



a Reason to Remember

Roth, Germany 1933-1942



Docent's Guide

Hatikvah Holocaust Education Center
Springfield, Massachusetts



Introduction

Please keep in mind that every group of visitors comes with different backgrounds, educations, and experiences. They may ask additional questions or linger on particular sections of the exhibit. Please take your cues from them and feel free to spend additional time on individual panels or sections as interest dictates.

The following guide provides you some background and overview, as well as information about each panel of the exhibit. For additional information, please refer to the Teacher's Guide found on the Hatikvah website: http://www.hatikvah-center.org/pdf/exhibit/ARTR_TravelingExhibit_TeacherGuide.pdf.

About “A Reason to Remember”

"A Reason to Remember: Roth Germany, 1933-1942", tells the personal story of 5 Jewish families who lived in the small village of Roth (pronounced ROTE) under Nazi rule. Roth's 31 Jews worked and played side by side with their neighbors. Jews had lived there happily for over 300 years.

The stark contrast between the ordinariness of their lives and the radical way in which their lives were changed by the Nazis and their collaborators through persecution and terror will provoke questions.

It's important to note that this transformation was not immediate, and it was full of complexities and contradictions. Even after Hitler became Germany's chancellor, life for Roth's Jews didn't immediately fall into separation and persecution. The destruction of the Jewish community happened in stages, step by step, during the years between 1933 and 1942.

There are documents, photographs and first-hand testimonies showing how some local villagers tried to help the Jews and many more documents showing obstacles that stood in the way of escaping from the Nazis, and the difficulties that those who were able to escape had in rescuing their relatives who were left behind.

Today there are no Jews in Roth. The stories of these families demonstrate the consequences of racism and genocide fostered by the Nazis. What happened to the Jews of Roth occurred in much the same way throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. The exhibit includes statistics about the 6 million Jews that were murdered as well as information about the nearly 6 million non-Jewish victims of the Nazi regime including Roma (Gypsies), the physically and mentally handicapped, Polish citizens, Soviet prisoners of war, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, political prisoners and African Germans.

The exhibit closes with a montage of images that illustrates other instances of hatred, intolerance and bigotry that occurred after the Nazis fell from power. These images help us remember that we still need to be aware today of how human rights are lost when racism and genocide flourish.

Leading Your Tour

Exhibit Themes

The information in the exhibit is organized around four different themes, designed to motivate visitors to think about their own personal choices and how they take responsibility for them:

- Racism and Propaganda
- Integration Versus Segregation
- Resistance
- Choice and Responsibility

As you begin your tour, mention these themes to your tour visitors. They may want to keep them in mind as they move through the exhibit. The discussion questions post-tour are centered around these themes.

Understanding the Sections of the Exhibit

“A Reason to Remember” is organized into the color coded sections which help depict the step by step progression to state sponsored genocide.

Section 1: Life Before the Nazi Regime

Color: Green

Meet the five Jewish families of Roth and see how they lived in the village before the Nazis came to power.

Panel One: Map of Europe

Contains a map of Europe with pre-World War II boundaries, as well as an inset of the Marburg area. The towns mentioned in the exhibit are all identified.

Panel Two: The Hochster Family

Hermann Hochster was a fabric salesman and went to people's homes delivering fabric on a cart pulled by his St. Bernard dog. A very popular family, they had lived in Roth for over 100 years. Hermann sang in the town chorus, and had served in the German army in World War I.

Panel Three: The Nathan Family

There is only one photograph (of the child Cilly Nathan) because no pictures remain of the Nathan family parents, Hermann and Paulina. Her family was poor after the death of her father, and she and her mother lived with her grandparents. Cilly (short for Cacilie) went to Frankfurt by herself when she was only 17 and worked as a maid.

Panel Four: The Bergenstein Family

Joseph and Clara Bergenstein had two sons, Heinz and Kurt. When Heinz was only 13, he moved to the town of Kirchain to work as an apprentice in a dry goods store. His father, like most of the Jews in Roth, fought for Germany in World War I.

Panel Five: The Roth Family

The 3 children, Herbert, Irene, and Walter, lived with their parents and grandparents. Their home had been there since the early 1800's. Their father, Markus was a grain feed merchant. Because they prepared their paperwork early and had sponsors in America, they were able to escape to the United States. The relatives that stayed behind died.

Panel Six: The Stern Family

The two sons, Julius and Otto, were raised by their mother and grandmother. Their father, Berthold Stern, died in 1929 from injuries he sustained in a POW camp in World War I. The Sterns were cousins of the Roth family.

