Auschwitz has become the international symbol of the Holocaust. It represents the peak of efficiency in the Nazi killing process in pursuit of what they called the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question.” It also represents the evolution of Nazi policy toward the Jews and others deemed unworthy by the Nazi state—a process that historian Raul Hilberg described as beginning with mild actions and ending in drastic measures.

Tangible Reality
Most people will never have the opportunity to visit Auschwitz or a death camp site in person. *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.* is the first ever traveling exhibition about the Auschwitz camp system. It allows visitors to come into contact with over 600 original artifacts and forces us to confront tangible evidence of this crime—often amassed by the Nazis themselves—that cannot be denied or minimized. It explores not just Auschwitz itself, but the entire scope of persecution and increasing violence toward European Jews from 1933-1945.

To expand on the themes of the exhibition, MCHE and Union Station Kansas City have partnered to offer a series of speakers and learning opportunities. Our community will have the opportunity to learn from local, national and international scholars who have committed to sharing their expertise on topics which range from understanding pre-war Jewish communities, tracing the increasingly radicalized policy of the Nazis toward European Jews, exploring the role of non-Jews as perpetrators, bystanders, rescuers and victims, and asking how we understand the lessons of this history, which remain so relevant in 2021.

From Knowledge to Understanding
Exhibition curator Luis Ferreiro wrote, “Each of the objects in the exhibition has its own voice, its own historical echo. Each is a fragment of history that has been preserved from the past to provide a firsthand account of the terrible events it witnessed. This voice establishes a unique and personal conversation with every visitor.”

“It happened, therefore it can happen again: this is the core of what we have to say. It can happen, and it can happen everywhere.”
— Primo Levi

German-made Model 2 freight wagon. Courtesy of @Musealia

German World War I gas mask (1917-18) Courtesy of @Musealia

Possessions brought by those transported to the Auschwitz concentration camp (1944) Courtesy of @Musealia
Knowledge Must Translate to Understanding

Executive Director’s Message | Jessica Rockhold

There is a difference between knowledge and understanding.”

I heard those words as an undergraduate when Holocaust historian Michael Marrus visited campus. That moment shaped my philosophy as a Holocaust educator and has informed every program I have ever taught.

It is important, but not enough, to know when and where the Holocaust happened, that it resulted in the murder of millions of Jews and others deemed unworthy by the Nazis, and to have a basic grasp on why this happened. Those facts are important, but it is incumbent upon Holocaust educators to help our learners translate that knowledge into deeper understanding that enables them to make the history relevant in their own lives.

The Disconnect

We receive multiple calls every year from concerned patrons who see something wrong and seek our help in rectifying it. This can be in response to such incidents as swastikas found in a public place, media sources making insensitive statements or worse, publishing antisemitic tropes; or politicians drawing inaccurate and inappropriate parallels to current situations or national events, such as the Camp Auschwitz sweatshirt seen on a Capitol Hill rioter on January 6.

Each time we respond to an incident in our community or region we reach out to the person or agency to begin a dialogue. Our first goal is to assess whether or not there is knowledge of the Holocaust. What we find in nearly all cases is that, yes, there is knowledge. There has to be or those images, tropes and terms would not carry meaning. What we also find is that there is a disconnect between that knowledge and an understanding of what it means and empathy for those who experienced it.

MCHE strives to address those issues of understanding and empathy in every program we present. Delivery of important facts is always accompanied with a personalization of the way that event or issue impacted the life of a person who experienced it (see Survivor Profile, page 10). We seek out programs with partners that allow us to accurately and meaningfully discuss ways in which other histories of persecution and atrocity share commonalities or are different from the Holocaust and what we can learn from that comparison (see UMKC Workshop, page 9). We work proactively to ensure that learners see individual impact and understand relevance to today.

Making It Personal

In 2021, we will have the opportunity to engage in this kind of learning through the exhibition Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away. Filled with artifacts and documentary evidence, the exhibition imparts knowledge. But in addition to that knowledge, being confronted with the single red shoe that a woman wore on the deportation train reminds us that this event destroyed the life of that one individual.

