

VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

# “Enemy Aliens”

THE INTERNMENT OF JEWISH REFUGEES IN CANADA, 1940-1943



# "ENEMY ALIENS": THE INTERNMENT OF JEWISH REFUGEES IN CANADA, 1940 – 1943

Produced by: Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, © 2012

The exhibit was generously funded by the Community Historical Recognition Program of the Department of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Canada

With the generous support of:

Oasis Foundation

The Ben and Esther Dayson Charitable Foundation

The Kahn Family Foundation

Isaac and Sophie Waldman Endowment Fund of the Vancouver Foundation

Frank Koller

The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre gratefully acknowledges the financial investment by the Department of Canadian Heritage in the creation of the online presentation of the exhibit for the Virtual Museum of Canada.

With special thanks to the former internees and their families, who generously shared their experiences and artefacts in the creation of the exhibit.

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With special thanks to Peter Seixas, Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness, University of British Columbia.

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Printed with the financial assistance  
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Front Cover: Photograph of an internee in a camp uniform, taken by internee Marcell Seidler, Camp N (Sherbrooke, Quebec), 1940-1942. Seidler secretly documented camp life using a handmade pinhole camera.  
– *Courtesy Eric Koch / Library and Archives Canada / PA-143492*

# INTERNMENT REMEMBERED, INTERNMENT EXHIBITED

## “ENEMY ALIENS” RECALLS A HISTORICAL MOMENT AS IT RECEDES FROM LIVED MEMORY

By Nina Krieger

As with most exhibitions mounted at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, absence plays a vital role in *“Enemy Aliens”: The Internment of Jewish Refugees During the Holocaust, 1940-1943*. The nature of this absence, however, is different from what viewers of exhibits about the Holocaust might typically encounter. Whereas explorations of systematic murder on an unimaginable scale demand that museum visitors contemplate the loss of human life and the cultural loss that accompanies genocide, the Centre’s efforts to illuminate a relatively unknown chapter of Canadian history remind us of a distinct type of absence. The presentation of artefacts and testimonies related to the internment of Jewish refugees in Canada prompts reflection about the inevitable loss of eyewitness perspectives and the fragility of material culture relating to a significant moment in our own national history.

The idea for the *“Enemy Aliens”* exhibit was fuelled by the initiative and enthusiasm of the sons and daughters of former interned refugees. Mindful that a history transmitted to them in fragments was becoming even more remote with the passing of their parents, these members of the second generation encouraged the VHEC to undertake the research and development of an exhibit featuring precious photographs, documents, notebooks and artworks that were for the most part hidden in closets and cupboards in their family homes. Thanks to generous funding from the Community Historical Recognition Program of the Department of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Canada, as well as from a number of other VHEC supporters, the Centre was able

to develop a comprehensive, bilingual travelling exhibit featuring this material. A separate grant from the Canadian Heritage Information Network enabled the VHEC to develop a companion website to expand the physical and temporal reach of the exhibit; this will serve as an important legacy and educational component of the project.

In the Centre’s early discussions with the families of former internees, a number of remarkable objects were immediately brought to our attention. The family of Wolfgang Gerson, who fled Nazi Germany in 1935 and became a prominent architect following his internment in Canada, shared startlingly vibrant watercolour sketches created by their father on scraps of toilet paper during internment, reflecting the scarcity of supplies in the camps. Other artefacts would be discovered or rediscovered in the months that followed. The family of renowned urban and regional planner Peter Oberlander possessed the suitcase brought aboard the *S.S. Sobieski* from England to Canada, while the sons of cancer researcher Hans Falk uncovered delicate landscape drawings created by their father in Camp L. The Oscar Cahén Archive contributed stunning internment and post-internment works by the acclaimed Canadian artist. Other repositories, including Library and Archives Canada and the Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives, contributed documents and images integral to the story. Among these are the remarkable photographs of internee Marcel Seidler, who clandestinely documented internment using a handmade pinhole camera. One of Seidler’s haunting photographs, depicting a lone internee pushing a





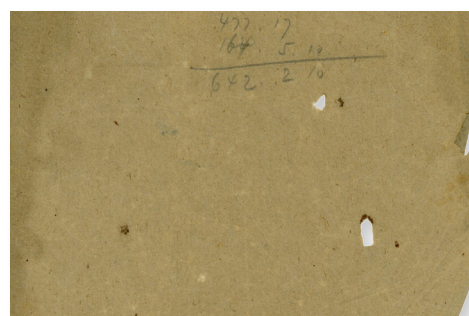
"Abandoned Rail Siding," Camp N (Sherbrooke, Quebec), 1941. This watercolour was painted by Robert Langstadt (1912 – 1987) with paints donated by the YMCA and the brush made from his own hair. – *Courtesy Gerry Waldston*

wheelbarrow and dressed in a POW shirt, is the lead image of the exhibit.

Surviving former internees also shared their precious possessions with the VHEC. Toronto-based designer Gerry Waldston, who fled Berlin in June 1939, sent the VHEC's research team treasure after treasure in the mail. Waldston's own drawings are featured in the exhibit and we managed to find precious exhibit space for a last-minute discovery, a watercolour by internee artist Robert Langstadt. Sigmund (Sigi) Muenz of North Vancouver loaned the VHEC one of the most unusual items on display: a fragment of unused toilet paper given to him aboard the *S.S. Ettrick* by Count Lingden, the grandson of Kaiser Wilhelm II, who organized a "toilet brigade" amid the chaos on the ship bound for Canada. The unlikely survival of this humble scrap of ephemera (which, incidentally, looks quite unlike anything contemporary audiences will recognize as toilet paper) hints at the countless items related to this history that did not withstand the passage of time, or that remain in personal archives today.

