"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 Nazism 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.

In addition, Safe Haven, Inc., formed in 1989, is dedicated to preserving the refugee’s stories and documenting how life in Oswego contributed to their experiences and new found freedom. Their Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum houses valuable resources and artifacts. Some historical material is available through their website, http://www.safehavenmuseum.com.

Call numbers, below, refer to locations for titles in collection of Penfield Library, SUNY Oswego, Oswego, NY.
Published Books, Monographs and Chapters of Interest


Primary Sources - Published & Manuscript Material in Penfield Library


- 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 131


- 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 Swetmans’ 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 Archives 1/4/33

- Smart, Joseph H. *Don’t Fence Me In! Fort Ontario Refugees: How They Won Their Freedom*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Heritage Arts, 1991. Special Collections Manuscript Box 131


Magazine and Journal Articles
Photocopies of articles can be found in Special Collections


- Gross, David C. " 'Free Port' is Refugee Haven." American Jewish World 33 (September, 1944): 11-12.


- Walrath, Jean. "Restrictions Irk Colony of 900 Refugees." Democrat and Chronicle (28 July 1945)


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.
- June 25, 1945 “Urges Refugees be Given Liberty in This Country.” p. 10 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.
- 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

The following interviews were conducted by Lawrence Baron, an adjunct professor from Saint Lawrence University (Canton, NY), in conjunction with WRVO (NPR, Oswego, NY) in 1984. The interviews were done in connection with the Refugees’ 40th reunion in New York City and contain interviews with and about Fort Ontario Refugees.

These interviews were made to generate Haven from the Holocaust, a one-hour radio documentary about the refugees and the people involved with them. The documentary is a production of WSLU-FM, North Country Public Radio, St. Lawrence University, Canton, NY. Jackie Sauter, Executive Producer. Beverly Hickman, Producer. Dr. Lawrence Baron, Researcher & Script Consultant. A transcript is available from Penfield Library, SUNY Oswego (OH-284).

The interviews were originally recorded on audiostream voltages with little quality control. The recordings contain many deformities and the interviews tend to end abruptly.

Interviews have been both digitized (.mp3 files) and transcribed. Both the audio files and the transcripts are available at: https://www.oswego.edu/library/oral-histories-emergency-refugee-shelter-fort-ontario-safe-haven.

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<th>Transcript Folder &amp; Tape Number</th>
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<td>OH-269</td>
<td>Interview with 3 former residents of the Emergency Refugee Shelter at Fort Ontario: Moric Kamhi, Leon Levitch &amp; Fredi Baum. Also, Samuel Grafton, columnist.</td>
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<td>OH-270</td>
<td>Opening remarks, recognitions, etc., at reunion. Ruth Gruber, Jack Bass, Jolanda Bass, Manya Breur, Walter Greenberg</td>
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<td>OH-272</td>
<td>David Simmons, an Oswego resident, remembers Ft. Ontario</td>
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<td>OH-273</td>
<td>Director of the Refugee Shelter, Joseph Smart</td>
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<td>Oswego teachers: Seward Salisbury and Muriel Perry</td>
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<td>OH-277</td>
<td>Segment of 40th Reunion Program: Joseph Papp, Moric Kamhi, Ruth Gruber, Governor Mario Cuomo, Manya Breur, Walter Greenberg, Adam Munz, Leon Levitch, Florence Freedman, Jolanda Bass, Rochelle Sidell</td>
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<td>Oswego educators and scout leader recall refugees: Ralph Faust, Virginia Dean, Harold Clark</td>
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<td>OH-279</td>
<td>Oswego citizens recall refugees: Geraldine Rossiter, Aulus Saunders</td>
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<td>Steffi Steinberg – life before and at Ft. Ontario</td>
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<td>OH-282</td>
<td>David S. Wyman, author, is interviewed by, Lawrence Baron</td>
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<td>OH-283</td>
<td>Sharon Lowenstein, author, is interviewed by Lawrence Baron</td>
<td>July 10, 1984</td>
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Video Recordings

- **Ahead of Time: the Extraordinary Journey of Ruth Gruber.** Waltham, MA: National Center for Jewish Film, 2011. Media PN 4874 G78 A4 2011
  - Documentary on the remarkable life of Ruth Gruber
  - Chapters 8 and 9 are about Gruber’s work with the refugees

  - Interviews with surviving refugees and local residents, panel discussion, and some other reunion activities. Technical quality is poor on some tapes.
  - The interviews have been digitized and are available for viewing on the Safe Haven 50th Anniversary Reunion Video Collection website maintained by SUNY Oswego’s library: https://www.oswego.edu/library/safe-haven-reunion

  - A presentation of the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum
  - The story of Safe Haven including the selection process, travel to Oswego, life in Fort Ontario, and leaving the Fort
  - Includes interviews of refugees and of Ruth Gruber
  - Includes many historical photographs

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

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

- Penfield Library. SUNY Oswego. Emergency Refugee Shelter at Fort Ontario (Safe Haven)  https://www.oswego.edu/library/safe-haven

- Oswego (NY) Public Library. The Safe Haven Collection.  
  http://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16694coll19
  - The Safe Haven Collection contains a few photographs, several copies of the Oswego Chronicle, and other files

- Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum. Oswego, NY  
  http://www.safehavenmuseum.com/