Panel Seven: Life in the Village of Roth

The Jews were fully integrated and very happy in the village. As the pictures show, they were in the town chorus, town sports, and went to the village school. They also had everything they needed to fully practice the Jewish religion. One plaque on a synagogue wall stated the familiar proverb: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Section 2: The Rise of Racism

Color: Muddy Yellow

Learn about the Jews in Roth and how they came to be marginalized by their neighbors. The personal stories illustrate the effects of racism and segregation.

Panel Eight: A Racist Universe

Race was Hitler's obsession. Racism was central to everything the Nazi's believed. Under the Nazi regime, racism shaped every policy that affected everyday life. There are examples of propaganda and pictures of other groups that the Nazis claimed were inferior to Aryans.

Nazis began by dehumanizing not only Jews, but mentally and physically handicapped people, gypsies, homosexuals and others.

Panel Nine: Alienated, Segregated, Humiliated and Stripped of Citizenship

Hitler began his destruction quietly, passing laws and ordinances restricting Jews in Germany. In 1933 Jewish businesses were boycotted. By 1935 the Nuremberg Laws stripped Jews of their citizenship. In 1937 Jewish children could not attend the village school.

Notice picture of Roth schoolchildren from the mid-1930's. Teacher is 2nd row from top, on the left; Ilse Hochster is 2nd row, 4th from left.

Some of the schoolchildren (and the teacher) are already making the Nazi salute. It is unknown if the teacher was encouraging the children to salute or if this picture could also show resistance to Nazi orders because not all of them are saluting.

All of these changes are made personal by Herbert Roth who writes "My friends stopped playing with me".

There is a document showing the order for Jews to no longer employ Aryan help. Starting in 1939 villagers would not help Jewish people bury their dead and, in 1942, the village confiscated the unused portion of the Jewish cemetery.

Section 3: The Loss of Human Rights

Color: Maroon

Study the detailed information about what occurred in Roth during Kristallnacht and its immediate aftermath. Included is an accounting of how and why the synagogue in Roth was not burned down or destroyed, as well as specific information on what happened to the Jewish men from Roth who were arrested and sent to concentration camp Buchenwald.

Panel Ten: Kristallnacht

The Night of Broken Glass, took place all over Germany and Austria on the night of November 9, 1938. Many scholars call it the turning point of the Holocaust because very few people or groups spoke out to oppose it. It also marked the move from humiliation and harassment to violence.

In Roth, the interior of the synagogue was destroyed, but not burned down because an Aryan neighbor was afraid it would spread to his house. Hitler made the entire Jewish community pay for the costs of clean-up by seizing their property. See documents at bottom of panel.

Note: This is the first time we use the term "euphemism". It is important to specifically mention this because this is how the Nazis perpetrated much of what they did. Ask visitors to look for other examples of euphemisms in the exhibit and from their own experiences. There are many other examples in documents.

Panel Eleven: Jewish Men and Boys Arrested and Imprisoned

After Kristallnacht, there was a mass arrest of Jewish men and boys over 14 throughout Germany and Austria. On November 10, 1939, approximately 30,000 were sent to concentration camps. In Roth, Heinz and Joseph Bergenstein and Hermann Hochster were arrested.

Joseph secured early release because he served in WWI and Heinz was 16 so he returned to Roth after several weeks. They were forced to pay for their transportation to and from the camps. See documents at bottom of panel.

Panel Twelve: Buchenwald Concentration Camp

Two of Roth's Jews, Heinz Bergenstein and Hermann Hochster were incarcerated in Buchenwald. The inmates suffered torture hard labor and medical experiments. "Undesirables" such as gypsies and homosexuals were forcibly sterilized or injected with typhus.

When Roth's Jews were released, they were told not to tell anyone what happened or their entire families would be killed.

Section 4: The Machinery of Destruction

Color: Light Gray

Witness the step-by-step dehumanization of Roth's Jews before they were deported. Included are specific examples of how Jews in Roth were put out of business, how their property and assets were confiscated, how curfews were imposed on them, how Judenhausen were established in the village, and how various "identity measures" were created by the Nazis to register them as Jews and segregate them from others in the village.

Panel Thirteen: Steps to State Sanctioned Murder

The murder of Europe's Jews did not take place as one large-scale event. It was a secretive, step-by-step process put in place by Nazi bureaucrats through a series of increasingly restrictive policies and laws.