Just as every artefact presented in the exhibition suggests others that we were unable to feature, every eyewitness

perspective recorded for the project reminds viewers of the voices that were impossible to capture. The children of former internees who encouraged the collection of artefacts for the exhibit were equally adamant that the surviving former internees be documented. And so the VHEC enlisted videographer Toni-Lynn Frederick and interviewer Vera Rosenbluth, who set forth on an ambitious documentary mission. For the project, we would record the experiences of Gunter Bardeleben, Dr. Gregory Baum, Walter Dunn, Gunther Erlich, Jack Hahn, Hon. Fred Kaufman, Eric Koch, Dr. Walter Kohn Edgar Lion, Sigmund Muenz, Dr. Ernest Poser, Dr. Gideon Rosenbluth, Rabbi Erwin Schild, Gerry Waldston and Peter Ziegler. One additional interview, with



Piece of toilet paper from the *S.S. Ettrick*, given to Sigmund Muenz by Count Lingden. – *Courtesy Sigmund Muenz*

former internee and psychiatrist Dr. Walter Igersheimer, was generously provided by Ian Darragh, editor of Igersheimer's book, *Blatant Injustice: The Story of a Jewish Refugee from Nazi Germany Imprisoned in Britain and Canada during World War II* (McGill-Queens, 2005).

Toni-Lynn and I worked to craft the large volume of footage we had to work with into thematic assemblies that appear at various points throughout the exhibit. In each assembly, the comments of a number of internees are woven together in an attempt to offer a coherent yet nuanced glimpse into the complexity of this history.

Because of the moment in which the interviews were recorded, the subjects featured in the exhibit are the youngest of those interned. In a segment about the challenge of maintaining morale during the undefined period of imprisonment, several interviewees suggest that internment must have been far more difficult for the older refugees among them; that they, as teenagers, had less to lose. This is one of several instances in the presentation of testimony where the former internees make explicit reference to the individuals who, by virtue of their age, could not be included as interview subjects in an exhibit mounted in 2012. A number of the individuals also comment on the unspeakably painful murder of family members who remained in Europe.

The VHEC's interview with Nobel laureate Dr. Walter Kohn illustrates the simultaneous transience and power of a single voice. Dr. Kohn, who was born in Vienna in 1923 and left his parents behind when he left Austria on a *Kindertransport* in August 1939, went on to an illustrious career post-internment. He came to our attention as a willing possible interviewee late in the development of the exhibit. Although an interview with Dr. Kohn would complicate our editing process, we could not decline the invitation to travel to Santa Barbara to conduct an interview. The result – nearly seven hours of footage featuring Dr. Kohn's recollections of his prewar, wartime and post-internment experiences – is an invaluable document that will now reside in the VHEC's archival collection.

Although our interviews were focussed on internment, the material they contain give viewers access to the questions that are at stake when we attempt to represent and learn from traumatic historical events. Dr. Kohn's comments on the impact of the number of individuals, including teachers and sponsor families, on his life are thought-provoking and empowering. In another interview, theologian Dr. Gregory Baum, born in Berlin in 1933, comments on the relationship between internment and the Holocaust.



A scene from internment by Wolfgang Gerson, water colour on toilet paper, Camp N (Sherbrooke, Quebec), circa 1940-1942.  
– Courtesy the Gerson family





An untitled ink drawing captioned as “And then I saw many refugees coming from the camp and they were all,” created by Oscar Cahén, circa 1945-1950.  
– © The Cahén Archives™

We included many of these broader reflections in a video “postscript” that appears at the end of the exhibit. This assembly contains four chapters relating to key themes that emerge from a study of this chapter in history, ranging from a consideration of whether Canada’s internment policy was justified to the effects of internment on the refugees’ sense of identity. Through the internees’ comments, viewers consider the legacies of internment and the questions it poses for all citizens.

A touchscreen featuring biographical sketches of the former internees profiled in the exhibit contains a number of video clips that did not “fit” into the thematic assemblies or the postscript. These outtakes or “nuggets,” as Toni-Lynn and I affectionately referred to them, hint at what lies beyond the frame of the exhibit. A haunting drawing created by Oscar Cahén in the years following internment also sits just beyond the exhibit narrative, alluding to the enduring effects of internment on those who were incarcerated.

Each and every voice captured by the VHEC’s interviews makes a vital contribution to our understanding of the diverse experiences and responses to internment. The recent deaths of two of the men we interviewed for the exhibit, Gideon Rosenbluth<sup>21</sup> and Sigi Muenz<sup>21</sup>, leave a gaping hole for everyone who worked on the project and emphasize the urgency of such documentary efforts.

The lesson plans featured on the exhibit’s companion website offer teachers strategies for engaging with the primary sources in the exhibit. Using concepts outlined by the Historical Thinking Project, the lessons promote historical and critical thinking among students engaging with this historical moment. The challenge for both school and general audiences is not only to critically consider Canada’s wartime internment policies and the responses of refugees to their internment; it is also to contemplate the stories yet to be told, yet to be documented, and yet to be presented to museum audiences.





# A FOOTNOTE TO THE HOLOCAUST

## CANADA AND THE INTERNED REFUGEES

By Paula J. Draper

In February of 2012 the *Globe and Mail* published a full-page tribute to Helmut Kallmann, one of a group of remarkable men whose contributions to Canada belied the hostility of their original reception as dangerous “enemy aliens” and as Jewish refugees.

*Spirited from Nazi Germany as a teen, he became Canada’s doctor of music : Chief of national music archives laid the foundation for contemporary Canadian music studies.<sup>1</sup>*

Kallmann was a teenager when he escaped from Berlin to England on the *Kindertransport*. His parents and sister later perished in the Holocaust. In the summer of 1940 he was

interned and shipped to Canada where he spent several years as a prisoner. Once released, he chose to remain, and his contributions brought him many honours including the Order of Canada.<sup>2</sup> Kallmann’s life-story is similar to many of the interned refugees to whom he kept connected through his ex-internees newsletter. Theirs’ is a bittersweet tale of Canada and the Holocaust.

This unusual story of Jewish survival during the Holocaust occurred in prisoner of war camps in Canada between June 1940 and November 1943. The odyssey of the interned refugees took them from fascist Europe to sanctuary in England, to incarceration and eventual release in Canada.





