

A Monument in Honor of the Survivors of the Holocaust who made new lives for themselves and their families in Iowa and the Iowans who as members of the United States Armed Forces liberated the prisoners of the Concentration Camps

The Holocaust was one of the most horrifying and shameful periods in the history of humankind.

“In 1945, American and other allied soldiers put an end to the unspeakable horror of the concentration camps. Through the eyes of the liberators – and those who survived the torture of the camps, the world witnessed tragedy beyond the realm of human comprehension. ...The world must always remember that awful period so that we may never relive it.” -- **Iowa Senator Tom Harkin**

“ We strive to promote greater respect for Survivors and Liberators of World War II concentration camps. It is also important for generations to come to learn of such horrifying war-time experiences so that they will not have to live through them again in the future.” -- **Iowa Senator Charles E. Grassley**

Love thy neighbor

The Holocaust was a manmade human tragedy of unimaginable proportions. Eleven million lives were senselessly consumed between the years 1933 and 1945 by the National Socialists of Germany (the Nazis) and their collaborators. As many as 1.5 million of the victims were children. Six million of the victims were Jews. The vibrant Jewish communities of Europe were destroyed.

“Many of the problems we face today are human created problems. We need to cultivate a universal responsibility for one another.” - The Dalai Lama, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

The Nazis victimized some people for what they did, some for what they refused to do, some for what they were, and some for the fact that they were.
– John S. Conway, Historian

Why was the world drawn into conflict? In brief, the Nazis considered themselves biologically (racially) superior to others in all physical, intellectual, and ethical ways. The Nazis believed they had a natural right and obligation to subdue and even exterminate inferior peoples.

While the Nazis classified Jews as the priority “enemy,” they targeted other groups including Gypsies, people with disabilities, Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, and Afro-Germans. The Nazis also identified political dissidents, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and homosexuals as security risks either because they consciously opposed the Nazi regime or some aspect of their behavior did not fit Nazi perceptions of social norms.

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Since the Holocaust, large-scale mass murders intended to annihilate entire peoples have been committed in the name of ethnic, racial, and religious superiority. The list of such massive atrocities regrettably includes East Timor, Kosovo, Rwanda, and Sudan.

Cambridge
Nothing that I can do will change the structure of the universe. With my voice I can help the greatest of all causes: goodwill among men; Peace. – Albert Einstein

Seek peace and pursue it.

The History

I experienced the collapse of a free society (Germany's Weimar Republic) and the collapse of democracy. The Nazi Party did not come to power by force. They were elected. – Adapted from Michel Thomas, Holocaust survivor

Once elected in 1933, the National Socialist Democratic Party (the Nazis) quickly dominated Parliament and passed laws that removed human rights protections, layer by layer from those they deemed 'undesirable.'

*First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out--
Because I was not a Socialist.*

*Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out--
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out--
Because I was not a Jew.*

Then they came for me--and there was no one left to speak for me.

-- Martin Niemöller, a prominent Protestant pastor who opposed the Nazi regime. He spent the last seven years of Nazi rule in concentration camps.

While the Holocaust was taking place, most were bystanders. Some were collaborators. And a small, but very important number helped those facing persecution. – adapted from Robert Satloff, Historian.

Science may have found a cure for most evils; but it has found no remedy for the worst of them all – the apathy of human beings. – Helen Keller

Starting in 1933, the Nazis sought to make life so difficult for Jews that they would be forced to leave. With highly limited immigration quotas worldwide, most who sought to escape were unable to find countries willing to take them in.

The opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference.
– Elie Wiesel, Author and Holocaust survivor

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. – Margaret Meade

One group, the Friends or Quakers at Scattergood Hostel from West Branch, Iowa notably helped save Europeans fleeing the whirlwind of Hitler.

“From 1939 to 1943, 185 refugees...found refuge at Scattergood, a temporary hostel in what had been a Friends boarding school...Among those fleeing Nazi-occupied Europe were of course Jews, but also political opponents of Hitler's regime, outspoken religious figures, former members of the Berlin city council and the Reichstag, prominent judges and lawyers, unco-optable artists, journalists and wealthy merchants, families with children, single young male students, elderly socialite ladies and dejected academics.” – Michael Luick-Thrams, Scholar.

Beginning in 1939, Jews were segregated from the general population and herded into ghettos, the goal being to reduce the population through disease and starvation. Many of these ghettos were walled in. The residents of the ghettos were then deported to concentration camps. Many were forced into slave labor to manufacture goods for wartime industries while being subjected to severe maltreatment. Most slave laborers died within four months.

In 1942, officials of the Third Reich agreed on a policy aimed at the physical annihilation of the European Jews. The Nazis then established six centers for the efficient assembly-line style murder of human beings. The operation of these killing centers was considered classified information.

Throughout history, it has been the inaction of those who could have acted, the indifference of those who should have known better, and the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most that has made it possible for evil to triumph. – Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia

A man does what he must – in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers – and this is the basis of all human morality. – President John F. Kennedy

The Liberators

Inmates of the extermination camps were liberated by Allied troops commanded by General Dwight D. Eisenhower. As Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower inspected the Ohrdruf Concentration Camp which had been liberated by American soldiers on April 12, 1945.

“ I visited every nook and cranny of the camp because I felt it my duty to be in a position from then on to testify at first hand about these things in case there ever grew up at home the belief or assumption that ‘the stories of Nazi brutality were just propaganda.’ ... I felt that the evidence should be immediately placed before the American and British publics in a fashion that would leave no room for cynical doubt.”

Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whosoever that saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world. – Hillel, Jewish sage, c. 100 CE.

That which is hateful to you, do not do unto others. – Hillel, Jewish sage, c. 100 CE.

