shot trying to escape. Jews were rounded up and sent to death camps regularly.



Wikipedia

## 5 "The Final Solution"

In June 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Following the army were special mobile killing units known as *Einsatzgruppen*. They rounded up Jews and murdered them. More than one million Jews and millions of Soviet citizens were killed.

In January 1942 Nazi leaders decided to kill all Jews living in the areas occupied by the German army. This project, which became a national priority for Germans, was known as the "Final Solution to the Jewish Problem." Within a few months, the Germans began to empty the ghettos and force Jews into crowded boxcars. They were

transported, without food or water, to death camps. Many died during the trip. When the trains arrived a selection occurred: camp guards killed women, children and the aged with poison gas. Only the able-bodied young remained alive to work as slave laborers. The Germans forced them to carry the victims' bodies and sort out their belongings. When they were no longer needed, these men and women were killed.

In addition to Jews, the Nazis sent other people to concentration camps and slave labor camps. Among these were political prisoners, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, persons with various disabilities, and ethnic minorities like Gypsies and persons of color. Many people were killed because they did not work hard enough. Others were tortured and killed for no reason other than racial hatred.

Some Jews fought back. They joined partisan units that lived in the forests and attacked Germans. Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto rebelled and fought until the Germans finally burned the ghetto down. In the Treblinka death camp, the Jews rioted and several hundred escaped. At Auschwitz, a Jewish group attacked the guards and destroyed some crematory ovens.

## 6 Liberation

By May 1945, Nazi Germany had collapsed. American and Soviet troops liberated the camps and were shocked at the conditions they found. They were sickened by the sight of thousands of dead bodies stacked on top of each other. Most of the survivors resembled living skeletons.

Even after they were freed, the Jews had problems. Most survivors had no homes to return to and so they immigrated to places like the United States, where they could start a new life.



The word "Holocaust" means destruction by fire. It is a reminder that many books, synagogues and people were consumed by fire as the Nazi leaders killed six million Jews





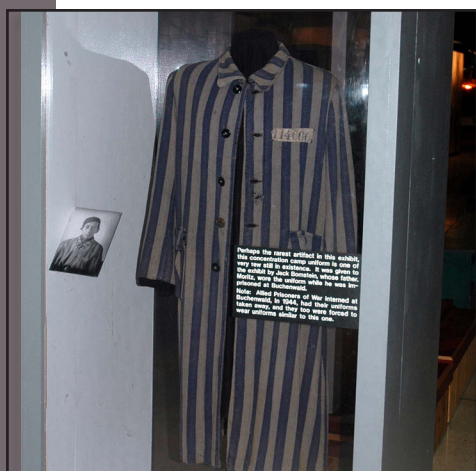
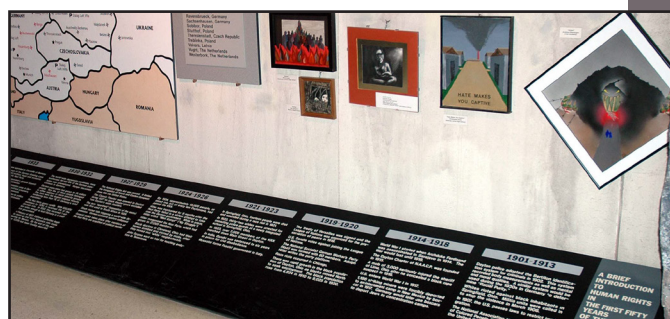
and millions of others in their efforts to achieve racial purity. More people died in the Holocaust than now live in the state of Ohio.

Today the survivors, their children and their grandchildren are scattered among many nations. They are our neighbors, and they stand witness to what happened when racial and religious prejudice is encouraged by people who offer simple answers based on lies and hatred. It is our obligation to the millions of persons who died in this great human Holocaust to see that this does not happen again.

On the reverse side of this wall, you can view photos and other artifacts that represent local histories of the Holocaust.

## 7 Timeline

Along the floor path of the Holocaust exhibit, you will find a timeline of a brief history of human rights in the 20th century. This retrospective includes not only issues relevant to the Holocaust, but to all matters of human rights from across the globe from 1901 to 1950.



## 8 Concentration Camp Uniform

Move to the long striped jacket in the glass exhibit case.

Perhaps the rarest artifact in this exhibit, this concentration camp uniform is one of very few still in existence. It was given to the exhibit by Jack Bomstein, whose father Moritz wore the uniform while he was imprisoned at Buchenwald.