Group photo of internees at work, with Fred Kaufman at bottom right, Camp B (Ripples, New Brunswick), 1941. – *Courtesy Fred Kaufman*

Tens of thousands of Jews found refuge from Nazism in Great Britain. Upon the outbreak of the Second World War, most were screened by tribunals and classified as “friendly enemy aliens.” Fears of invasion spread after the Allied retreat from Dunkirk and refugees who had been cleared by the tribunals were rounded into temporary British internment camps. Meanwhile, the British government pressed Canada and Australia to accept prisoners of war and “dangerous enemy aliens.” Internees were indiscriminately removed from the camps and in June and July 1940, three ships brought 2,354 Austrian, German and Italian male refugees, aged 16 to 60, to Canada. Upon arrival, these predominately Jewish refugees found themselves incarcerated in prisoner of war camps, mixed with Nazis, captured prisoners of war, German merchant seamen, communists who had fought Franco in the Spanish Civil War and Italian nationals. Canadian authorities were soon informed that, instead of dangerous spies, they had been sent innocent refugees. Ottawa was

flooded with petitions for their release. Camp commandants wanted to know what to do with their unusual prisoners. The last thing Ottawa had expected, or wanted, was Jews.

In the years leading up to the Second World War, Canada had resisted all pressures to permit entry to Jewish refugees, and the government was determined not to let them enter through the back door of internment. The British, admitting their error, would take them back, but made it clear that they preferred the Dominion to release the refugees into the safety of Canada. It would be more than three years before all the refugees interned in Canada would regain their freedom.

While about half decided to risk the dangerous Atlantic crossing to regain their liberty in England, the rest languished in the Canadian internment camps located in New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario. They called themselves the “camp boys.” The mood of the camps reflected the effects of years

of persecution and flight, separation from wives, children, and parents, and the anxiety and fears about friends and relatives caught in the Nazi web. They rankled at their unjust imprisonment. Most wanted to join the fight, yet were incarcerated by those with whom they had found refuge. The irony of their situation led to constant tensions.

The Defence Department had expected military prisoners; instead they were confronted with undisciplined civilians brandishing petitions and requesting kosher food. While some commandants and guards displayed tolerance, if not sympathy, for their prisoners, others combined anti-German and anti-Jewish attitudes when dealing with them. *"It cannot be forgotten," wrote one particularly hostile camp commandant, "that they are German-born Jews. Jews still retain much of the same instinct they had 1940 years ago. The combination of this insidious instinct" he added, and "The German habit of breaking every pledge ever made, is not a particularly easy one to handle except by maintaining strict discipline."* Major W.J.H. Ellwood's comments reflect a traditional Christian antisemitic trope, and the basis for 1940 years of persecution -- the belief that the Jews had been responsible for the death of Jesus. These tensions lessened as internment wore on, and more benevolent regimes were put in place.

Most remarkable was the life the refugees created for themselves in the camps. Among the prisoners were prominent intellectuals, entertainers, musicians, and professionals. They mixed with youngsters from yeshivas, university students and leftists. Despite its tedium and the petty tyrannies of the administration, camp life offered an educational experience on many levels. Henry Kriesel, who became a prominent Canadian novelist, recalled:

*What was available in the long, long evenings was time. There were endless discussions and debates on art and music, on politics and religion...The great political struggles of the left were fought out, and the struggles between liberal capitalism and socialism. I am sorry that I did not record my impressions of these debates, always lively, often passionate, sometimes violent. I suppose I took them for granted. But I learned and absorbed a lot. It was not until many years later that I finally realized that I had had a*



A notebook that Walter Josephy used while interned in Camp I (Île-aux-Noix, Quebec), circa 1941. – *Courtesy the Josephy family*

*liberal education in many ways more remarkable than the article available in universities.*

The camps were little male cities, replete with cafes, sporting areas, schools, workshops and places of worship. Canadian Jewish organizations and other charitable groups donated supplies. Everyone learned English. Most tried to use the lost time wisely. The challenge was to maintain a sense of humour in the face of the irony of their predicament.

Political activity in the internment camps was an outlet for tension, when it did not create it. Camp politics took two forms, ideological and remedial. Ideological divisions proved less important than the united struggle to secure decent living conditions and release. Among the most politically active were the Zionists. They watched the situation in Palestine as carefully as they could. Some applied for permission to join the Jewish unit of the British Army in Palestine. These applications were denied, as were the many applications for active service in Allied armies.





Jewish internees reading in the camp synagogue with the Torah ark visible between two long tables, circa 1940-1943.

– Courtesy Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

Although they earned only thirty cents a day doing war work, *tzedakah* (charity) remained integral to their lives. On the third anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, refugees in one camp donated \$360 to the Canadian Jewish Fund to assist Jews in Europe. Concerts raised money for the Allied War Effort, including the Red Cross and the Queen's Canadian Fund of Air Raid Victims. Refugees in the Sherbrooke camp mounted a large campaign for the Canadian Zionist Organization, using the slogan "One day's pay for Palestine." In another, money was raised to assist Jews in Poland. These men held no illusions about the immensity of the tragedy faced daily by the Jews of Europe. They wanted release, not only to help themselves, but also to help their families trapped in Europe and the war against fascism. In the words of one former interned refugee, their internment was an "enormous waste of good will and waste of manpower and a waste of everything."