People did not really understand how such a plan could exist, and by the time they realized the ultimate goal, it was too late to change anything. Many who did figure it out tried to escape, but they had nowhere to go.

The following 4 panels explain the steps of this process.

Panel Fourteen: Branded

Roth's Jewish population – as did all Jewish people under Nazi rule – were forced to outwardly identify themselves. They had to purchase identity cards, known as *Kennkarten*, add the middle names "Sara" or "Israel" and wear a yellow Star of David on their outer clothing. The Nazis were thus able to keep track of them.

Aryans tried to show their "purity" by filling out an *Ahnenpass* and tracing their non-Jewish ancestry back four generations.

Panel Fifteen: Isolated

Another step in the Nazi extermination plan was to isolate the Jewish people by stripping them of their businesses, homes, and possessions. Then they were forced to exist in small, overcrowded "ghettos" with curfews, and later to take in Jewish people from other towns.

Many people died under these conditions from starvation or rampant disease.

Panel Sixteen: Prohibited to Work

The Jewish population was systematically removed from the economic life of Germany during the years, 1933 to 1938. In Roth, Hugo Stem was harassed out of business. He had a stiff leg from WWI, and peddled his wares with a horse and cart. A gang of Aryan youth took his horse and overturned his cart and he had to stop working.

Note that some non-Jewish people stood by him and tried to buy from him. Point out that not all Germans were bystanders, but after a while the pressure to ignore Jews was too great to resist.

Markus Roth was denounced for doing business with Aryans (see document) and the Aryans were pressured to stop doing business with him.

Panel Seventeen: Stripped of Possessions

Eventually, on December 3, 1938, a Nazi decree was issued to confiscate all remaining property and possessions of Jewish people all over Germany. This continued until 1942 when all the Jews were deported from Roth. They had to leave any of their clothing that could not fit into a small suitcase.

Notice Confiscation of radios document. You can see the names Roth and Bergenstein.

Notice the receipt for clothing on the bottom left of the panel. These receipts perpetuated the deception that possessions would be returned.

Section 5: Attempts to Flee

Color: Dark Gray

Find out what happened to each Jew who had lived in the village: who escaped, who did not, and what their fate was. Personal letters and other documents reveal the struggle and failure to obtain affidavits for relatives still in Germany, the situation faced by the Jews from Roth who were deported to the Riga Ghetto, and the places in which Roth's Jews met their deaths.

Panel Eighteen: The Hochster family

Edwin spoke out against Nazis and escaped to South Africa with money hidden in his shoes. His wife and daughter followed.

Trude escaped to England where she lived a meager existence as a maid. See her testimony where she went hungry so she could buy paper and stamps to write to her family

Several members were deported to Auschwitz concentration camp where they were murdered.

Panel Nineteen: The Nathan family

All the members of the Nathan family perished in the Holocaust. Some died of starvation in the Riga "ghetto," and the remainder were sent to the killing center of Auschwitz.

This situation was typical of families where the father had died. Widows and children had the smallest chance of survival.

Panel Twenty: The Bergenstein family

Although the American relatives of the Bergenstein family tried to obtain affidavits for them to come to the United States, none were approved and the entire family perished, mostly in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

Panel Twenty One: The Roth Family

Herbert, Irene, Walter Roth and their parents managed to flee in 1938 and came to the United States on the ship "New York." Eventually, they settled in Chicago. No one else in the Roth family survived.

Panel Twenty-Two: The Stern Family

Four members of the Stern family were able to escape early in 1936 because they realized the dangers, and they had wealthy relatives in the United States who provided affidavits. They settled in Chicago. In 1942 both Otto and Julius served in the United States army. At the end of the war Otto Stern returned to Roth as an American soldier. Notice the picture at the bottom of the panel.

Panel Twenty Three: Letters and Documents

This panel shows the efforts of the families who did manage to escape to try to get their relatives out of Roth. It was extraordinarily difficult to bring family members to America. It was very expensive – sponsors had to prove they could support new immigrants. Many countries had immigration quotas and refused to accept the fleeing refugees.

The letters from both America and Roth are heart breaking.

Section 6: The Fate of Roth

Color: Faded Blue

Read the Gestapo letter detailing the deportation of Roth's Jews to Theresienstadt and to the Ghetto in Riga, Latvia.

Panel Twenty Four: Judenrein (Cleansed of Jews)

By September 6, 1942, the last three of Roth's Jewish residents were deported. Probably they were eventually murdered at Auschwitz. Notice the original document on the bottom left which points out in detail how the deportees were to be deceived about their destination.