The shelves of shaving brushes, kitchen utensils and small precious trinkets that people brought with them to the camp expecting to build new lives leave us with a profound sense of not only the magnitude of this event but lead us to a deeply personal connection to the people who carried them but did not live to see liberation. The desk of the Commandant requires us to consider the nature of perpetration and the inherent capacity of humans to do both great good and great harm.

This exhibition corroborates the testimony of survivors and makes tangible what we have learned in books. It then calls upon us to translate that knowledge into understanding of the people, places, and moral and ethical dilemmas this history demands that we confront.

Enamelled vessels/pots and other possessions brought by those transported to the Auschwitz concentration camp (1944). Courtesy of @Musealia

A woman’s dress shoe belonging to an unknown deportee to Auschwitz (1940s). Courtesy of @Musealia
MCHE has an extraordinary opportunity through our partnership with Union Station Kansas City to incorporate a comprehensive educational component into the internationally acclaimed exhibition—Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.

Opening on June 14, 2021, this presentation of the darkest chapter in Holocaust history will include artifacts from the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum that vividly illustrate the horrors of this most infamous of the Nazi death camps. MCHE is organizing an extensive program of panels and speakers who will review the brutal evidence of Auschwitz and its place in history.

The exhibition will cause each of us to ask again: What could have caused an intelligent and generally tolerant society as existed in Germany and surrounding nations to fall to such depths?

**Those Who Follow**

Much of any answer starts with the culture of the people and the nation in which they live. A newly published book that I’ve started reading, *Those Who Forget* by Geraldine Schwarz, explores German culture and her own family’s role as *Mitläufer*, people “who followed the current” of a small group of determined criminals and bigots. These were people who succumbed to Nazi propaganda. They accepted the removal of Jews from their community and then excelled in pillaging their assets.

She noted that while their impact “was tiny on an individual level, it had a cumulative effect” because without their participation Nazism would not have been able to commit crimes of such magnitude. Her observation is particularly frightening today with the rise of authoritarian and xenophobic political figures in Europe and elsewhere.

**Waiting to Be Rediscovered**

Laurence Rees, a BBC historian and author, makes this point vividly in *Auschwitz: A New History*: “Through their crime, the Nazis brought into the world an awareness of what educated, technologically-advanced human beings can do….Once allowed into the world, knowledge of what they did must not be unlearned. It lies there—ugly, inert, waiting to be rediscovered by each new generation.”

There is no doubt that MCHE’s mission to teach the history of the Holocaust and to counter indifference, intolerance and genocide has never been more relevant than it is today.

Karl Zobrist is a partner in the Kansas City law office of Dentons US LLP, where he specializes in energy law and corporate governance issues. He is also vice chairman of the Kansas City Metropolitan Crime Commission and a member of the board of trustees of Augustana College. He is president of the Truman Good Neighbor Award Foundation, his father, Dr. Benedict Zobrist having served as director of the Harry S. Truman Library from 1971 until 1994.

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**Events for Educators**

These professional development opportunities are open to educators of grades 7-12. All sessions will be taught by MCHE educators. Details will be posted as they become available and registration is required at www.mchekc.org/auschwitz2021. These programs are supported in part by the Jean G. Zeldin Partners in Holocaust Education Fund.

**MCHE Summer Institute:**

**The Path to Genocide**

July 12-15

at Union Station Kansas City

With participation from the Truman Presidential Library and Museum

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**Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away. Educator Preview**

August 25 | 4:30-6:30 p.m.

at Union Station Kansas City

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**Special Topics:**

**Auschwitz In-Depth**

October 20 | 4:30-7:30 p.m.

at Union Station Kansas City
The Midwest Center for Holocaust Education and Union Station Kansas City are pleased to announce the participation of the following historians and scholars in a public speaking series associated with the exhibition *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.* These events are free and open to the public but require pre-registration. Dates, times and format are subject to change based on Covid restrictions. Information and registration are available at mchekc.org/auschwitz2021.