After a long struggle by the Canadian Jewish Congress, other refugee advocates, and the internees themselves, Canadian releases began in earnest in 1942. Schemes were worked out whereby individuals could be released to study at universities if sponsored by Canadian families, farmers could request internees to help them, and skilled workers could be released for war work. The process was slow. By the end of 1943, all the camps were closed. Nine hundred and fifty-two refugees were allowed to remain in Canada for the duration of the war. In October 1945 former internees were formally permitted to apply for citizenship. The "camp boys" had become Canadians. They had married, worked hard to contribute to the war effort, and had begun to rebuild their lives - their painful stories a mere footnote lost in the immense shadow of the horrors of the Holocaust.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Globe and Mail*, February 25, 2012

<sup>2</sup> *Ottawa Citizen*, February 16, 2012



Bundles of correspondence from Gideon Rosenbluth's internment in Camp L (Quebec City, Quebec), and Camp N (Sherbrooke, Quebec).  
– Courtesy Gideon Rosenbluth and Vera Rosenbluth

## INTERVIEWING THE INTERNEES

By Vera Rosenbluth

When I was growing up, I had only a vague awareness of what my father meant when he spoke of 'camp'. I knew that it was what had brought him from England to Canada as a 19-year-old student during the war, and I knew that sharing the experience of being a 'camp boy' bound him closely to friends like George Brandt, Berndt Weinberg, Eric Koch and Kaspar Naegele.

However, the details of the experience were shrouded in mystery. As a child, one doesn't ask questions that probe, and I had the feeling (which turned out to be wrong), that my father preferred not to talk about it. It wasn't until I was an adult, a professional broadcaster with a good tape recorder that it occurred to me to ask my parents questions about their lives.

When we reached the period of internment in my father's life story, I posed some tentative questions and was surprised by his willingness, even eagerness, to share stories and reflections about the 18 months that he was behind barbed wire. Certainly there was deprivation, indignation at the unjustness of the situation, feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty about the future. But the stories were also ones of camaraderie, of the teaching and learning that went on, the lively camp meetings, the musical and artistic talent as well as resourcefulness and pranks of some of the internees. My father considered this period one of tremendous political education and personal growth. The teenager who was interned in England was released in Canada as a young man.



“So why didn’t you ever tell me this before?” I finally managed to say, as I pressed ‘pause’ on the tape recorder. “Because”, he replied, “you never asked.”

On a greater social level, these important stories, by a remarkable group of men, haven’t been well known in Canada because we haven’t asked... until now. Eric Koch combined memories from many fellow-internees and his own experiences with archival research for “Deemed Suspect; A Wartime Blunder”, published in 1980. Wendy Oberlander met several internees in gathering material for her intimate video “Nothing to Be Written Here.” It was she who urged the Holocaust Education Centre to interview the diminishing group of surviving internees without delay.

I was privileged to have been asked to conduct interviews with 11 former ‘camp boys’ beginning in March 2010. My partner in this endeavour was the gifted videographer, Toni-Lynn Frederick. We began by interviewing four men in Vancouver: my father Gideon Rosenbluth, Ernest Poser, Gunther Erlich and Walter Dunn who was interned in Australia. In Toronto, in March 2011, we interviewed Gerry Waldston, Eric Koch, Gunter Bardeleben, Peter Ziegler and Rabbi Erwin Schild. In Montreal, we videotaped interviews with Gregory Baum and Edgar Lion. Later, interviews with Sigmund Muentz, Jack Hahn, Fred Kaufman and Walter Kohn were also gathered for the exhibit.

Without exception, these men received us warmly, giving us hours of their time to remember and reflect. Some had spoken of these events with their families; others had not. We were thanked repeatedly for giving them the opportunity to share their stories, and for bringing them to public attention. Each man had his own individual and personal story, but together they began to form a collective picture of the events of that period.

These men, now in their late 80’s and early 90’s, were teenagers when Hitler came to power. Some like my father, escaped to England with their families after 1933, attended school and even graduated before the war. Others got out in the nick of time. At 16, Gregory Baum was put on a *Kindertransport*



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Top: A group photo of internees at Camp B (Ripples, New Brunswick), circa 1940-1941. – *Courtesy Gunter Bardeleben, VHEC Collection*

Bottom: Gideon Rosenbluth (left), and his older brother Eli, Berlin, 1924. – *Courtesy Gideon Rosenbluth and Vera Rosenbluth*



and sent to work on a farm in Wales. Difficult memories were recalled by Rabbi Schild, who was incarcerated in Dachau for three weeks, which he said felt like three centuries, before being released on condition that he leave the country. Gunther Erlich talked about the horrors of Buchenwald, where he spent some time before before being released. A few of the interviews revived painful memories of being separated from parents. Some, like Peter Ziegler, didn't find out till after the war that his parents had perished in Auschwitz.

All of them managed one way or another to get to England, where they had to learn a new language and culture. They found work or were students, and began to rebuild their lives. But then came the tribunals, the very sudden and unanticipated arrests, and the beginning of internment. All the men had vivid memories of the day in May 1940 that English policemen arrived at their door to say politely "You're under arrest. It will be only for a couple of days."

All this happened so quickly that the places designated as 'camps', such as Huyton, were ill-prepared for the influx. My father told me that it was the first, but not last place he was really hungry. In one of the early camp meetings, which were to become a constant feature of subsequent camps, people discussed breaking into the camp hospital, which had food supplies but no patients. While they were debating the ethics of that, a taxi driver from Munich quietly left the meeting, and returned with a full backpack of stolen food. That was the end of the ethical debate.

As Toni-Lynn and I continued to gather memories and reflections, the themes of the VHEC exhibit slowly emerged: the unspeakably terrible conditions on the ships that took the men to Canada or Australia, the reception they received by Canadians who expected dangerous prisoners-of-war, the conditions in the camps, the relationships with each other and the camp guards, the creative and courageous ways the men coped with the situations they found themselves in, the circumstances of their release, their integration into Canadian society.

The interviews generally were from four to six hours long. It was incredibly moving to hear this first-hand testimony, given by such wise and generous men who were willing to revisit that period in their lives when they were achingly young. These men have all made significant contributions to Canadian society, though they arrived in this country involuntarily. While they remembered hardship, humiliation, powerlessness, and an abrupt interruption of their life plans, they could also talk about how they were changed and strengthened by the experience. Their stories were honest, moving, and often tinged with humour. They are truly survivors who deserve to be honoured.

