

BUS-eum2 Publicizes Internment



A visitor reads the accounts of German-Americans who were confined to camps in the U.S. during World War II on one of eight panels in the front part of a traveling exhibit entitled “Vanished: German-American Civilian Internment 1941-48.”

Pictures are from the Jacksonville Journal, in Jacksonville, Ill. on April 15, 2007.

Reports about this project appeared in papers in eight Midwestern states this spring with titles such as “Story of WWII internees rolling into Galesburg, IL” or “See WWII history in new way” in Clear Lake, IL.

The BUS-eum2 exhibit came from the “TRACES Center for History and Culture” in St. Paul, Minn., a non-profit educational organization. It shows the largely unknown history of 11,000 German American and another 6,000 German South-American civilians interned in the United States during World War II, allegedly to be exchanged later for Nazi-held Americans.

The mobile exhibit presents the history of the internment camps/detention centers, of which the Midwest had eight. Others were in the East and West. TRACES specializes on encounters between Americans and Germans/Austrians during World War II. The center launched its unique BUS-eum exhibits in 2004 with information on Midwestern prisoners of war in Germany.

Almost daily, the bus parked at another pre-arranged location and had between 100 and 600 visitors. Local contacts, often a public library, publicized it and



provided parking.

In addition to grants from Humanities Councils in Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri, there was support from local groups across the eight states.

“Exhibit rolls into Jacksonville”

As most Americans, visitors had heard about Japanese internment but were very surprised to learn about camps for German-Americans. “Vanished ...” illustrates the human drama of this story through artifacts, illustrated descriptions, and video, e.g. an NBC TV “Dateline” documentary.



Visitors to the exhibit watch an NBC “Dateline” documentary on the internment of German-American civilians during World War II. all Photos Jacksonville Journal Courier, by: Clayton Stalter, Published: 4/15/2007

The exhibit shares the story of Art Jacobs, the U.S. born son of German immigrants. Jacobs' father was arrested only in November 1944. Deemed dangerous to public peace according to Executive Order 9066--signed by President Roosevelt on February 19, 1942--he was held at Ellis Island. As many dependents, 12-year-old Jacobs, his mother and older brother joined him in the internment camp in 1945.

"From a child's perspective, the camp was pretty nice," Jacobs says. "There was a swimming pool and movies at night, so as a child you didn't know you were fenced in. For an adult, though, it was pretty tough." Jacobs reports he lived in two internment camps, at Ellis Island and Crystal City, Texas.



After their release the family was sent back to Germany, but only months later Jacobs returned to the U.S. and later joined the Air Force. "I'm a patriot," he says. "I'm not bitter about what my country did to me, I'm bitter about what they do now. They don't recognize that I was locked up." "It's a story that needs to be told, and it's usually covered up." "Internees were not criminals, we just happened to be of the same nationality as the enemy. We were not terrorists, we didn't take up arms. We were innocent victims and no one really cares;" "and that hurts." Now living in Tempe, Ariz.,

German-Americans to be deported from Ellis Island circa 1946. (Picture from the exhibit poster)

earching German-American war-time internment. He es a Web site (see below).

In a related information effort, Karen Ebel begins her father's story: "Vivid images remain with my German immigrant father, years after his release from internment by the U S. During World War II; the land of hope and freedom harassed and imprisoned many of the immigrants it had beckoned to its shores. Civil rights were trampled, even the rights of a teenager (Max Ebel, Karen's father) running from Hitler's tyranny, while our soldiers fought for freedom. America still has not faced what it did."

Persons who were interned longer suffered more permanent effects. "Growing up, I sensed that my father was imprisoned for being a German in the wrong place at the wrong time. Shrugging ... he said, 'Well, that's in the past.'" See details of Ebel's story at the web site.

In Bismarck, ND - "Gitterkrankheit--the fence sickness" was coined by three German Americans - Dr. Eddie Friedman, Dr. Arthur Sonnenberg and Wolfgang Thomas. The three, along with more than 3,800 people of German and Japanese ancestry, had been inmates of a Department of Justice (DOJ) Camp at Fort Lincoln in Bismarck. They lost their homes and livelihood based on the executive order that had resuscitated a 1798 law against sympathizers with the British and in response to a manufactured saboteur's threat.

Friedman describes "the fence sickness" to author John Christgau: "After you've been behind barbed wire for a long time, even if you know you've done nothing wrong, a part of you begins to feel like a criminal. Once you get out, it's not something you want to talk about." Yet, it shapes the rest of an internee's life.

After many efforts for congressional recognition, on February 13, 2007, the House of Representatives passed (R.122), "a resolution to (1) recognize the historical significance of February 19, 1942--the date Executive Order 9066 was signed by President Roosevelt--restricting the freedom of Japanese Americans, German Americans, and Italian Americans, and legal resident aliens through required identification cards, travel restrictions, seizure of personal property, and internment; and (2) supports the goals of the Japanese American, German American, and Italian American Communities in recognizing the date as *National Day of Remembrance*."

Japanese victims received an apology and \$20,000 per person under President Reagan in 1988. European American victims of internment and some children of former victims have joined to simply assure public knowledge and gain recognition of their treatment. No Congressional resolutions passed both houses so far, however, the largest German and French television stations taped the celebration of the conclusion of three-month, eight-state Midwest BUS-eum tour with guest speakers from across the nation in the Twin Cities on June 9. They recorded Eberhard Fuhr, Anneliese Wiegand Krauter and Lothar Eiserloh and

interviewed other former internees and then went on to one-time camps at Crystal City in Texas and New York's Ellis Island.

On German-American internment on the Web:

German American Internee Coalition: www.gaic.info

German internees: <http://www.traces.org/germaninternees.html>

Art Jacobs' story: www.foitimes.com

Max Ebel's story: <http://www.foitimes.com/internment/Ebelcm.htm>

Film crew site: www.tangramfilm.de.

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