**Perspectives on Liberation: A Panel**
Featuring: Jessica Rockhold (MCHE), Jeff Nelson (Eisenhower Library), Mark Adams (Truman Library)
May 18 | 6:30 p.m. | Zoom

**Holocaust Landscapes**
Tim Cole – Professor of Social History and Director of Brigstow Institute, University of Bristol
June 22 | 2:00 p.m. | Zoom

**Collapsing Democracy, Rising Fascism**
Andrew Stuart Bergerson – Professor of History & Public Humanities, University of Missouri-Kansas City
July 8 | 6:30 p.m. | Zoom

**Prewar European Jewry**
Fran Sternberg – Lecturer in Jewish Studies, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, University of Kansas
July 20 | 6:30 p.m. | Zoom

**The Roma Experience of the Holocaust**
Gerhard Baumgartner – Head of Research at the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance
August 2 | 2:00 p.m. | Zoom

**Terezin and Deportations from the West**
Anna Hájková – Associate Professor of Modern Continental European History, University of Warwick
August 24 | 2:00 p.m. | Zoom

**Mengele: Unmasking the “Angel of Death”**
David Marwell – Historian and Author
September 1 | 6:30 p.m.
Union Station Kansas City

**Hitler’s First Victims: The Nazi Forced Sterilization Program and the Euthanasia Project**
Beth Griech-Polelle – Kurt Mayer Chair of Holocaust Studies, Pacific Lutheran University
September 13 | 6:30 p.m. | Zoom

**Non-Jewish Victims of the Holocaust: A Panel**
Featuring Beth Griech-Polelle, Gerhard Baumgartner, William Spurlin
September 14 | 2:00 p.m. | Zoom
Belzec to Auschwitz
Shelly Cline – Historian and Director of Education, Midwest Center for Holocaust Education
September 23  |  6:30 p.m.  |  Union Station Kansas City

Antisemitism Then and Now
Holly Huffnagle – AJC U.S. Director, Combating Antisemitism
Offered in partnership with Jewish Community Relations Burea/AJC
October 4  |  6:30 p.m.  |  Union Station Kansas City

Queer Victims of the Holocaust
William Spurlin – Professor of English and Vice-Dean/Education in the College of Business, Arts & Social Sciences, Brunel University London
October 12  |  6:30 p.m.  |  Zoom

The Warsaw Ghetto and Oneg Shabbat
Sam Kassow – Charles Northam Professor of History, Trinity College
October 26  |  6:30 p.m.  |  Union Station Kansas City

Postwar Justice
Lawrence Douglas – James J. Grosfeld Professor of Law, Jurisprudence & Social Thought, Amherst College
Presented in partnership with the Truman Presidential Library and Museum
November 9  |  6:30 - Annual Kristallnacht Commemoration  |  Union Station Kansas City

Archaeology of the Holocaust: Treblinka and Bergen-Belsen
Caroline Sturdy-Colls – Professor of Conflict Archaeology and Genocide Investigation
Director Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
November 18  |  2:00 p.m.  |  Zoom

MCHE Second Generation Speakers Panel
Featuring: Alice Jacks Achtenberg, Regina Kort, Matilda Rosenberg
December 1  |  6:30 p.m.  |  Union Station Kansas City

Auschwitz
Robert Jan Van Pelt
International Holocaust Remembrance Day
January 24, 2022  |  6:30 p.m.  |  Union Station Kansas City

Documenting Destruction
Paul Salmons
Date  |  Time  |  Location  |  TBD
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SPRING/SUMMER/FALL PROGRAM CALENDAR

All programs through Spring 2021 are being offered through Zoom. Please visit our website at mchekc.org for complete details and registration information.

MAY

May 5 & 6
Genocide Colloquium with UMKC

May 12
In the Monument Film Series Discussion

May 18
Auschwitz Speakers Series: Prewar European Jewry

JULY

July 8
Auschwitz Speakers Series: Collapsing Democracy; Rising Fascism

July 12 - 15
MCHE Summer Institute: The Path to Genocide

July 20
Auschwitz Speakers Series: Prewar European Jewry

AUGUST

August
Pictures of Resistance exhibition opens to the public.

