



Grove City French students help preserve tragic chapter in Jewish history



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A few Grove City College French majors recently got a crash course in what it truly means to immerse oneself in history.

They were given the opportunity to help translate 19 documents from French to English related to the January 1944 mass arrest of Jews in Amiens, a city in the Somme region of France. Those records and firsthand accounts forced participating student translators to grapple with the harrowing nature of this tragedy that befell dozens of French citizens almost 80 years ago.

“When I read it from an outside perspective, it hit me that this really happened,” said Katelyn Livorse, a Grove City sophomore majoring in French and political science. “It becomes more impactful and disturbing to read, because it was real.”

This translation project was spearheaded by Kelsey Madsen, who chairs Grove City College's Department of Modern Languages, and David Rosenberg, a former University of Pittsburgh archivist who has been meticulously studying 1940s Amiens and helping to both preserve and reveal the plight of its Jewish population through his traveling "Who is a Jew?" exhibit.

Pittsburghers can catch its current iteration, "[The Fruits of Hate: A French City During the Holocaust](#)," at the Andrew Carnegie Free Library & Music Hall in Carnegie through Nov. 30. The Grove City students' translations are already on display both as part of the exhibit and via jewsofthesomme.com, a website housing much of Rosenberg's work with his daughter, Lydia Rosenberg.

"This is an outstanding contribution both to the exhibit and the website," Rosenberg said during an [October gallery talk](#) at the library. "We are honored to be able to hear some of these new translations, and I would like to thank Dr. Madsen and the students of Grove City College sincerely for their participation."

Rosenberg's exhibit [debuted in 2018](#) and has since enjoyed multiple engagements at [various universities](#), places of worship and other venues throughout the Pittsburgh area. His efforts [were rewarded last year](#) when Amiens Mayor Brigitte Foure presented him with the medal of the city of Amiens.

Madsen has been teaching at Grove City for six years and generally focuses her research on "questions of how memories and history are represented in literature." She stumbled across Rosenberg's exhibit last spring while teaching a class on World War II history in French.

They soon began corresponding about his work, and Madsen said Rosenberg suggested testing the linguistic skills of Grove City French majors through this translation challenge.

"This is obviously work he or I could have done," Madsen said. "The point of having the students to do it was for them to have a first-person connection with the past."

She put out a call for volunteers in August and ultimately rounded up a group that included Livorse, senior Cara Scott, freshman Marcus Henry, junior Virginia Williams and recent graduate Jaclyn Nichols. It took

about a month for them to translate everything and another few weeks of editing before Madsen deemed their work ready to be shown publicly in “The Fruits of Hate” and on the Rosenbergs’ website.

The translation team did their best to retain each documents’ original tone and intention, which was sometimes difficult given the fact that many French words and phrases don’t perfectly correspond to anything that would make sense to English speakers. As Madsen put it, much of what they were reading contained “valuable traces” of former Amiens residents whose lives were either upended or cut short by the Holocaust.

When all was said and done, Madsen felt these Grove City students had received valuable hands-on translation experience that also served as a reminder of how those atrocities occurred less than a century ago.

“For my students, that was their great grandparents’ generation,” Madsen said. “I think it’s such an important historical event that by having them connect with stories of individuals and see the photos ... that it’s a way to humanize the past and see how vital it is to be aware of the past.”

Scott, a dual philosophy and French major, had taken Madsen’s class on World War II-era France and visited Pittsburgh to check out Rosenbergs’ exhibit. She noticed that not many folks were interacting with it, which she assumed was because so much of it was in French. While Scott only translated one document, she assisted Madsen during the editing process and said she grew to love what they were doing so much that she’s now “considering pursuing it as a career.”

Henry, a French and biology major, said that the documents initially assigned to him “were a little more bureaucratic” and thus more difficult to connect with on an emotional level. Eventually, though, he was given more autobiographical material that began tugging at his heart strings.

“Those were really deep and moving,” Henry said. “It gave me that full view of the whole situation, where you see the facts of what happened as well as the deeply personal and intimate moments.”

All three Grove City translators praised Madsen and Rosenberg. Scott said that Madsen is the kind of professor who is always “so on top of things” and Livorse can tell that she clearly “wants us to succeed.”

Henry appreciates both Madsen and Rosenberg for opening the door to a “deeper experience for us as students” than conventional coursework.

“I didn’t think I’d actually get to translate real documents that are posted on websites for people to read,” Livorse added. “It’s cool that I get to actually make a difference in the real world.”

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