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Barbi Quatrano of Boone and Keenan Hero of Charlotte examine an authentic World War II-era Nazi armband.

# Touching the Holocaust: armbands, stamps and postcards

By Monte Mitchell Published: July 20, 2011 » 0 Comments | Post a Comment BOONE –

When German soldiers pillaged a synagogue in southern Russia in 1942, one of them used a piece of scripture as wrapping paper to mail home a parcel.

That piece of scroll, which tells the story of David and Goliath from I Samuel, was on display in Boone on Tuesday as part of the 10th annual Martin and Doris Rosen Summer Symposium on Remembering the Holocaust.

The symposium at Appalachian State University helps teachers learn creative ways to tell their classes about the Holocaust.

"I like teaching in three dimensions," said Danny Spungen, a member of the Spungen Family Foundation in Illinois that owns the visiting collection on display. "I like people touching."

Many of the 250 items in the collection were protected by plastic, but people could pick them up or touch them, including a piece of a looted Torah, the Five Books of Moses. A Nazi soldier had taken the scripture passage from Deuteronomy and used the paper to make an envelope that had a stamp bearing an image of Adolf Hitler.

Teachers picked up an authentic World War II-era Nazi armband and tried to figure out what the material was. They guessed it was wool.

"I was looking at the armband — and to think that was actually on a Nazi officer or Hitler Youth," said Karen West, a teacher at Resurrection Lutheran School in Cary.

Keenan Hero, 11, a rising sixth-grader at St. Mark's Catholic School in Charlotte, picked up the Nazi armband and then looked at postcards from concentration camps such as Dachau.

"It's amazing how they did (it)," he said. "You could peel a stamp, and there would be a note written." The secret messages written under the stamps was one way inmates could avoid Nazi censorship.

The collection was amassed over 30 years by Ken Lawrence, a civil-rights activist and stamp collector who decided to use his skills and hobby to fight back against people who deny the Holocaust happened. Lawrence saw the items as documenting what he termed "the Nazi scourge."

Spungen, whose family had great success manufacturing ball bearings, met Lawrence at a collectors show where Spungen hoped to buy an "Inverted Jenny," a rare American stamp in which an airplane was misprinted upside down.

But the Inverted Jenny he saw wasn't quite perfect even in its imperfection — it had a straight edge along one side rather than stamp-like perforations, he said Tuesday — and Spungen passed on the Jenny.

But he was fascinated by Lawrence's collection and bought it on behalf of the foundation in 2007.

The Spungen Holocaust Postal Collection now bears the title "The Nazi Scourge: Postal Evidence of the Holocaust and the Devastation of Europe."

Spungen travels to schools and other settings to display the items, which can be seen online at <http://foundationcenter.org/grantmaker/spungen/collection.html>.

The symposium is put on by ASU's Center for Judaic, Holocaust and Peace Studies. Co-directors of the center are history professor Rennie Brantz, English professor Rosemary Horowitz and English professor emeritus Zohara Boyd.

The university is establishing a new endowed professorship, which should ensure the continuing history of the Holocaust symposium.

"With all the cutbacks in the university and with state money, they could wipe this program out, but with all this endowment we'll continue it," said Barbi Quatrano of Boone.

The Leon Levine Foundation of Charlotte put up \$466,000, and local people raised more than \$200,000 to establish the endowed professorship to be called the Leon Levine Distinguished Professor in Judaic, Holocaust and Peace Studies. The university is seeking an additional \$334,000 from a state trust fund to reach at least \$1 million for the professorship and the center. Levine is the founder and chairman emeritus of Family Dollar.

Ruth Etkin, who like Quatrano is a member of the Boone area's Jewish community, said an amazing amount of support from the area's non-Jewish community helped them raise the \$200,000 in nine months.

"The importance is there's a guarantee (the holocaust symposium) will continue," she said. "Great, great community support. We're delighted."

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