Allied Prisoners of War, or POWs, interned at Buchenwald in 1944, had their U.S. uniforms taken away and were forced to wear uniforms similar to this one.

## 9 Places of Ha'Shoah

Move to the grouping of photos on the left side of this exhibit.

These buildings and places represent “Places of Ha'Shoah” – places where the events of the Holocaust took place.

Tucson photographer Cy Lehrer used heavy black borders and film base to enhance the dramatic effect of his imagery. This technique encourages the viewer to experience the starkness of the photo and suggests an environment that would allow for incomprehensible crimes to take place.



## 10 Fragments of the Budapest Ghetto

Near the “Places of Ha'Shoah” images is another grouping titled “Fragments of the Budapest Ghetto.”

These scenes are from an old Jewish section of Pest, Hungary, a district of 19th century buildings near the Danube River. Here the Nazis established a large ghetto in June 1944, several months after occupying Hungary and deporting virtually every Jew living in the provinces.

Budapest's 220,000 Jews were forced into 2,000 houses marked with a yellow star. In October, Hungarian Fascists began their program of anti-Jewish violence, even as Soviet troops approached the city. In November, thousands of Jews were shot and thrown into the Danube and preparations were made for massive deportation of those remaining. The Soviets occupied Budapest on January 18, 1945, and an estimated 120,000 Jews were saved.

Dominating the Jewish section is the Moorish-style Dohany Street Synagogue, a huge, ornate, twin-towered structure inaugurated in 1859 by the city's Neolog (Reform) congregation. The largest active synagogue in Europe, it seats 3,000 and has undergone a full restoration that was completed in 2009. During the war, the church was fenced off and used as a concentration camp for Jews massed prior to deportation. In the arcade courtyard are individual and mass graves of thousands of Budapest's ghetto victims. Another courtyard contains a memorial to Hungarian Holocaust victims, a weeping willow tree created in granite and steel, by Hungarian sculptor Irma Varga.

On nearby Sip Street are found the offices of the Central Board of Hungarian Jews, the Budapest Jewish Community, the World Jewish Congress and the American Joint Distribution Committee. The immediate neighborhood offers an Orthodox Mikvah, kosher restaurants, grocers and wine shops, Jewish gift shops and three Jewish schools.

## 11 A Liberator's Jacket

Go to the glass exhibit case containing a leather pilot's jacket.

This jacket belonged to Sergeant Delbert Cooper. In 1943 Sergeant Cooper served as a soldier in the U.S. Army's 14th regiment, 71st Infantry Division. His story can be heard in the video in this exhibit. He was among the first Americans to enter and assist in liberating Gunzkirchen Lager, which was part of the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp in Austria.



## 12 The Violin

Move to the violin on exhibit to learn Robert Kahn's history. Mr. Kahn recounted his experience in a letter:

"59 years ago on November 9, 1938, a teenager 15 years old, experienced the most violent, barbaric display of anti-Semitic acts ever recorded in history. I was that teenager!

The day began by witnessing the purposeful destruction of the only Jewish school in the area, while people cheered and applauded. It was my school.

Then, as I hurried home on my bike, I arrived to see a mob of Nazis, in brown and black uniforms throwing our furniture and other belongings through windows which had been smashed, and off the balcony. In the yard below, a huge bonfire consumed everything that was dear to us, while the Nazi hoards and mob of onlookers sang and shouted insults at us, the Jews.

While our apartment was being destroyed and ransacked, mother was locked up in one room, crying loudly. My father was being beaten up in the hallway, begging for mercy. When I told them to stop, they took me into my room, threw my violin at me, took me to the balcony and ordered me to play happy German songs. I was scared, crying, in agony but play I did to the amusement of the crowd. My father was taken to Dachau concentration camps. Our two beautiful synagogues were destroyed.

Before I fled Germany, and eventual freedom in America, I hid the violin in the attic of our apartment. When I returned from military service in the U.S. Army and the war was won over Hitler, I wrote to the janitor of our apartment in Mannheim, Germany. He found the hidden violin and sent it to me in America.

This is the violin which shares all the memories of the past with me. At one time it could vibrate to imitate the happy flight of song birds; today it is only a reminder of a once dehumanized and terrified Jewish boy."

Signed, Robert Kahn, September 15, 1997





### 13 A Child's Prized Possession

The next artifact is an accordion contained in a glass exhibit case.

This artifact introduces us to the *Kindertransport*, a program created in 1938, that allowed 10,000 predominantly Jewish children from Nazi Germany, Austria and Poland to flee to the United Kingdom. Those children were placed in foster homes, hostels and schools. They were often the only members of their families to survive the Holocaust.



