

HOLOCAUST HISTORY / INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Duquesne University hosts Holocaust exhibit 'Who is a Jew?'

Local historian's research will be exhibited through Feb. 4.

By **JUSTIN VELLUCCI**

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Duquesne students view "Who is a Jew" (Photo courtesy of Duquesne University)

Pittsburgh-based historian David Rosenberg first visited Amiens, France — a city of 120,000 nestled in the Somme, 90 miles due north of the Eiffel Tower — in 1973 for a dissertation he was working on while attending Yale University.

It was Protestants who brought Rosenberg to Amiens, particularly the history of the Protestant movement there during the 16th century. It was the city's Jews that kept him coming back.

On one 1995 trip during High Holiday services inside the Amiens synagogue, he saw a simple plaque.

"'To our Martyrs,' it said, and there followed a list of 49 names of Jews of the Somme — men, women and children — who had been deported to their deaths in the camps," Rosenberg said. "About 15 years later, in 2011, remembering

the plaque and sensing a vacuum of knowledge and awareness around me when I visited, I decided to embark on this project as a duty to the departed and, as I hoped, a contribution to the historical consciousness of the region.”

The byproduct of that decade-long journey — an exhibit: “Who is a Jew? Amiens, France 1940-1945” — combines haunting yet humanizing photos, letters and events of the Holocaust and honors the 6 million Jewish victims, and millions of other victims, of Nazism during World War II. The exhibit is being staged on the fourth floor of Gumberg Library at Duquesne University now through Feb. 4.

“Who is a Jew” was previously displayed at Temple Emanuel of South Hills, the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh and Hillman Library at the University of Pittsburgh, Rosenberg said. But Duquesne has expanded the exhibit — including the installation of “talk tiles,” which feature audio clips of people reading the letters in the exhibit.

The core of Rosenberg’s historical work revolves around personal identification cards of Amiens’ Jews that Rosenberg found at a French Holocaust museum in 2017, as well as documents from national archives he discovered in 2014.

“Putting those two things together, I understood I had something that could drive this story home,” Rosenberg said. “I’ve also tried to insert this story into the place where it happened, in France.”

The exhibit also was staged in Amiens and is available for viewing online at jewsofthesomme.com.

“I want to make [visible] these people who have been hidden from history,” Rosenberg said. “I want to make sure the reality of their lives is unavoidable and accessible.”

That message resonates at Duquesne, said Shai Maaravi, a senior who came from the Golan Heights in Israel to study there. Maaravi said the Catholic college encourages the practicing of all religions.

“It’s not like going to Pitt, where you have a huge Jewish population, but I’ve been lucky to find solidarity here,” said Maaravi, president of the school’s Jewish student organization.

Maaravi also is encouraging his peers to check out “Who is a Jew?”

“The idea of taking this one small town and letting people know what happened there? The actual details? That tells a story,” he said. “Tens of thousands of small towns were destroyed during the Holocaust’ — that doesn’t describe a story.”

Duquesne will also commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day this week. It was designated Jan. 27 by the United Nations General Assembly, coinciding with the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Holocaust’s most infamous camp.

To mark the date, Duquesne will host a free online interfaith commemoration and presentation on Jan. 26 featuring Lauren Bairnsfather, director of the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh; Tree of Life Rabbi Hazzan Jeffery Myers; the Rev. Bill Christy, C.S.Sp., Duquesne chaplain and director of Spiritan campus ministry; and Maaravi from the Jewish student organization.

During the event, Rosenberg will present a talk titled “The Making of ‘Who is a Jew?’: A Tale of Two Cities and the Challenges of Bringing a Troubling Holocaust History Home.”

Rosenberg also will be presented with a medal of honor from the city of Amiens during a Feb. 8 ceremony. **PJC**