

OCTOBER 19, 2023 | MODERN LANGUAGES

Student translators help preserve Holocaust history



Grove City College students helped translate a collection of records and first-hand accounts documenting the mass arrest nearly 80 years ago of Jews in the city of Amiens in the Somme region of France.

Of the dozens arrested and later taken to Auschwitz, just one person survived, according to Dr. David Rosenberg, a historian and retired archivist committed to highlighting the neglected history of the Jewish population of that region.

The 19 documents the students translated are now part of Rosenberg's traveling exhibit "[The Fruits of Hate: A French City During the Holocaust](#)," which is on display at the Andrew Carnegie Free Library of Carnegie, Pa., until Nov. 30, and will be added to the website [Jews of the Somme](#), which includes hundreds of photo IDs, letters, and other documents of the era.

The documents, which were only available in the original French, are all that is left to put "voices" and "faces" to these victims of the Holocaust, Rosenberg said. Official records and correspondence combined with memoirs of descendants and survivors provides a chilling and poignant record of the arrests. By making them accessible in English, he said the students "have made an outstanding contribution to the memory of adults and children victimized by an irrational hate."

[Dr. Kelsey B. Madsen](#), chair of the [Department of Modern Languages](#), enlisted some of her students to translate and edit the Amiens documents after seeing the exhibit and meeting Rosenberg last spring. While the work provided an opportunity for them to use their French language skills outside of the classroom as a form of service, Madsen said it may have had a more profound impact.

"They are actively contributing to the transmission of history and memories between generations and between cultures," she said.

"Today, World War II remains a popular topic for films, novels, and documentaries, but our relationship to it is increasingly abstract," Madsen said. "College students are unlikely to have met a Holocaust survivor or to have grown up knowing relatives who fought in World War II – for many, that was their great-grandparents' generation. Through translating, the students have the opportunity to cultivate a human connection with individuals and events portrayed in the documents."

On Jan. 4, 1944, and the days following, the Gestapo rounded up dozens of Jews in Amiens and the Department of the Somme. Previous mass arrests in the city had targeted foreigners, but this was the first time French citizens were taken. They were transported with more than 1,000 other Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where the overwhelming majority of them, including all but one of the Amiens Jews, were gassed on arrival.

The occupiers kept records of the roundup, including local officials' correspondence and first-hand reports documenting the chapter in the history of the city, which was liberated a few months after the roundup. The records were moved to Paris after the war and left undisturbed for decades.

In 2011, Rosenberg, a former University of Pittsburgh archivist, began researching and documenting the history of the Jewish community of Amiens and the Somme during the German occupation. In 2014 he discovered the records in Paris, which included correspondence with local officials concerning Jews in the city, and later a collection of ID cards, or fiches, which included photos and details that added to the story.

The materials inspired he and his daughter Lydia Rosenberg to create the exhibit and the [website](#), which includes an extensive collection of scanned original documents, blog style articles about individuals and families, and a

growing body of original photographs from the private collection of relatives and descendants.

Freshman Marcus Henry, a Biology and French major from State College, Pa., said reading and translating the accounts of people who suffered in the roundup was fascinating.

"These were intimate, painful scenes in the lives of those who wrote these letters," he said. "This way of looking at things is an interesting reconnection from the often-emotionless facts we learn about history to the people whose lives it impacted, especially on a smaller scale than the grand generals and politicians who make a larger mark on history."

Cara Scott, a senior Philosophy and French major from Oxford, Miss., said she was eager to get involved in the project when Madsen proposed it, but wasn't prepared for the effect it would have on her.

"When I began working on these translations, I was not immediately impacted by the gravity of the situations described in the accounts. There is a certain degree of removal that comes with reading historical texts, especially when they are written in another language. However, whenever I got to the end of each account where the writer would describe the moment of the arrest, the significance of what I had just worked on would hit me. The depictions of the arrests of children were especially disturbing," Scott said.

The work was rewarding and inspiring, Scott said. "It was a great feeling to put my language skills to work on something so worthwhile. Following this project, I'm looking for more French-to-English translation opportunities and am considering pursuing a career in translation."

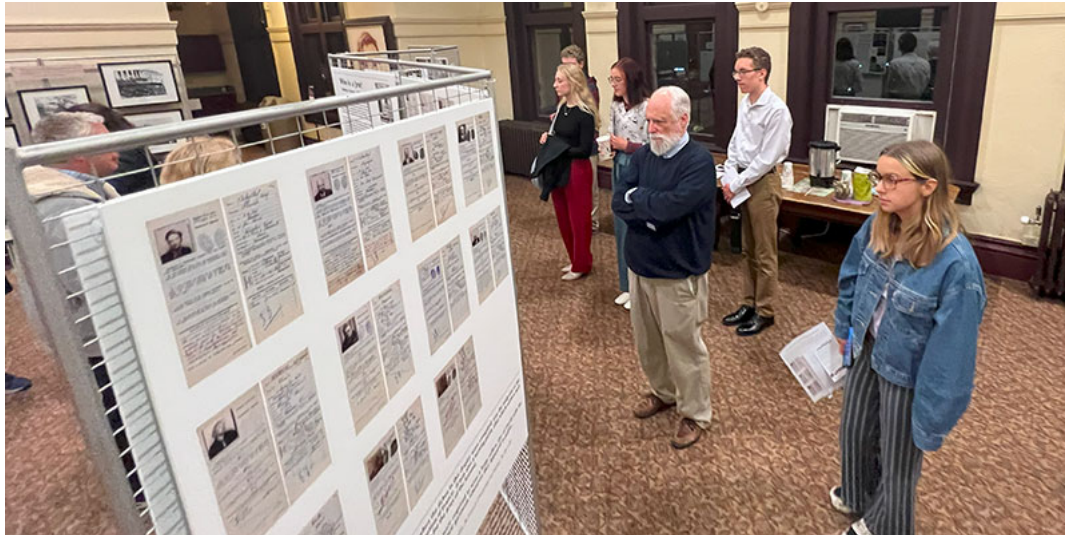
In addition to Henry and Scott, Grove City College students Katelyn Livorse, a sophomore Political Science and French major, and Virginia Williams, a junior Biology major, and 2023 Political Science graduate, Jaclyn Nichols contributed to the translations.

Madsen and the students visited the exhibit on Tuesday, Oct. 17 for a [gallery talk](#) where they read some of the translated accounts and shared their impressions about the work.

"I'm profoundly grateful that Dr. Rosenberg has given us this opportunity to work alongside him in his effort to preserve the memory of Jewish individuals living in Amiens, France who were unjustly arrested and deported during the Occupation," Madsen said.

Rosenberg plans to bring the exhibit to Grove City College in April. For more about his work, visit jewsofthesomme.com. Watch the video of the Oct. 17 gallery talk on "The Fruits of Hate: A French City During the Holocaust [here](#)."

(Photo: Lydia Rosenberg)



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