

## **Emergency Refugee Shelter at Fort Ontario: Jewish Haven at Oswego, NY**

"The refugee is like a plant without soil or water."  
-Moses Ibn Ezra, Shirat Yisreal

In August of 1944, close to one thousand refugees from war torn Europe were placed in an internment camp at Fort Ontario to await the outcome of the Second World War. The majority of these refugees were Jewish and had recently been liberated from the persecutions of Naziism in central Europe. Their stay in Oswego was to become an emotional event for the community of Oswego and a political conundrum for the nation. It was not until January of 1946 that the gates of the War Refugee Center were opened and the refugees allowed to become truly free.

In an effort to better understand the plight of the refugees and the mindset of this tragic era, Penfield Library has compiled this study guide and bibliography to assist those interested in the subject. Readers should be aware that a new organization, Safe Haven, Inc., is dedicated to preserving the story about Oswego's involvement and the refugee's experience. Safe Haven's new museum is open and houses valuable resources and artifacts. Check its web pages <http://www.oswegohaven.org> for an update on Safe Haven's work and access to some historical material online.

### **Specialized Encyclopedia**

Call numbers refer to locations for titles in Penfield's collection.

Gutman, Israel, ed. 1990. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*. New York: MacMillan Pub. Co.

See entry "Fort Ontario," by Ariel Hurwitz. (Vol. 2, pp. 503-504.) Ref D 804.3 E53 1990

### **Published Books, Monographs and Chapters of Interest**

Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe. "Conditions Causing Flight" and "Extent and Characteristics of the Refugee Movement." *In Refugees in America*. New York: Harper & Brothers Pub. 1947. **D 809 U5 C6 1947**

Feingold, Henry. "The War Refugee Board." In *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. 1970. **D 810 J4 F38 1970**

Friedman, Saul S. "New Agencies: Old Rationalizations." In *No Haven for the Oppressed: United States Policy Toward Jewish Refugees, 1938-1945*. Detroit: Wayne University Press. 1973. **D 810 J4 F75 1973**

Gruber, Ruth. *Haven: the Unknown Story of 1000 World War II Refugees*. New York:

Coward McCann, 1983. [Other reprints available] **D 809 U5 G78 1983**

Gruber, Ruth. *Haven: the Dramatic Story of 1000 World War II Refugees and How They Came to America*. Times/Random House, 2000.

- Lowenstein, Sharon R. *A New Deal for Refugees: The Promise and Reality of Oswego, 1944-1945*. Arbor, MI: UMI. 1985. (Ph.D. dissertation) **D 810 J4 L6 1985**
- Wyman, David S. "The Search for Havens" and "The Fort Ontario Experience." In *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945*. New York: Pantheon. 1984. **D 810 J4 W95 1984**
- Yad Vashem International Historical Conference. *Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust: Proceedings of the Second Yad Vashem International Historical Conference*. April 8-11, 1974. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem. 1977. **D 819 J4 Y29 1974b**

### Primary Sources - Published & Manuscript Material in Penfield Library

- Columbia University Library. New York. *The Varian Fry Papers. The Fort Ontario Refugee Shelter Papers*. Vol. 5, Archives of the Holocaust. Ed. by Karen J. Greenburg. New York: Garland Pub. 1990. **Ref D 809 U5 C726 1990**
- United States Congress. House. Committee on Immigration and Naturalization. *Investigation of Problems Presented by Refugees at Fort Ontario Refugee Shelter*. Hearings, Subcommittee VI, 79th Congress, 1st Session... House Res. 52... June 25 and 26, 1945. **Special Collections D 809 U5 A5 1945c**
- Emergency Refugee Shelter at Fort Ontario. Copies of Shelter's newsletter, oral histories, statistics, news clippings and articles, 1944-1990. **Special Collections. Manuscript Box 131.**
- Fort Ontario. Refugees. Letters to a teacher, Miss Wood, 1944-45. **Special Collections. Manuscript Box 83.**
- Letter. Roosevelt, Eleanor to Joseph P. Lash, 21 September 1944. Published in *A World of Love: Eleanor Roosevelt and Her Friends, 1943-1962* by Joseph P. Lash. Garden City, NY: Doubleday. 1984. (Copy of published letter also in **Special Collections. Manuscript 131, Box 1, Container 4.**)
- Ralph Swetman Papers. Correspondence, petitions, reports, statistics and clippings related to Oswego State Teachers College's cooperation with the refugees at Fort Ontario and President Swetman's involvement with efforts on the refugees' behalf. Includes letters from Joseph Smart and Alexander and Rajko Margulis. (10 folders in box 2, folders 19-29) **Special Collections. 1/4/33.**
- Wyman, David S., ed. *America and the Holocaust: A Thirteen-volume Set Documenting the Acclaimed Book The Abandonment of the Jews...* Vol. 10, *Token Shipment (Oswego Camp)*. New York: Garland Pub. 1989. (Vols. 7-9, and 11 also have numerous sources cited.) **D 804.3 A47 1989**
- Token Shipment: The Story of America's War Refugee Shelter*. [by Edward B. Marks] U.S. Dept. of Interior. War Relations Authority. N.Y.: AMS Press, 1975. Rpt. of 1946. Ed. Vol. 8. **Special Collections JV6601 .R4 U55 1975.**

