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Documentation of the Holocaust in the Maritimes

A small black and white photograph shows a man with a thick shock of white hair standing behind barbed wire holding his infant son in his arms. In another snapshot, his wife sits on the ground with their son in her lap. Another photograph shows a young man leaning from a train window to say goodbye to his mother; would he ever see her again? A Saint John shoemaker receives a tersely-worded telegram from a cousin – the first word they have heard that extended family members have survived. These are some of the few examples of archival materials to be found in the Saint John Jewish Historical Museum, a collection which also includes newspaper clippings and research files.

About a dozen Holocaust survivors made their way to Saint John after the Holocaust. Some came with sponsorships extended by cousins living in the city, others came for professional reasons, such as medical professionals and tailors. Most of the survivors became involved in the life of the Saint John Jewish community, but there were some who felt somewhat isolated because of their wartime experiences.

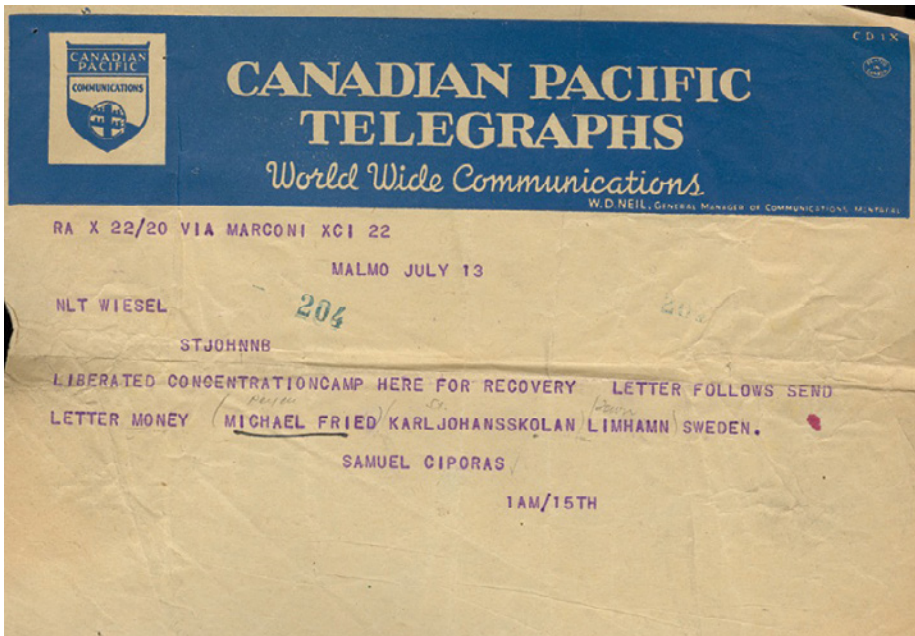
In 2014, the Saint John Jewish Historical Museum decided to create a small exhibition to tell the stories of the survivors who came to the city. We found we had to rely on oral interviews to tell these stories, often with survivors' children or grandchildren. The stories of two survivor families had been recorded in the 1980s, and with the surviving family members' confirmation of details, those stories could be shared. We also recorded interviews with one survivor and with three children of survivors which allowed us to share more stories. The use of personal memoirs (published and through correspondence) and other published works aided us in telling more stories of Holocaust survivors in Saint John.

Albert Featherman was sent to the Lodz ghetto in 1942. When the ghetto was liquidated, he was taken to Auschwitz and then Bergen-Belsen where he was used as a slave labourer. After the war he was sent to a DP camp near Bergen Belsen where he met and married Rose Wiesel who was originally from Hungary and transported to the camps late in the war. Their first child was born in the camp. With the assistance of Rose's cousins, Herman and Joseph Wiesel, the family arrived in Halifax on October 1, 1948. In addition to a recorded interview with Sydney Featherman, the Jewish Museum was also given access to more than 300 family photographs, many of them taken in the camp and at the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) offices.