August 2
Auschwitz Speakers Series: The Roma Experience of the Holocaust

August 24
Auschwitz Speakers Series: Terezin and Deportations from the West

August 25
Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away. Educator Preview

SEPTEMBER

September 1
Auschwitz Speakers Series: Mengele: Unmasking the “Angel of Death”

September 13
Auschwitz Speakers Series: Hitler’s First Victims: The Nazi Forced Sterilization Program and the Euthanasia Project

September 14
Auschwitz Speakers Series: Non-Jewish Victims of the Holocaust: A Panel

September 23
Auschwitz Speakers Series: Bełzec to Auschwitz

OCTOBER

October 4
Auschwitz Speakers Series: Antisemitism Then and Now

October 12
Auschwitz Speakers Series: Queer Victims of the Holocaust

October 20
Event for Educators: Special Topics: Auschwitz In-Depth

October 26
Auschwitz Speakers Series: The Warsaw Ghetto and Oneg Shabbat

NOVEMBER

November 9
Auschwitz Speakers Series: Postwar Justice

November 18
Auschwitz Speakers Series: Archaeology of the Holocaust: Treblinka and Bergen-Belsen

DECEMBER

December 1
Auschwitz Speakers Series: MCHE Second Generation Speakers Panel

December 8
Common Book Discussion: Survival in Auschwitz

JANUARY, 2022

January 24, 2022
Auschwitz Speakers Series: Auschwitz

To Be Determined
Auschwitz Speakers Series: Documenting Destruction

Restitution for Holocaust Survivors and Their Families

You might qualify for an additional Holocaust-related pension. Jewish Family Services can help Holocaust survivors and their surviving spouses access restitution. For more information, contact Laura Gilman, Director of Older Adult Services: 913-730-1441 or lgilman@jfskc.org.
Auschwitz: Then and Now

DR. SHELLY CLINE

It was a lovely spring day in April, and I was on my very first research trip. The bus ride from town was short, and I passed the time listening to the mixture of languages that swirled around me, among them Hebrew and German. Through a parking lot filled with tour buses I got my first glimpse of one of the world’s most recognizable sites—the main gate of Birkenau.

When I walked by the set of train tracks that led into the camp, a faint recording played the sound of a locomotive engine. It was an odd, misplaced touch of kitsch better suited to an Old West Town than to the single deadliest place on earth. As I walked around the camp that day, I thought about the deep contrast between what it had been and what it had now become.

Profits and Slave Labor

In 1940, Rudolf Hoess was tasked with repurposing a small, dilapidated military base in the Polish town of Oswiecim into a concentration camp. Its intended purpose was to house about 10,000 political prisoners and enemies of the state as Germany continued its expansion into Poland. It was not envisioned as a place for Jews.

In these early days, Auschwitz got little attention from Berlin. Indeed, Hoess even had difficulty securing the needed supplies to complete his renovation. All this changed in 1941 when the German chemical company I.G. Farben expressed interest in building a massive synthetic rubber plant near the camp. Heinrich Himmler ordered the camp’s capacity be increased to 30,000 and drew up plans for a redesigned town that would be an entirely German community centered around the economic hub of the factory, or what we now know as Buna-Monowitz or Auschwitz III. The SS anticipated substantial profits from the raw materials they would sell to I.G. Farben and the slave labor they would provide to the factory. Despite the millions of Reichmarks invested in the factory, it never became fully productive or profitable.

1941 also saw the invasion of the Soviet Union, and Germany anticipated the capture of many thousands of prisoners of war. For that purpose, another expansion of the Auschwitz camp was ordered. This new camp of Birkenau, or Auschwitz II, was situated about two miles from the original set of barracks that made up what we know as Auschwitz I. Some POWs were imprisoned in Auschwitz, but the 100,000 Birkenau was built for never arrived because the war turned against the Germans.