### Magazine and Journal Articles:

Photocopies of articles can be found in Special Collections

- Keane, Betty. "Behind the Doors of the War Refugee Board." *Answer* 2(4) (March 10, 1944): 5-6.
- "Oswego Welcomes 982 Token Refugees." *American Jewish World* 32(50) (11 August 1944): 1,9.

- Sandrow, Edward T. "The Thousand Who Were Saved." *Congress Weekly* 11(9) (11 August 1944): 9-12. "Refugees Arrive from Europe." *Life* 17(8) (21 August 1944): 25-29.
- "U.S. Admits and Cares for 982 Refugees at Emergency Shelter in Oswego, New York." *Rescue* 1(9) (September, 1944): 7-8.
- Gross, David C. "`Freeport' is Refugee Haven." *American Jewish World* 33(3) (September, 1944): 11-12,69.
- Syrkin, Marie. "At Fort Ontario." *Jewish Frontier* 11(9) (September, 1944): 9-12.
- Wachsman, Z.H. "New World at Oswego." *Answer* 2(10) (November, 1944): 11-13.
- Morehead. "Oswego Refugees Hurt Over Strict Internment [part 1]." *PM* (New York) 26 February 1945.
- Morehead, Eleanor. "Oswego, an Average U.S. Town, Chooses to Ignore its Refugees [part 2]" *PM* (New York), 27 February 1945.
- Karpf, Ruth. "Displaced persons; a U.S.A. Close-up". *Survey Graphic* 34 (June, 1945): 282-284,304.
- Walrath, Jean. "Restrictions Irk Colony of 900 Refugees." *Democrat and Chronicle*, 28 July 1945.
- Jolles, Naomi. "The Fourt R." *Woman's Home Companion*, July 1945: 16, 32.
- Klichefsky, Gertrude. "The Effects of Our Quota Law." *Rescue* 2(718)(July/August, 1945):5.
- "Climax at Fort Ontario." NRS [National Refugee Service] *Community Bulletin*, 6 (August-September 1945).
- "Truman Opens Gates to Refugees." *Christian Century* 63, 2 January 1946: 4.
- Brand, Edward. "Oswego \_ A Study of Liberation." *American Hebrew* 155 (40) (February, 1946): 14-15.
- Palmitesso, Carl. "The Refugees at Fort Ontario." *Publication of the Oswego County Historical Society*. (1953): 65-71.
- Neff, Carol. "A Page in BB's History of Service: the Fort Ontario Refugee Project." *National Jewish Monthly* (May 1980): 22-24.
- Lowenstein, Sharon. "A New Deal for Refugees: The Promise and Reality of Oswego." *American Jewish History* 71(3) (March, 1982): 325-341.
- Baron, Lawrence. "Haven from the Holocaust: Oswego, New York, 1944-1946." *New York History* 64(1) (January, 1983): 5-34.
- Strum, Harvey. "Fort Ontario Refugee Shelter, 1944-1946." *American Jewish History* 73(4) (June,1984): 398-421.
- Strum, Henry. "Token Refuge." *NAHO* 18 (1) (Spring 1985): 20-23.
- Greenberg, Karen J. "A Missed Chance: Reassessing the Fort Ontario Refugee Center." *Hudson Valley Regional Review* 9(1) (1992): 129-137.

#### ***Oswego Palladium Times Newspaper Articles***

- August 7, 1944 Reception Moves Refugees Deeply at Fort Ontario. " p. 4 col 1-6.
- September 5, 1944 More Than 10, 000 Made Inspection of Fort Shelter. " p. 12 col 1-5.
- September 20, 1944 Mrs. Roosevelt Visits Refugee Shelter. " p. 14 col 1-4
- June 25, 1945 Urges Refugees be Given Liberty in This Country. " p. 10 col 1-4.
- January 19, 1946 Last Refugees Will Leave Fort by February 6<sup>th</sup>. " p. 10 col 1-2.