Panel Twenty Five: Perished in the Holocaust

This is a memorial to the people who perished.

On September 7, 1942, Roth was officially declared "Cleansed of Jews." Notice the chart on the bottom right listing a Jewish population in Roth as early as 1611. Since 1942 to today there are no Jewish people in Roth, Germany.

Section 7: The "Final Solution"

Color: Navy Blue

Expand your understanding about Roth by viewing additional information about the Holocaust in general. This includes statistical information about the number of Jews who died in the Holocaust as well as the fate of non-Jewish victims of the Nazi regime.

Panel Twenty Six: The Nazi Policy of Genocide

A chart shows the Jewish losses in all of the European countries. A second chart shows the nearly 6 million non-Jewish victims.

Visitors will have questions about losses in various countries. Most instructive is the relatively small number of Jews in Germany (about a half a million) – less than 10% of the total population; as well as the large number (almost 2 million) of non-Jewish Polish victims.

Section 8: "Why Remember the Holocaust?"

Color: Navy Blue

Study a montage of images depicting prejudice, discrimination, human rights abuses, and genocides from other places and other periods in history. Together they illustrate that choices made today will determine events of tomorrow.

Panel Twenty Seven: "Why Remember the Holocaust"

We tell this story so that visitors will see what happened to real people – and to learn from history so that we will not repeat it.

Note the quotation by Edmund Burke, "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing."

We hope that after seeing this exhibit, people will have the courage to not be a bystander if they see something wrong happening.

Discussion Questions

Questions about Exhibit Themes to help facilitate conversation among students and visitors.

Important Note: What occurred in Roth was a microcosm of what happened throughout Nazi occupied Europe.

Racism and Propaganda

Throughout the exhibit there are images, documents, and stories from survivors' testimonies that ask questions about racism. There are also images that illustrate how the Nazis used propaganda to achieve their objective of creating a society without Jews and others they deemed undesirable.

1. How was racism central to Nazis, and how did the Nazis use racism as the cornerstone of their ideology?

The direct quotation from Hitler in *Mein Kampf* perfectly illustrates:(found in Panel 1, Nazi Germany: A Racist Universe) "All who are not of good race are chaff...It is the sacred mission of the German people...to assemble and preserve the most valuable racial elements...and raise them to a dominant position..."

Excerpted from our Teacher's Guide:

"Nazi ideology was fundamentally racist and saw the world as consisting of "superior" and "inferior" races. Jews were considered an "enemy race" that needed to be destroyed because they "threatened the existence of the Third Reich".

2. How was racism expressed in Nazi propaganda?

A massive anti-Jewish campaign was begun in enormous public rallies, in newspapers, cartoons, posters, post cards, on the radio in textbooks and even in books for children. (*Der Steurmer* was a weekly anti-Semitic newspaper and is shown on Panel 8.)

Integration Versus Segregation

3. What factors helped the Nazis succeed in creating a society that rejected integration as a value?

Excerpted from our Teacher Guide:

"...The worldwide economic depression that began in 1929 with the crash of the stock market had a severe negative impact on Germany because of the large punishment tax imposed on Germany by the Versailles Treaty that followed the end of World War I. More people were homeless and jobless in Germany than in any other country affected by the depression. In addition, the Versailles Treaty forbade Germany to have an army.

...Hitler promised to restore Germany to its former place of honor in the world...And he also blamed all of Germany's economic problems on Jews. In January, 1933 Germany's President, Paul von Hindenberg, appointed Hitler Chancellor of the country.

On February 27, 1933 The Reichstag (German Parliament) was burned down. Hitler blamed the Communist party, his strongest opponent, for setting the building on fire...Late in March, 1933, under pressure from Adolf Hitler, the German parliament passed a special law, called 'The Enabling Act' that declared Germany to be in a state of emergency...This is how Adolph Hitler obtained dictatorial power over his country and declared himself its "Fuehrer".

From that point forward, Hitler put every other political party in Germany out of existence. He nationalized the media and ended freedom of the press. And then he orchestrated a systematic, step-by-step process to rid Germany of its Jews. Every piece of anti-Jewish legislation that was passed in Germany and put into effect in every other country that fell under Nazi occupation was put into effect as a result of "The Enabling Act". Hitler had seized power legally and he held his power legally until World War II ended in 1945."

Refer to the "Alienated, Segregated, Humiliation and Stripped of Citizenship" Panel for the early progression of the exclusion of Jews from social life in Roth.