Rolf Duschenes and his family escaped from Hamburg in 1937. Rolf and his older brother Herbert went to Czechoslovakia as students, where they were among the very last to be issued visas at the Swiss Embassy before it closed. After a harrowing trip they joined their mother and another brother in Geneva, before moving on to England in 1939. There, Rolf was among the many hundreds of young men who

carried German passports who were rounded up after the fall of Dunkirk and sent by ship to internment camps in Canada. After two and a half years of internment in Sherbrooke, Quebec, he was sponsored to study architecture at McGill. Upon graduation he was employed by Ross and MacDonald, a well-known Montreal firm. He was assigned to oversee a project in Saint John and made the decision to move there after much travel. Interestingly, the family chose to store all of their belongings in Hamburg before they left and when family members returned after the war, they were able to reclaim their possessions intact. Among their possessions were many boxes of German books – studies of art, history, literature, many of them now rare. Some of these books have been incorporated in to the Museum's collections and added to the exhibition.

Equally as rare is correspondence between survivors and their sponsors. The Wiesel family of Saint John had corresponded with one cousin, Rose Wiesel and sponsored their arrival in the city in 1948. They also sought to sponsor another cousin, Michael Fried. Their first news of his survival came as a brief telegram which also asked for financial help. A 14 year correspondence followed, maintained by Dolly Wiesel of Saint John, who copied many family members on the correspondence. Michael chose to stay in Sweden where he had been taken for recovery after liberation. This correspondence was re-discovered and preserved many decades later.



Telegram sent by Michael Fried to Joseph Wiesel, Saint John. Courtesy of Saint John Jewish Historical Museum.

In 1999, the private papers of Louis Ferman, a Holocaust survivor who settled in St. John's, Newfoundland were donated to the Saint John Jewish Historical Museum. The papers included more than 150 pages of personal correspondence, most of it in Russian and Yiddish from the 1950s, as well as more than 20 years of programmes commemorating the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising at the local synagogue. Mr. Ferman was also extensively involved with several survivors' organizations and saved material from reunion events held across North America.

Additional material about the Holocaust can found elsewhere in the Maritime Provinces – the New Brunswick Internment Camp Museum in Minto, New Brunswick and the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Visitors to the Internment Camp Museum will find a scale model of the internment camp and its environs and a large collection of artifacts. Many of the inmates created models, paintings, woodcrafts and other objects to pass the time and many of these were presented to the guards, several of whom lived nearby. Archaeological digs at the site of the former camp unearthed pots, plates, cups and other objects used by the inmates while in the camp which had been discarded and buried after the closure of the camp. From August 1940 to June 1941, this camp interned more than 700 German Jewish men who had been rounded up as enemy aliens. The camp was closed briefly and reinforced to hold German and Italian seamen caught in Canadian waters and Nazi sympathizers found within Canada. The camp closed permanently on September 1, 1945.

A two-volume history of the camp was researched and written by Ted Jones and was published in 1988 (volume 1) and 1989 (volume 2). The author acknowledges documents from Library and Archives Canada, the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, the University of New Brunswick as part of his source material. For the personal stories he relied upon interviews, correspondence, camp diaries and other documents retained by the former inmates. Most of these documents would have been returned to them after the book was complete. The Museum itself maintains an archive of newsletters which add some elements to the story of the camp. More can be learned about the camp and the museum on their website: <http://nbinternmentcampmuseum.ca/>.

The Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 opened in 2011 as one of Canada's national museums, building on a smaller museum developed in 1999 to tell Canada's immigration story. The waterfront buildings in Halifax, Nova Scotia welcomed thousands of immigrants from the 1920s to the 1970s including a number of Holocaust survivors in the late 1940s. Much of the information about the immigrants to Canada are preserved in a vast oral history collection including over 2000 stories and 500 interviews along with thousands of photographs and documents (newspa-

per stories, immigration documents, ship information) including those preserved as digital files.

The image collection includes thousands of scanned newspaper clippings, immigration related documents and ship memorabilia, as well as digital photos donated by individual families and organizations. Information can be searched on line or onsite at the Scotiabank Family History Centre. An examination of the online documentation at <http://www.pier21.ca/> turns up about a dozen written accounts of Holocaust survivors arriving in Canada. These stories include horrific accounts of the murder of the Jews of Poland and in the camps, the difficulties faced after the war, the journeys to Canada and the challenges of adapting to a new life in a new home.

Stories of Holocaust survivors can be found in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia and on-going efforts are in place to ensure that these stories are found and shared through published memoirs, permanent and temporary exhibits in museums and on museum website and Facebook pages.