We are fortunate to have the voices and images of this group of ex-internees recorded on video to be part of this groundbreaking exhibit and to be available for future scholars. This episode, hitherto unknown by the vast majority of Canadians, will now be ensured a place in the history of the Second World War and the memories, stories and reflections on the videotapes will be part of a very significant legacy.

On a personal level, I feel extremely grateful to have spent time in the company of these men. The experience has brought me to a greater understanding of the whole story, my father's individual story, and hence my own.

# LOOKING BACK

By Eric Koch

Looking back at the internment experience more than seventy years later, one thing strikes me more than any other: it happened before the Holocaust. One way or another, we were all of course, victims of Nazi persecution, some of us survivors of *Kristallnacht*, Dachau and Buchenwald. But we could not have had any inkling of the horrors to come and could not imagine them.

The important thing to remember is that it happened at a time when the Nazis were winning the war. We tried not to think about it. It was literally beyond us. On June 22, 1941, the day of the Nazi invasion of Russia, Heinz Kamnitzer (later a leading intellectual in East Germany) said, “This is the end of Adolf Hitler.” That seemed to us extravagantly optimistic.

The hardest thing to remember is what it actually felt like. One remembers incidents, anecdotes, pleasant and unpleasant encounters, but it is hard to recall the flavour of internment. Some of it was highly enjoyable. After all, most of us were young and eager for enjoyment. The absence of women made us enjoy what we remembered of them. But I can’t say their absence actually made us suffer. But how could I tell then - or now - what other people suffered? I can’t say that I suffered, but I am not sure. It was a long time ago. I was amazed when I wrote in *Deemed Suspect*, more than thirty years after the event, that Freddy Grant, the happy-go-lucky composer of our camp song *You’ll Get Used To It*, had suffered so much that he refused to talk about it. In camp he always seemed to be in a good mood and excellent company, and we had a few enjoyable encounters in Toronto in the



A section of barbed wire surrounding internment Camp N (Sherbrooke, Quebec).

— Courtesy Eric Koch, VHEC Collection





A cartoon from Eric Koch's internment scrapbook of a Sargeant-General yelling at four trembling internees, artist unknown.

— Courtesy Eric Koch. Source: Library and Archives Canada/Artist Unknown/Eric Koch Fonds/e010939544





A pencil sketch of a guard tower at Camp Q (Monteith, Quebec), artist unknown, September 1940.  
– Courtesy Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives

years afterwards. I had no idea that he found the experience intolerable.

On the subject of *Deemed Suspect*, I should mention that some eighty alumni of the camps would not wish to be mentioned in the book by name. One of the reasons was that they had not told their employers; for fear that the conclusion might be that nobody is incarcerated for no cause at all. Also, a number of ex-internees had not told their wives and children.

The reason why our internment was too hard to explain to others was, of course, that it was *absurd*. We ourselves found it hard to understand. Some of us were furious with the

British for what they had done to us, others, such as one of our rabbis, took the view that, under the circumstances, the British did exactly the right thing. Our attitude towards the *absurdity* of our incarceration of course depended entirely on our personalities and life experience.

It goes without saying that most, but not all, of the Canadian military who had to cope with us never grasped our situation. The very loud Sergeant-Major MacIntosh in Camp N in Sherbrooke, a patriotic native of Scotland, hated the British so much that he wholeheartedly disapproved of the war. When once again he was ranting about the Jews and was told that Einstein was a Jew, he responded: "Einstein? In what group is he?"

# THE WEBSITE: AN INTERACTIVE LEGACY

By Noni Maté & Dennis Smith

“We at 7th Floor Media have worked with the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre on a number of projects. We share a commitment to use new media to extend the reach and the educational use of the Centre’s wonderful exhibits. The partnership has been very rewarding for all of us. We’re excited about the way the *Enemy Aliens* website will bring this forgotten piece of Canadian history to an international audience.”

*Noni Maté, Director, 7th Floor Media, Simon Fraser University*

*Enemy Aliens* is the third website that 7th Floor Media and the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre have produced together. It contains all the elements that have been successful in past sites – rich artefacts, extensive educational materials and first person testimonies from the witnesses of this part of Canada’s history. Adapting an exhibit to the web allows the Centre to include more artefacts, photographs, video and historical documents than an exhibit alone can present. It also integrates the educational materials that are not normally part of the visitor’s experience in a museum exhibit. The “virtual exhibit” on the web also extends the legacy of the exhibit, preserving it for years to come. *Enemy Aliens* is a part of the Virtual Museums of Canada program, a pan-Canadian collection of digital exhibits that has grown over the years. The earlier VHEC exhibit, *Open Hearts, Closed Doors* (also created with 7th Floor Media) has been one of the most popular Virtual Museum sites since its launch in 2002.

The VHEC and 7FM collaborated closely to create the *Enemy Aliens* website. The partners had long discussions to clarify the focus of the site, its intended audiences, the scope of the content and educational resources, and the overall

objectives the VHEC wished to achieve. “In designing the *Enemy Aliens* site, I adopted the metaphor of bureaucratic files,” explains Dennis Smith, Creative Director at 7FM. “Manila folders, typewriter fonts, and rubber stamp graphic elements reinforce the message that the ‘enemy aliens’ were caught inside governmental policies and red tape. The photos, letters, official documents, physical artefacts and videos that support the commentary appear in ‘dossiers’.”

The educational materials have a prominence in the site that is unusual for websites of this type. In keeping with the philosophy of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, the lesson plans have an equal prominence with the story of the internees. Each “chapter” of the site has its own learning activity, available in a menu on the right side of the screens. Educators can readily open the appropriate classroom activities while they learn about the internees’ stories, and choose which activities are most appropriate for their requirements. The lessons themselves reflect the VHEC’s interest in promoting the development of historical thinking skills, such as critical thinking, the use of primary documents, understanding how values change over time, and evaluating the current relevance of events that happened in the past.