Shift to Genocide

Although the war with the Soviets slowed, Nazi policy against the Jews accelerated. Mobile killing squads followed behind the Wehrmacht, shooting thousands of Jewish civilians. In July 1941, official policy focused on developing plans for a “total solution” to the “Jewish Question” in Europe. With this shift from situational killing to genocidal policy came the construction of camps specifically built for mass murder. The first of these—Belzez, Treblinka and Sobibor—were completed in the spring of 1942. Unlike the camp that was developing at Auschwitz, the purpose of these sites was only large-scale killing via specially built gas chambers.

There were early gassing experiments conducted in Auschwitz against Soviet POWs and smaller groups of prisoners in the months prior, but these took place in the basement of Block 11 and later in the crematorium building in the main camp. However, as policy toward the Jews changed, modifications were also made in Auschwitz to bring it in line with the new goals of the Nazi regime. Two farmhouses near Birkenau were retrofitted as gas chambers. There, in these “little white” and “little red” houses, transports of Jews were gassed until larger industrial gas chambers were completed in the spring of 1943.

Factories of Death

While millions died at other locations in the Holocaust, it was these four gas chambers and combined crematorium buildings that came to exemplify the Nazi genocide against the Jews. In Birkenau’s Kremas II-V, the Nazis harnessed their modern industrial might to produce factories of death. And it was by these means that more than 420,000 Hungarian Jews were killed in 56 days during the summer of 1944.

That day in Birkenau I stood by the shattered remnants of these Krema buildings, and I thought about those who suffered and died in them. I thought about the complicated evolution of this place that shifted with Nazi policy. And I thought about how difficult it was to reconcile the geography I now walked with the landscape of the Holocaust. It was a powerful reminder that this place is very much a part of our world and the events that happened there were really not so long ago.
ALL THESE DELICATE SORROWS

PBS Documentary Features New Americans Club Archive

For MCHE, teaching the history of the Holocaust does not end with liberation. Far from being the end of the story, this is when survivors tell us their lives began again. After regaining their strength, they set out to find surviving relatives, began to rebuild their lives by marrying and starting families, and sought a path out of Europe. For many survivors, this led to the United States, and for a small group, this meant a new home in Kansas City.

Some arrived in Kansas City having fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Many more arrived in the late 1940s and early 1950s, transitioning through displaced persons camps. Together they reconstituted community here.

Among their many personal accomplishments, they banded together to share their lives and to ensure that the Holocaust would be remembered in Kansas City. They commissioned and dedicated one of the first Holocaust memorials in the country. They founded the local Yom Hashoah commemoration. And, after MCHE’s founding in 1993, they shared their testimony in a variety of formats to ensure that the history was recorded and preserved.

It is this story—beginning with liberation and following the survivors through rebuilding their lives in Kansas City—that will be told by Kansas City PBS filmmaker Brad Austin. The documentary, *all these delicate sorrows: The Legacy and Lineage of Kansas City’s Holocaust Survivors*, will debut on Kansas City PBS (KCPT) in mid-June 2021.

“It is with great privilege that I get to help tell this Kansas City story about amazing individuals who show so much courage in their lives. My true hope with this film is to convey the fascinating journey these survivors endured that led to them to call Kansas City home,”

– Brad Austin, filmmaker

World History Colloquium on Genocide

**MCHE PARTNERS WITH UMKC STUDENTS**

May 5 and 6
5:30 p.m. via Zoom
Free and open to the public
Registration: mchekc.org/genocideworkshops/

In a 1949 interview, Raphael Lemkin stated, “I became interested in genocide because it happened so many times.” Although he coined the term “genocide” to describe the systematic murder of Europe’s Jews, his interest went beyond the Holocaust.

Lemkin dedicated his life to genocide prevention and to studying patterns of injustice and violence that pervaded history and spanned the globe.

Lemkin considered his work of genocide prevention to be a failure. Nevertheless, we must not be discouraged, but called to greater awareness and action.

