

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

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"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

- 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*. Fiftieth Oswego Anniversary Edition. Oswego, NY: Safe Haven Publication, 1994, c1984. [Other reprints available] **D 809 U5 G78 1994**
- Gruber, Ruth. *Ahead of Time: My Early Years as a Foreign Correspondent*. New York: Winwood Press, 1991. **PN 4784 G78 A3 1991**
- Gruber, Ruth. *Haven: the Dramatic Story of 1000 World War II Refugees and How They Came to America*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000. **D 809 U5 G78 2000**
- 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** (in Reference Storage)
- Lowenstein, Sharon R. *A New Deal for Refugees: The Promise and Reality of Oswego, 1944-1945*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI. 1985. (Ph.D. dissertation) **Special Collections D 810 J4 L6 1985 (Spec Coll only)**
- Lowenstein, Sharon R. *Token Refuge: The Story of the Jewish Refugee Shelter in at Oswego, 1944-1946*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. **HV 640.5 J4 L68 1986**
- 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 Books. 1985. **D 810 J4 W95 1985**
- Yad Vashem International Historical Conference. *Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust: Proceedings of the Second Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem. April 8-11, 1974*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem. 1977. **D 810 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*. Archives of the Holocaust, vol. 5. Ed. by Karen J. Greenburg. New York: Garland Pub. 1990. **Ref D 809 U5 C726 1990** (in Reference Storage)
- 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**
- 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. **E 807.1 R48 L38 1984** (Copy of published letter also in **Special Collections Manuscript 131, Box 1, Folder 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 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**
- *Token Shipment: The Story of America's War Refugee Shelter*. [by Edward B. Marks, Jr.] U.S. Dept. of Interior. War Relocation Authority. N.Y.: AMS Press, 1975. Reprint of 1946. ed. Vol. 8. **Special Collections JV 6601 R4 U55 1975**
- 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), War Refugee Board "Summary Report"*. New York: Garland Pub. 1989. (Vols. 7-9, and 11 also have numerous sources cited.) **D 804.3 A47 1989**
- 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**

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) (10 March 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(26) (11 August 1944): 6-7.
- "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. " 'Free Port' is Refugee Haven." *American Jewish World* 33 (September, 1944): 11-12.
- 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 I] *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 Fourth R." *Woman's Home Companion* (July 1945): 16, 32.
- Krichesky, Gertrude. "The Effect of Our Quota Laws." *Rescue* 2 (July/August, 1945):5.
- "Climax at Fort Ontario." *NRS* [National Refugee Service] *Community Bulletin* 6(3) (August-September 1945): 1, 7-8.
- "Truman Opens Gates to Refugees." *Christian Century* 63 (2 January 1946): 4.

- Brand, Edward. "Oswego – A Study of Liberation." *American Hebrew* 155(40) (1 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): 22-23.
- 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, Harvey. "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 6th.” 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

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 audiocassette tapes 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>.

Transcript Folder & Tape Number	Title/Interviewees	Date, if Known
OH-269	Interview with 3 former residents of the Emergency Refugee Shelter at Fort Ontario: Moric Kamhi, Leon Levitch & Fredi Baum. Also, Samuel Grafton, columnist.	1985?
OH-270	Opening remarks, recognitions, etc., at reunion. Ruth Gruber, Jack Bass, Jolanda Bass, Manya Breur, Walter Greenberg	1984?
OH-271	“Oswego Reunion”: Ruth Gruber, Adam Munz, Liana Brown, Fredi Baum, Julius Krauthamer, Karl Bader, Samuel Grafton	Aug 1984
OH-272	David Simmons, an Oswego resident, remembers Ft. Ontario	198?
OH-273	Director of the Refugee Shelter, Joseph Smart	July 10, 1984
OH-274	Oswego teachers: Seward Salisbury and Muriel Perry	Nov 19, 1983
OH-275	Walter Greenburg – life before and at Ft. Ontario	Jan 26, 1984

OH-276	David S. Wyman, author, is interviewed by Pat KcKeon	Sep 23, 1986
OH-277	Segment of 40 th 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	Aug 1984
OH-278	Oswego educators and scout leader recall refugees: Ralph Faust, Virginia Dean, Harold Clark	Nov 19, 1983
OH-279	Oswego citizens recall refugees: Geraldine Rossiter, Aulus Saunders	1984?
OH-280	Steffi Steinberg – life before and at Ft. Ontario	Jan 26, 1984
OH-281	US Policies and refugees: Michael Dobkowski	Nov 2, 1983
OH-282	David S. Wyman, author, is interviewed by, Lawrence Baron	Apr 30, 1986
OH-283	Sharon Lowenstein, author, is interviewed by Lawrence Baron	July 10, 1984
OH-284	Radio Program: <u>Haven From The Holocaust</u> . A one-hour documentary produced by WSLU-FM, North Country Public Radio, St. Lawrence University, Canton, NY. The program includes excerpts from previous interviews. Participants include: David Wyman, Josiah DuBois, Samuel Grafton, Sharon Lowenstein, Ruth Gruber, Geraldine Rossiter, Lawrence Baron, Fredi Baum, Leon Levitch, Steffi Steinberg, Muriel Perry, Edith Weiss, Walter Greenberg, Seward Salisbury, Manya Breuer, Joseph Smart, Adam Munz, and Moritz Konig. Jackie Sauter, Executive Producer. Beverly Hickman, Producer. Dr. Lawrence Baron, Researcher & Script Consultant.	Mar 2, 1987

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
- Doody, Vince. *Safe Haven: 50th Reunion* [Oswego, N.Y.] Safe Haven, Inc, 1994. **Special Collections D 810 J4 S132 1994**. - 16 videocassettes.
 - 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](https://www.oswego.edu/library/safe-haven-reunion) website maintained by SUNY Oswego's library: <https://www.oswego.edu/library/safe-haven-reunion>
- Safe Haven, Inc. and Yesterday's New's, Inc. *Safe Haven: a Story of Hope*. Rockport, MA: Yesterday's News, Inc., 2000. **Media D 810 J4 S135 2000**
 - 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
- Ulanowski, Chris et al. *Safe Haven 1944-1945. Oswego, N.Y.*. Safe Haven, Inc. and the Learning Resources Center, SUNY Oswego, 1985. **Special Collections D 810 J4 S129 1995**
 - Interviews with Oswego residents reminiscing about arrival of Jewish refugees to their city.
- WXXI (Television station, Rochester, NY). *Safe Haven*. Written, produced & directed by Paul Lewis. Executive producer C. Zimmerman; host Robert Clay. 55 min. Rochester, NY: PBS Video, 1987. **Special Collections D 810 J4 S128 1987**
 - 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/>
- US Holocaust Memorial Museum: Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter.
<http://www.ushmm.org/research/research-in-collections/search-the-collections/bibliography/fort-ontario-emergency-refugee-shelter>