# "Enemy Aliens"

THE INTERNMENT OF JEWISH REFUGEES IN CANADA, 1940-43

"We had to leave"

From Refugees to  
Internees

Accidental  
Immigrants

Camp Boys

Advocacy

New Lives

We want freedom, even if there are bombs in England and none here. Internment bears heavy on my nerves, the barbed wire seems almost choking me. Freedom, freedom. Henry Kriesel, one of the "Camp Boys"



As Nazi Germany drew the world into war, Canada's discriminatory immigration policies denied entry to those seeking refuge, particularly Jews. In 1940, when Canada agreed to Britain's request to aid the war effort by taking in "enemy aliens" and prisoners of war, it did not expect to receive 2,284 refugees from Nazism, most of them Jews.

These men, many between the ages of 16 and 20, had found asylum in Britain only to be interned in Canada.



Screenshot of the "Enemy Aliens" website homepage (left) and dossier (right).

Another feature of the *Enemy Aliens* website that sets it apart is the opportunity it provides site visitors to become co-creators. Online visitors who are former internees themselves, are family members of internees or who have other memories of the camps may contribute their own stories and photographs to the site. In this way, the website

becomes a living historical document, a repository for historical data that might otherwise be lost.

7th Floor Media has also created two interactive touchscreens that accompany the physical exhibit. The touchscreens will travel with the exhibit on its tour across Canada.





A suitcase belonging to Peter Oberlander, brought from England to Canada when he was deported and interned as an "enemy alien," 1940. — *Courtesy the Oberlander Family*



# PERSONAL REFLECTIONS OF “THE BOYS”

By Frank Koller

How do you tell a small boy in Canada about a rich and vibrant life in Europe violently interrupted, a family wiped out, the guilt of surviving and years of enforced boredom while interned with strangers behind barbed wire in a foreign country?

My dad, Philipp Koller, had a hard time.

Philipp had two visible scars, which he would talk about when I was a kid in the 1950s.

The one on his right cheek was earned in a duel: a real swordfight with a fellow student at Heidelberg University just before the First World War.

The second, on the left of his neck, marked a gunshot wound sustained a few years later while he was a cavalry officer in the Austrian army, fighting in Poland.

But his invisible scars were kept private and after talking with other children of the internees, this seems a common legacy of the camp experience.

As Wendy Oberlander says of her father Peter's reluctance to look back, “It was a hole we couldn't talk about, a grief and a loss that was never named.”

I wish my dad had shared more because his amazing life had a profound effect on me.

Born in 1893, Philipp was one of three children in a very prosperous family.

While his father was Jewish, Philipp was raised Catholic, his mother's religion. Back then - perhaps because for a while they lived in a part of Austria that earlier, and later, was in Poland - it wasn't unusual for non-religious Jews to convert.

Philipp began university in Vienna and had started his doctorate at Heidelberg when war erupted in 1914. Demobilized after his injury, he resumed his studies in labour economics, supervised by – what a list! – Joseph Shumpeter, Max Weber, Werner Sombart and Emil Lederer. His PhD. thesis, “On the Problems of Masses and Leaders in German Trade Unions” strongly pointed to danger looming in post-war Germany.

Dad spent the 1930s urging his family to leave Europe, convincing one sister but not his mother and his other sister. They were murdered in Auschwitz. He was in London in 1940 when British authorities picked him up – as a “deemed suspect” - to begin a journey to Canada where he was interned for more than 2 years.

Years after his death, I read Dad's letters from the internment camp in Farnham, Quebec –incoming, outgoing and in English to satisfy the censors.

One thing I clearly did not inherit was the patience of Job, which Philipp embraced in detention. An absolute vacuum of any news about his mother and sister back in Poland began to gnaw on him as months became years. Only gradually, as younger friends such as Kurt Swinton, Bill Heckscher, and Peter Ziegler were released, did he begin to openly chafe. He had a sense of style too, although not one I could have employed during my years on air at CBC Radio.



Camp A (Farnham, Quebec) school matriculation photo with instructors, 1941. — *Courtesy Frank Koller*

Camp “A,” January 12, 1942 (his 49th birthday), letter to Heckscher:

“I have just completed the mysterious circle of seven times seven: a kind of rebirth is said to be the beginning of the second circle. I am prepared for any renaissance whatsoever, as you can imagine how my past was thrown away when this strange experience of “emigration” started. It will be virgin soil from which a new beginning will have to rise. I shall be as open to this new life as the heart of a girl is to the adventures of her first man.”

Released in 1942, with help from Rotarian connections and Senator Cairine Wilson, Philipp worked as an economist for the Montreal Shipping Company. Within a year, he’d married my mother, Marjorie McPhee, described in a letter as “a fine Scotch girl who will make me happy.” Soon after I appeared in 1948, he took a job with a Royal Commission on Transportation and we moved to Ottawa.

Apart from Swinton and Ziegler, Philipp seldom made contact with “the boys” as they were called in our house.

Pat Swinton remembers her father as “very private. I don’t remember any discussions about the camps at all when I was a kid. We weren’t brought up to be curious about his personal history. He talked about his time in the Canadian army (which he quickly joined after he got out of the camp in 1941), but that was it.” There were no regular get-togethers with others in Toronto to rehash old times.

Peter Oberlander’s daughter Wendy believes that Peter never looked back because of “the shame of being detained, the shame of not being able to help his parents, the great brokenness of losing his home, his language and his culture.” “I think the rest of his life was distinctly formed by the internment,” Wendy told me, “but at the same time, my father was very proud of putting it all behind him and looking forward.”

In the 1950s, my dad played a key role in a tax battle with the Canadian government, which was eventually resolved to the great advantage of other detainees.

Soon after he’d begun receiving reparations from the German government for the loss of properties in Austria



and Czechoslovakia, Ottawa greedily decided that this represented “taxable income!” For years, evenings were spent drafting appeals with support from several Canadian MPs. Eventually he won: my mother remembered it took a lot of sweat and reams of carbon paper.

Yet Dad always found time to help with my homework: I can still feel him sitting by my small desk, impeccable in shirt and tie.