Iowans in the United States Armed Forces during World War II were well represented among the liberators. They came from cities and towns across the state and were attached to a number of divisions that were the first to enter the camps.

Flags of the Liberating United States Army Divisions

The following United States Army Divisions have been certified by the United States Army Center of Military History as Liberating Divisions

Camps	Division	Date
Dachau Subcamps	42 nd , 45 th Infantry, 20 th Armored 4 th , 36 th , 63 rd , 99 th , 103 rd Infantry, 10 th , 12 th , 14 th Armored, 101 st Airborne	April 29, 1945
Buchenwald Subcamps	80 th Infantry, 6 th Armored 2 nd , 69 th , 89 th , 4 th 8th Armored	April 11, 1945
Mathausen Subcamps	11 th Armored 26 th , 71, 80th Infantry, 11 th Armored	May 6, 1945
Flossenburg Subcamps	90 th Infantry 1 st , 65 th Infantry, 9 th Armored	April 23, 1945
Neuengamme Subcamps	8 th , 84 th Infantry, 82 Airborne	April, May 1945
Dora-Mittelbau	104 th Infantry, 3 rd Armored	April 11, 1945
Attendorn	86 th Infantry	April 11, 1945
Werl	95 th Infantry	April 2-8, 1945
Langenstein	83 rd Infantry	April 11, 1945
Dinslaken	29 th Infantry	April 3, 1945
Spergau	2 nd Infantry	April 17, 1945

The soldiers who entered the camps witnessed the horrific human conditions first hand.

Testimonies of Iowa Liberators

1. Pershing J. Johnson, Davenport

In March – April 1945, my battalion crossed the Rhine, and with that sweep, we caused the liberation of concentration camps. We did pretty well in helping the displaced persons. We saved lives.

2. William Barton, Davenport

As I blew off the locks on a gate into Dachau and first saw the inmates, I realized they were expecting to be murdered. We were able to put the prisoners at ease and then helped prevent the spread of disease.

3. Carl R. Cline, Davenport

When I entered the camp, I saw men and women dying from starvation. I am very sorry that the care and feeding we gave them couldn't keep most of them alive.

4. Richard S. Corbin, Davenport

I was a 21-year old officer when my division liberated Wobellin Concentration Camp in Germany. I was directed to inspect all the buildings so I could report what I had seen to the commanding General. What I saw, the living and the dead, I shall never forget.

5. Douglas Ruddy, Davenport

I saw our tank smash through the gates of Dachau. Among the inmates was a young woman who had made an American flag, piece by piece from bits of red, white and blue cloth.

6. Vernon Tott, Sioux city

I was a 20 year old from Sioux City and in the 84th Infantry Division. On April 10, 1945, we stumbled upon a compound outside Hanover, Germany. It was ringed with barbed wire and displayed a sign warning German SS troops not to enter for fear of disease. I was horrified by what I saw inside.

The Survivors

Most of the survivors of the Holocaust spent months if not years after the war in Displaced Persons (DP) Camps. They had no where else to go. Some married other survivors during those months after the war ended in 1945. It was from the DP camps that many of the survivors journeyed to the United States to begin new lives, the path cleared for them by legislation championed by President Truman in 1948. Others, beginning in 1948, headed to the newly established haven for Jewish refugees, the State of Israel.

Some bound for America came to Iowa. Over fifty came to Des Moines. Others settled elsewhere within the state. Most stayed in Iowa. They worked at whatever jobs they could find. Some eventually owned their own shops. They became Iowans and American citizens.

From Iowa Survivors

1. Kitty Williams, Council Bluffs

Having survived the Holocaust, having come to Council Bluffs and having married and had children, I am so fortunate in so many ways.

2. Linda Fishman

In 1942 I was forced to work in a factory and then was taken to four concentration camps. I was liberated by the American Seventh Army in May 1945. My husband, baby and I came to Des Moines, Iowa in 1950 with the help of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. Life was difficult but I am happy here, where my sons were born.

3. Jacob Waizman

After I was in Auschwitz and two other camps, I saved myself in Buchenwald by hiding in a terrible place until Patton's 3rd Army came on April 11, 1945. My wife, baby daughter and I came to Des Moines in 1950. I worked and retired as an assistant engineer for the Des Moines Public Schools. I love America, Iowa, and my neighbors, who have been so kind to my family.

From a child of Survivors

My mother and father brought my brother and I as young children to Iowa in 1949 after President Truman authorized immigration from the Displaced Persons camps. My parents didn't speak English. We came by train with a tag that indicated "Des Moines" was to be our destination. Dad had an 8th grade formal education but was certified in the DP camp in cabinetry, so that he would have a way to make a living. Once in Des Moines, we were assisted, in particular, by members of the Jewish community who helped us adapt to the customs and culture of Iowa. My parents were very appreciative of having being accepted as Iowans. They were grateful to the U.S. and British troops that saved them. When my parents became U.S. citizens in 1955, citizenship was conferred upon us children as well. - Jacob Shnurman,

One person of integrity can make a difference.

--Elie Wiesel, Author and Holocaust survivor

It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work of attaining social justice, but neither are you at liberty to desist from it. -- Jewish Wisdom Literature

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?

But if I am only for myself, who am I?

And if not now, when?

-- Hillel, Jewish sage, c. 100 CE

Afterword

By the time this memorial was erected, almost all of the local survivors of the Holocaust and many of the Iowan soldiers who saved their lives had passed from the scene.

As the generation of Holocaust survivors and liberators dwindles, the torch of remembrance, of bearing witness, and of education must continue forward. – Dan Gillerman, Israeli Ambassador