



Coe College

News Release

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Holocaust ravages vivid in exhibit coming to Coe College

A one-of-a-kind, award-winning exhibit of hundreds of pieces of World War II era mail and documents related to the Nazi's attempted extermination of Jews and others will be publicly displayed at Coe College on Saturday Feb. 14. The exhibit will be shown from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the Perrine Gallery of Stewart Memorial Library. It is free and open to the public.

The collection is owned by the Deerfield, Illinois-based Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation, which acquired the extraordinary items to preserve and offer them for public use at Holocaust and genocide educational venues around the world.

"The insured value of the collection is \$1 million, but the educational value to future generations is incalculable," said Daniel Spungen, a member of the board of the Spungen Family Foundation.

"One of the most heartbreaking artifacts and historical evidence of Nazi desecration is a torn fragment of a hand-written Hebrew parchment from a Bible scroll (Tanakh). A German soldier used the holy scripture to wrap a parcel he mailed from Russia to Austria in 1942," explained Spungen. "The sacred parchment was pillaged from a Russian synagogue. Ironically, the portion that was used as wrapping paper has passages from the first book of Samuel about the story of David and Goliath."

George J. Kramer, chairman of the New York-based Philatelic Foundation, described the scroll fragment as "one of the most important items of Judaic postal history." This is only the third public exhibition since the acquisition of the historic items from a private collector was formally announced by the Spungen charitable foundation last September.

Steve Feller, a Coe professor of physics and co-author of the book, "Silent Witness: Civilian Camp Money of World War II," will present an educational program about Holocaust-related money in conjunction with the exhibit of the collection.

The postal artifacts in the collection are evidence of the torments, ravages and terror of war and genocide in Europe from 1933 to 1945. They also show that many prisoners never lost hope, and the human spirit survived.

"We will be giving educational institutions and museums around the world the opportunity to use the exhibit materials for displays, lectures and research," said Florence Spungen, Founder of the Foundation. "This is a permanent educational tool for all generations to document this important period of time that cannot be forgotten."

The Holocaust exhibit was acquired intact from noted researcher, writer and collector, Ken Lawrence, of Bellefonte, Pa., a former vice president of the American Philatelic Society, who began assembling the material in 1978.

Including items contributed by Spungen, the foundation now will be the guardian of the more than 250 envelopes, post cards, letters, and specially-designated postage stamps used exclusively by concentration camp inmates, Jewish ghetto residents and prisoners of war. In addition, the collection includes counterfeit Bank of England paper money created by slave laborers during "Operation Bernhard," the Nazis' failed plot to undermine England's economy and the subject of the recent motion picture, "The Counterfeiters."

Frequently exhibited by Lawrence, the display won awards and medals at stamp shows including an international exhibition in Washington, D.C. in 2006.

"The scroll page that was used for mailing a parcel is the most viscerally disturbing item. Some scholars have told me it is among the most important surviving evidence of Nazi desecration," said Lawrence. "Chronic, flagrant desecration exemplified by violating that sacred scripture imbued the cultured German nation and historically honor-bound German army with an inhuman attitude toward Jews that made the Holocaust both possible, and given the opportunity, inevitable."

Some of the ghetto and concentration camp letters have coded or hidden messages about the plight of the senders. Research about the postal materials has led to discovery of a previously unreported undercover address in Lisbon, Portugal, used by Jewish resistance fighters, and the location of two camps in Romania for slave laborers and political detainees.

In addition to the Bible scroll fragment used to wrapping a package, the collection includes:

- Rare examples of mail sent to prisoners and mail sent between inmates at different camps;

- A card sent by an inmate at Dachau soon after it opened in 1933 is the earliest known prisoner mail from any Nazi concentration camp;
- An October 3, 1943 letter to his parents in Rzeszów, Poland from Eduard Pys, a 21-year-old who arrived on the first transport at the Auschwitz concentration camp in May 1940;
- The only known surviving piece of mail sent by Rabbi Leo Baeck, the leader of German Jewry (Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden), while he was confined to the Theresienstadt ghetto;
- A postal checking account receipt imprinted with a crude anti-Semitic caricature denoting payment for a subscription to a Nazi propaganda newspaper, Der Stürmer;
- Mail secretly carried by children through the sewers of Warsaw during the 1944 uprising;
- Mail clandestinely carried from Nazi-occupied Poland to the exhibit Polish Navy headquarters in London and to a Jewish resistance leader in Switzerland; and,
- A December 1945 postal card addressed to Dr. Eugen von Haagen, a Nazi war criminal on trial after the war at Nuremberg, that is the only recorded example of the censor mark of the International Military Tribunal.

Arrangements are being worked out for the entire collection to be housed at the new facilities of the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center that will open in April in Skokie, Ill.

"We are genuinely excited about the prospect of being the central repository for this remarkable collection," said Richard Hirschhaut, Executive Director of the museum.

The Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation was established in 2006 to support charitable and educational causes. Many of the historic artifacts now can be viewed online at the foundation's Web site, www.SpungenFoundation.org.

Photo cutlines:

1) **Earliest Concentration Camp Mail:** Dated September 6, 1933, this Dachau postcard is earliest known Nazi concentration camp inmate stationery and earliest known camp censor's mark. The pre-printed text reads: "CONCENTRATION CAMP DACHAU, Excerpt from Camp Regulations, Prisoners may receive one package with up to ten pounds of laundry per month (foodstuffs, tobacco items, etc. excluded) likewise one letter and one card. Violations result in rejection (of the letter, card or package). Oral authorization is not permitted. The Camp Commander." From the collection of World War II era Holocaust-related mail acquired from Ken Lawrence by the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation.

Photo credit: Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation

2) **Operation Bernhard note:** Examples of counterfeit 5, 10, 20 and 50 pound denomination Bank of England paper money, created by slave laborers at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp during the Nazis' failed "Operation Bernhard"

project to undermine England's economy, are in the collection of World War II era Holocaust-related items being preserved by the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation. The infamous fake bank notes scheme was the subject of the recent motion picture, "The Counterfeiters."

Photo credit: Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation

The event will be held in the Perrine Gallery
Stewart Memorial Library
Coe College
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