This accordion allows the museum to share the story of Gertrude Wolff, one of those 10,000 children.

Children leaving on the *Kindertransport* train could only take two medium-sized suitcases, but 14-year-old Gertrude Wolff boarded the train with her little sister on May 17, 1939, with one suitcase and one accordion. The accordion on display was a gift from her parents. Refusing to leave her prized possession behind, Gertrude used the accordion as her second suitcase.

Gertrude's parents managed to escape Germany, but her father was interned by the British. She came to the United States with her sister and mother in 1939. After World War II, she married Robert Kahn, whose violin is also on display in this exhibit.



### 14 Henry WYROBNIK

Go to the photo cut out of the man showing a concentration camp tattoo on his forearm.

This man is Henry WYROBNIK. Henry was born in Lodz, Poland. He, his parents, siblings and many other family members were put into the Lodz Ghetto by the Nazis until August 1944, when he and his family were sent to Auschwitz.

Henry shared some reflections of his experiences. As the Allied Armies approached, he and thousands of others were taken on a Death March beginning on January 15, 1945. They were given only small amounts of bread. They marched for two weeks, day and night. If someone lagged behind or walked out of line, they were shot immediately by German soldiers. They were put on open coal trains, other trains were hooked on, and they spent two weeks on the train. They had nothing to eat but snow.

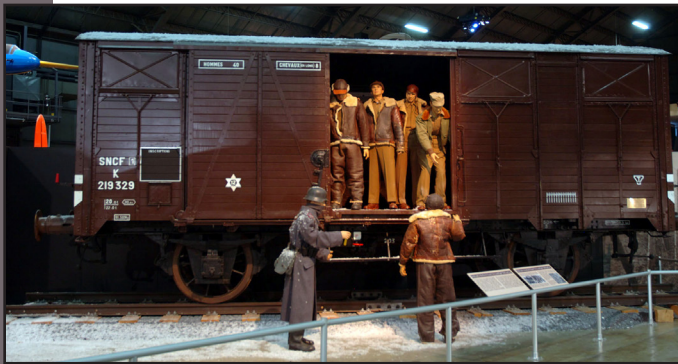
In Czechoslovakia, people threw food to the trains as they went through the countryside, but the Czech people were shot by the SS, a quasi-military unit that serviced as Hitler's personal guard, if they were caught throwing food. One hundred eight people were on Henry's train, "packed like sardines," and at the end only 35 remained. The train finally



took them to Mauthausen. There they were forced to bury bodies in mass graves. In Mauthausen, they had no clothes, no food and were sitting in crowded barracks. At the end of three or four weeks, they were sent to Gunskirchen, a sub-camp of Mauthausen. At the end, Henry says they “spent three weeks without water to drink, living in the woods with mud so deep if you stepped into it, you would sink in.” Many people from other countries were also imprisoned there. They built barracks for 500 people, which were actually a gas chamber.

On May 5, 1945, Gunskirchen was liberated and Henry was freed and eventually sent to a hospital to recuperate. He had lost his whole family, including his parents, one brother and two sisters.

Henry met his wife, Dora, also a survivor, in a Displaced Persons (DP) Camp at Feldafing, Germany. They came to the U.S. in 1949, and he worked for Shillitos, a department store in Cincinnati. Later, he owned his own business and came to Dayton.



## 15 Parallel Tracks to Germany

On the wall you will see photos of railcars. These are called “forty and eights.”

During World War I, many American “Doughboys” traveled to the front in French railcars displaying the notice that each car could carry 40 men or eight horses. Therefore, they quickly became known as “forty and eight”

railcars. In World War II, “forty and eights” again transported supplies and troops to the front, but they also carried new cargo. Millions of Holocaust victims were herded into similar railcars on their way to concentration camps. Many Allied prisoners of war, or POWs, rode to German POW camps in them – sometimes with as many as 90 men forced into each car. “Forty and eight” railcars carried 168 Allied POWs from Paris to Buchenwald concentration camp in August 1944. You will find a “forty and eight” railcar located in our World War II Gallery. This artifact was delivered to the museum in 2001 from Istres Air Base in France.

## 16 Conclusion

Thank you for taking your time to learn about the Holocaust and those persons living in the Dayton area who were affected by this historic and tragic event. Please check the museum’s website to listen to oral histories from people who witnessed these events first-hand. We hope that the sharing of this knowledge will ensure that a similar event is prevented in the future.

## Map of Podcast Locations