Philipp died in his sleep on Christmas Day in 1963 while we were with Kurt Swinton and his family in Toronto.

My favourite memory is of our weekend ritual – riding the bus downtown every Sunday in Ottawa, buying the *New York Times* and devouring the huge newspaper at Murray’s Restaurant along with fench fries and fresh orange juice.

My father wanted me to understand the world and there are very few Sundays in the decades since when I have not read the *Times*, following his example.

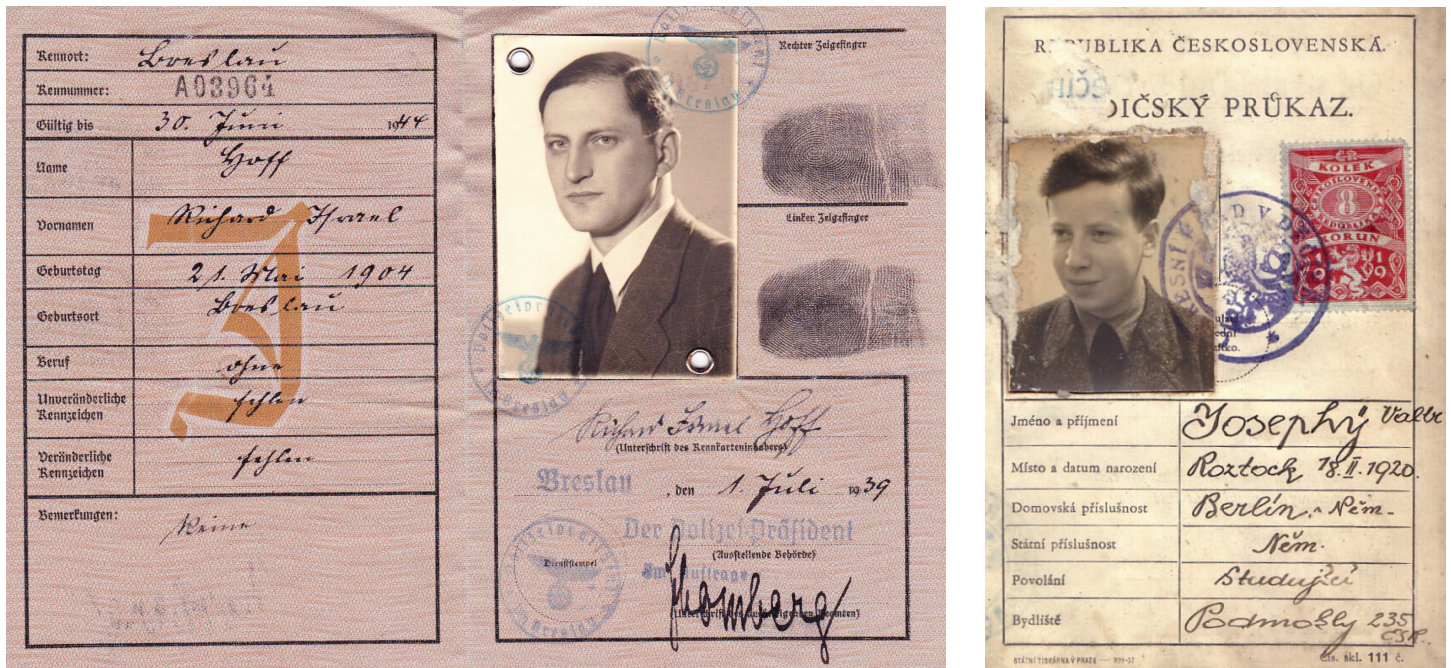


Philipp Koller with son Frank, Ottawa, September 1953. – *Courtesy Frank Koller*

# A TANGIBLE LEGACY

## THE ARTEFACTS OF “ENEMY ALIENS”

By Elizabeth Shaffer & Katie Powell



Artefacts serve as records of accountability, memory and education and have the power to bear witness to past wrongs and injustices. They document and provide evidence of actions (and inaction) and contribute to our interpretation and understanding of past events. The 44 artefacts on display in the exhibit “*Enemy Aliens: The Internment of Jewish Refugees in Canada 1940-1943*” are no exception and aid in telling the story of over 2,000 Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany and Austria who were deported to Canada from Britain during the Second World War and interned as “enemy aliens.” Documenting the

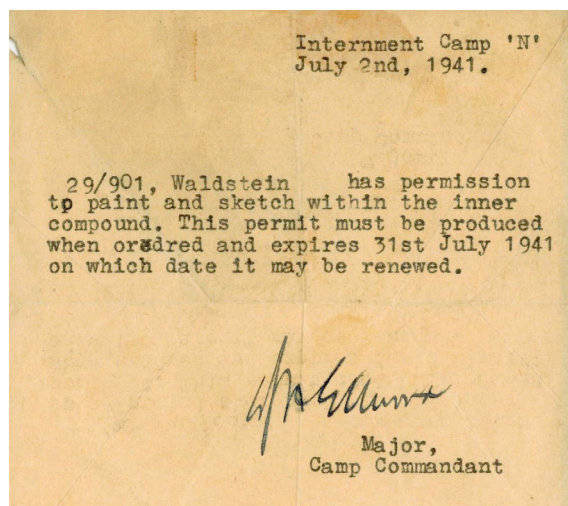
experiences of internees, the artefacts on display speak to life prior to, during and after internment.