January 24, 1946 Make Plans for Closing Shelter During February. p. 16 col 1-4.  
 January 26, 1946 Must Return Fort Ontario by March 7 to War Department. " p. 4 col 1-3.  
 January 28, 1946 Nearly All of Refugees Will Go by Week-End. p. 4 col 1-3.  
 January 30, 1946 Only 273 Remain at Fort Ontario Refugee Shelter. p. 12 col 3-4  
 February 1, 1946 Largest Group of Refugees to Leave Shelter Saturday. p. 4 col 1-3.

The Oswego County Historical Society has five scrapbooks of newspaper clippings from local and national newspapers, including the Refugee Camp Newsletter, *Ontario Chronicle*, published during the time of their internment.

### Oral History Audiotapes in Penfield's Special Collections

Most of these taped interviews with and about Fort Ontario Refugees were done in connection with the refugees' 40th reunion in NYC in 1984. Some have transcripts and some are available as part of Special Collections - [Digitized Collections](#).

<b>Transcript Folder and Cassette Number</b>	<b>Title/Interviewees</b>	<b>Date, if Known</b>
OH269	"Refugees"/four interviewees	1985?
OH270	Gruber, Bass, Hartmeyer and Greenburg, opening remarks, recognitions, etc. at reunion	1984?
OH271	"Oswego Reunion"/Bass, Gruber, Kramer & Others	Aug. 1984
OH272	Oswego citizens recall center/Simmons, Saunders, Laskie	198?
OH273	Director of Refugee Center/Joseph H. Smart	1984
OH274	Oswego teachers recall/Salisbury, Perry	Nov. 19, 1983
OH275	Refugee: Life before and at Oswego/Walter Greenburg	Jan. 26, 1984
OH276	Immigration issues & "Token shipment"/Author D. Wyman	Sept. 23, 1986
OH277	Segment of 40th Reunion Program	Aug. 1984
OH278	Oswego educators and scout leader recall refugees/Faust, Clark and Dean	Aug. 4 1984
OH279	Oswego citizens recall/Rossiter and Saunders	198?
OH280	Recollections of Refugees/Steffi Steinberg	Jan. 26, 1984
OH281	U.S. Policies & refugees/Michael Dobkowski	Nov. 2, 1983
OH282	Policies & refugees/Author D. Wyman	Apr. 30, 1986
OH283	Author/historian Sharon Lowenstein	July 10, 1990

OH284

Narrated story of the Camp, including  
refugee interviews

198?

### Photographs

Some locally held photographs are available at the Oswego Public Library, the Oswego County Historical Society, and the [web pages of Safe Haven, Inc.](#).

### Videorecordings

WXXI (Television station, Rochester, NY). *Safe Haven*. Produced by C.

Zimmerman; host Robert Clay. 55 min. PBS Video, 1987. **Media D810 J4 S128 1987** - Interviews

with some of the 982 Holocaust survivors interned at Oswego's Fort Ontario 1944-46.

Ulanowski, Chris et al. *Safe Haven 1944-1945*. Oswego, N.Y.. Safe Haven, Inc.;

Learning Resources Center, SUNY Oswego, 1985. **Spec. Coll. D810 J4 S129 1995** -

Interviews with Oswego residents reminiscing about arrival of Jewish refugees to their city.

Doody, Vince. *Safe Haven: 50th Reunion* [Oswego, N.Y.] Safe Haven, Inc, 1994.

**Special Collections D810 J4 S132 1994**. - 16 videocassettes. - Interviews with surviving refugees and local residents, panel discussion, and some other reunion activities.

Technical quality poor on some tapes.

### New York Times Articles re:

#### Refugees held at Fort Ontario, Oswego

*The New York Times Index* from 1944-1946 lists numerous articles on the Jewish Refugees at Fort Ontario under the subject heading "Minorities, Refugees, and Oppressed Groups."

### Other Bibliographies

Edelheit, Abraham and Hershel Edelheit. *Bibliography on Holocaust Literature*.

London: Westview Press. 1986. (Chapter 13 "The Free World Reaction" section entitled "The United States").

Edelheit, Abraham and Hershel Edelheit. *Bibliography on Holocaust Literature:*

*Supplement*. Oxford: Westview Press. 1990. (Chapter 11 "The Reaction of the Free World" section B "The United States and the Holocaust")