In that spirit, MCHE is proud to partner with the University of Missouri-Kansas City to present a public history workshop focused on genocides. Graduate students from Dr. Andrew Bergerson’s World History Colloquium will present case studies in genocide, lead participants in a discussion about each study, and highlight the insights that these genocides might provide about the Holocaust. Topics include Holodomor, Huguenot persecution, Rwandan genocide, Armenian genocide, and the California genocide of Native Americans.
Survivor Profile
MARIA DEVINKI

Maria Devinki grew up in Wodzislaw, Poland, as one of three children born to Regina and Solomon Braun. The family owned and operated an export business until the business was forcibly transferred to non-Jews in a process known as Aryanization. The Germans sent her father to Treblinka where he was murdered and forced the rest of the family into a ghetto.

Maria worked as a forced laborer in the nearby Skarżysko complex. While still in the ghetto, Maria married Fred Devinki. Shortly after, with the assistance of a Polish army officer who was a friend of the family, Maria and Fred, her mother and four other relatives went into hiding in a hole under a barn at a nearby farm. They remained there for the next 27 months until being liberated by the advancing Soviet Army in 1945.

After liberation the remaining members of the family attempted to return home and resume their lives. However, in May 1945, after her younger brother was killed by members of the Armia Krajowa, Maria and her husband made their way to a displaced persons camp in Germany and from there to the United States, arriving in Kansas City in 1950.

Common Book Recommendation

Join the MCHE community in reading and discussing Survival in Auschwitz by Primo Levi. December 8, 6:30 p.m. via Zoom

This spring the MCHE community read and discussed Smoke Over Birkenau by Liana Millu. A Jewish Italian partisan, Millu was arrested in 1944 and sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Her incredible story details the complexity of life within a death camp. She describes the generosity, greed, jealousy, swapping recipes, celebrating birthdays, secret births and, of course, constant death that made up her world in Birkenau.

Millu published her unique work in 1947, the same year another Jewish Italian partisan published his own account of life within Auschwitz. In time, Primo Levi’s account would become one of the best known memoirs of the Holocaust.

This fall, the community is encouraged to read Survival in Auschwitz. Levi recounts life in Auschwitz with a calm, somber prose, often seemingly at odds with the nature of the events he describes. Much like Millu’s work, Levi forces us to confront difficult questions about the human condition. Those who missed the spring discussion of Smoke Over Birkenau should consider reading the two works together.

“Dawn came on us like a betrayer; it seemed as though the new sun rose as an ally of our enemies to assist in our destruction. The different emotions that overcame us, of resignation, of futile rebellion, of religious abandon, of fear, of despair, now joined together after a sleepless night in a collective, uncontrolled panic.”
– Excerpt from Survival in Auschwitz

Survivor Profile
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During World War II, approximately 30,000 Jews escaped ghettos and work camps and formed organized armed resistance groups known as partisans. Despite the odds, women were also able to join the partisans. Their work ranged from domestic duties such as cleaning, cooking and nursing to reconnaissance, weapons transport and armed combat. Women made up approximately 10% of the partisans.

Born in Poland in 1924, Faye Schulman received her first camera from her brother when she was thirteen. That camera ultimately saved her life and allowed her to later document Jewish partisan activity. She is one of the only known Jewish partisan photographers. Schulman’s rare collection of images captures the camaraderie, horror and loss, bravery and triumph of the rag-tag, tough partisans—some Jewish, some not—who fought the Germans and their collaborators.

Rescheduled from Spring 2020, *Pictures of Resistance: The Wartime Photography of Jewish Partisan Faye Schulman* is a traveling exhibition produced by the Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation. It poses probing questions about this incredible woman and the people whose images she documented.
MCHE ANNUAL MEETING
AND ELECTIONS

FEATURED GUEST:
George Guastello
President and CEO,
Union Station
Kansas City

All members are invited to attend the virtual annual meeting. Details and registration available at www.mchekc.org/annualmeeting.