Other suggestions for discussion:

- What does it take to create a diverse society in which differences between people are integrated in a productive way?
- How easy or difficult is it to change an integrated society into one that is segregated and exclusive?

Resistance

4. Why didn't the Jews resist more?

“Resistance to the Nazis took many forms. Only one of them was organized, armed resistance involving weapons and guerilla warfare. This type of resistance occurred everywhere but under extreme hardship because of the difficulty of obtaining and storing arms as well as being able to use them. A broad perspective needs to be taken concerning anti-Nazi resistance activities, which included obtaining, sharing and smuggling information, operating illegal schools, religious services, medical institutions, and recreational activities, covert sabotage of Nazi war operations, documentation of Nazi atrocities, taking photographs in secret, writing poetry and creating works of art that documented atrocities or kept spirits hopeful or defiant, and especially “spiritual resistance” – maintaining hope in the face of adversity as well as defying the orders of the Nazis and their collaborators.

Rescue and protection operations, by governments as well as by prominent individuals and ordinary citizens were another important part of resistance to Nazi oppression. Resistance activities as well as rescue and protection operations existed in every country of Nazi occupation.”

A Reason to Remember contains some unexpected examples of resistance among Roth's non-Jewish population. These examples appear in different sections of the exhibit.

Examples:

- We cannot know for sure that this indicates resistance, but the image of Ilse Hochster with her teacher and classmates (in the Alienated and Stripped of Citizenship Panel) shows that at the time the photo was taken only three children give the Nazi salute although the school was already Nazified.
- Some farmers continued to sell grain to Markus Roth for a time after business restrictions were in place for Jews. (In the Prohibited to Work section) However, this activity was reported and the result was that Mr. Roth was publicly denounced and the farmers chastised for “...trade with these parasites.”
- Also, some citizens of the nearby town of Lohra continued to trade with Hugo Stern, but eventually he was harassed out of business.
- Erwin Hochster was warned by a neighbor to get out. In 1936 he was able to do so. He smuggled money out of Germany in the heels of his shoes. Eventually his wife and infant daughter were able to join him in South Africa. (In the Attempts to Flee panel).
- Both Trude and Erwin tried from England and South Africa to obtain visas for their parents, sister, Ilse and brother Helmuth. Erwin obtained visas for his parents who refused to leave without Ilsa and Helmuth. Trude obtained visas for her parents and Helmuth, but the outbreak of the World War II prevented them from leaving. (Also in “The Desperate Struggle for Affidavits”).
- Some fellow employees gave Gerdi Nathan bread and other food to help sustain the tiny family. Before deportation another employee gave Gerdi a coat and shoes for “the last terrible trip.” (In The Fate of the Nathan Family panel)
- Herbert, Irene, Walter Roth and their parents fled Germany in 1938. Despite their desperate attempts to obtain visas for their relatives, the other members of the family were unable to escape and perished in the Holocaust. (In the Fate of the Roth Family and The Desperate Struggle for Affidavits).
- Klara, Julius and Otto Stern petitioned the American consulate in Stuttgart for visas to leave Germany. In May 1937 they were able to leave. In spite of the family's status as “enemy aliens” in America, both Otto and Julius attempted to enlist in the US Army. Finally the young men were drafted. After the war ended, Otto returned to Roth as an American soldier. (In the Fate of The Stern Family).

Other suggestions for discussion:

- What factors obstruct as well as enable acts of resistance to take place. What might have empowered the citizens of Roth to resist? What type of resistance did not occur in Roth?
- What might have happened had people worked collectively against the Nazis?

Choice and Responsibility

Each section in the exhibit can be examined from the point of view of looking at the choices people made and the consequences of those choices. Victims had only three choices: they could escape, if possible; they could resist to the degree that it was possible; or they could survive as best they could for as long as they could.

Those who were not victims could choose to be perpetrators, collaborators, enablers, bystanders or resisters. They could also choose to be rescuers and protectors, although no one in Roth made that choice.

Final Points to Ponder Regarding Choice and Responsibility, and “A Reason To Remember”: Understand, Remember, And Respond.

5. **Think about all of the individual choices that were made during the Nazi years that culminated in the death of approximately 6 million Jews and almost 6 million other targeted people.**
6. **Think about what this story can teach about other human rights abuses, including those genocides occurring in other periods of history and that exist today.**
7. **Think about what the story of the Jews of Roth teach visitors about choice and responsibility in their own lives.**

**Docents Guide for
A Reason to Remember: Roth, Germany, 1933-1942**

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