The artefacts evoke a diversity of internee experiences; from early classification as “enemy alien,” through difficult journeys and internment in foreign countries, these artefacts demonstrate the internee’s individual and collective efforts to cope with internment and not infrequently, their refusal to let it define their identity. Identification cards and travel documents depict young men before internment, navigating a

Left: Richard Hoff’s Jewish identity card, 1939. Although converted to Christianity, Hoff was considered a Jew according to Nazi racial laws because of his ancestry. – *On loan by Henry Graupner, Guelph, Ontario*

Right: Walter Josephy’s Czech driver’s licence for his motorbike, 1938. After leaving his school in Germany due to Nazi restrictions on education, Josephy continued his studies in electrical engineering in Bodenbach, Czechoslovakia. – *Courtesy the Josephy family*





Top: A drawing by Gerry Waldston entitled "End of Summer," October 1940. – *Courtesy Gerry Waldston*

Bottom left: Permission issued by the Commandant of Camp N (Sherbrooke, Quebec) allowing Gerry Waldston (Gerd Waldstein) permission to sketch within the compound, July 2, 1941. – *Courtesy Gerry Waldston*

Bottom right: *The Uniform of Shame and Pride*, as felt by a 16-year old in 1941, by Gerry Waldston, 1941. – *Courtesy Gerry Waldston*

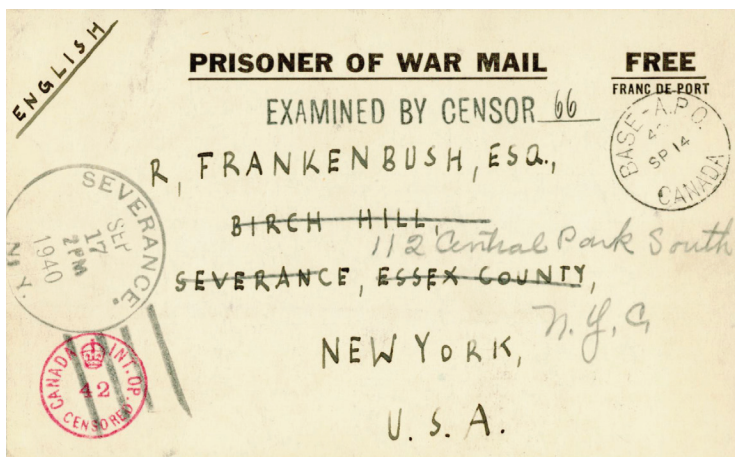
shifting landscape beginning in Nazi Germany and Austria, and ending with internment in Canada. Depicting classifications such as “Jews,” “refugees” and “enemy aliens” these documents speak to the power of systems to classify individuals and how such classifications are often dictated by circumstances and fear and used as instruments of oppression.

A piece of barbed wire from the fence that surrounded internment Camp N in Sherbrooke, Quebec highlights the plight of the internees as prisoners. A (Prisoner of War) shirt from Camp I in Île-aux-Noix, Quebec, depicting a red circle commonly believed to be a target, further reinforces the internees’ imposed identities inside the camps. As well, artefacts such as a piece of canteen money, a camp guard’s diary and a document giving Gerry Waldston “permission to sketch”, address the administrative and political structure that existed within the camps. However, many internees refused to be defined by their circumstances and organized educational pursuits, expressed themselves creatively and communicated their thoughts and feelings to their families and each other.

Despite having their studies interrupted, many internees continued their education within the camps, with many expressing a renewed vigour for academia. Artefacts such as

a handmade toilet paper notebook and internee notebooks highlight the frugal use of scarce paper and showcase the internees’ commitment to continuing their education. A shortage of supplies also necessitated the use of toilet paper as a medium for artists, as displayed by a set of four watercolours by Wolfgang Gerson. The exhibit includes a number of works of art and handicrafts created by internees. Among them are a watercolour, a pen and ink drawing and a hand carved chess set by abstract artist Oscar Cahén. Also of note are several sketches, paintings and wooden crafts contributed by artist Gerry Waldston.

Despite the vibrant camp communities created by the internees, connection with the outside world was sought. However, as the volume and variety of letters in the exhibit demonstrate, communication beyond the barbed wire was not without its challenges. POW mail speaks to the censorship that took place, bundles of correspondence from Gideon Rosenbluth to his family highlight the importance and difficulty of communication with loved ones and the numerous letters written by the Oberlander family seeking information about their son, speaks to the bureaucracy faced by internees and their relatives.



Left: Peter Ziegler’s “prisoner of war” postcard sent to R. Frankenbush in New York from Camp B (Little River, New Brunswick), September 3, 1940.– Courtesy the Peter Ziegler Collection – VHEC Collection

Right: A small watercolour by Oscar Cahén painted during his internment in Canada. After his release, Cahén went on to be a prominent figure in Canadian art, and a founding member of Painters Eleven. – © The Cahén Archives™



A combination of loaned and donated artefacts, these unique items help to make tangible the narratives of the Jewish refugees interned in Canadian camps during the Second World War. The artefacts engage the narrative from its earliest beginnings, speaking to the oppression and imposition of internment and substantiating the internees' will, determination and active resistance against their circumstances. As an expression of

their thoughts, emotions, talents and intellect, these artefacts contribute to a broader record, engaging visitors with the exhibit. The VHEC is grateful for the generosity of the former internees and their families, without whose willingness to share these artefacts and accompanying stories, this chapter of Canadian history could not be told.



Top left: Camp money issued for use at Camp N (Sherbrooke, Quebec), 1942. – *Courtesy Fred Kaufman*

Top right: Box created by an unknown internee, unknown location, 1941. The box is made from cardboard, birch bark and the same material that was used for the internees' uniforms, denim with a red circle on the back. – *Courtesy Gerry Waldston, VHEC Collection*

Bottom left: A collection of Peter Oberlander's school notebooks on various subjects, kept during his internment in Camp T (Trois-Rivières, Quebec), Camp B (Ripples, New Brunswick) and Camp I (Île-aux-Noix, Quebec), circa 1940-1941. – *Courtesy the Oberlander family*

Bottom right: A small wooden chess set made by Oscar Cahén during his internment in Quebec. – © *The Cahén Archives*<sup>TM</sup>

Back Cover: Alfred Bader's internment shirt from Camp I (Île-aux-Noix, Quebec), circa 1940-1941. Bader arrived in Canada on-board the S.S. *Sobieski* and was interned for fifteen months before his sponsored release on November 2, 1941. After attending Queen's University, Bader became a noted chemist, businessman and collector of fine art. – *Courtesy Alfred Bader*



