



SAFE HAVEN

Viewer's Guide

**with suggestions for
discussion groups
and classroom activities**

To accompany

SAFE HAVEN

*A documentary about America's
only refugee shelter for victims of the Holocaust*

The *Safe Haven* documentary was
written, produced, and directed by

PAUL LEWIS

This *Safe Haven* guide was
written by
PAUL LEWIS

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**280 State Street
P.O. Box 21
Rochester, N.Y. 14601**

(716) 325-7500

SYNOPSIS

Safe Haven tells the story of America's one and only refugee shelter for victims of Hitler's Nazi Europe. One thousand people from 18 countries were brought to the United States to live out the war in peace in the small town of Oswego in upstate New York. The Oswego story is little-known and was mostly overlooked at the time because the refugees arrived shortly after the Normandy invasion. All eyes were on the fighting in Europe. But the story is important for what it tells us about what America did — and did not do — to help the Jews of Europe during World War Two.

Although State Department officials knew as early as the winter of 1942 that the Jews of Europe were being systematically exterminated, no action was taken. Finally, in June 1944, President Franklin Roosevelt agreed to admit 1,000 refugees. This was clearly a token gesture of rescue. One thousand were admitted in lieu of a larger plan to bring in tens and hundreds of thousands.



The refugees were surprised and angry to learn they would be restricted behind a fence and barbed wire. (photo courtesy National Archives)

The refugees were brought to the United States outside the normal immigration quotas, and they all had to sign a form promising to return to their homelands at the end of the war. Many of the refugees had survived or escaped the Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps.

The refugees were housed at Fort Ontario, a former army garrison. They were surrounded by a six-foot-high chainlink fence topped with three strands of barbed wire. They were restricted to the city limits of Oswego and were prohibited from taking jobs outside the internment camp.

For 18 months, the refugees slept, ate, worked and studied at Fort Ontario. They married, had children and died. But they lacked the one thing they wanted most: freedom.

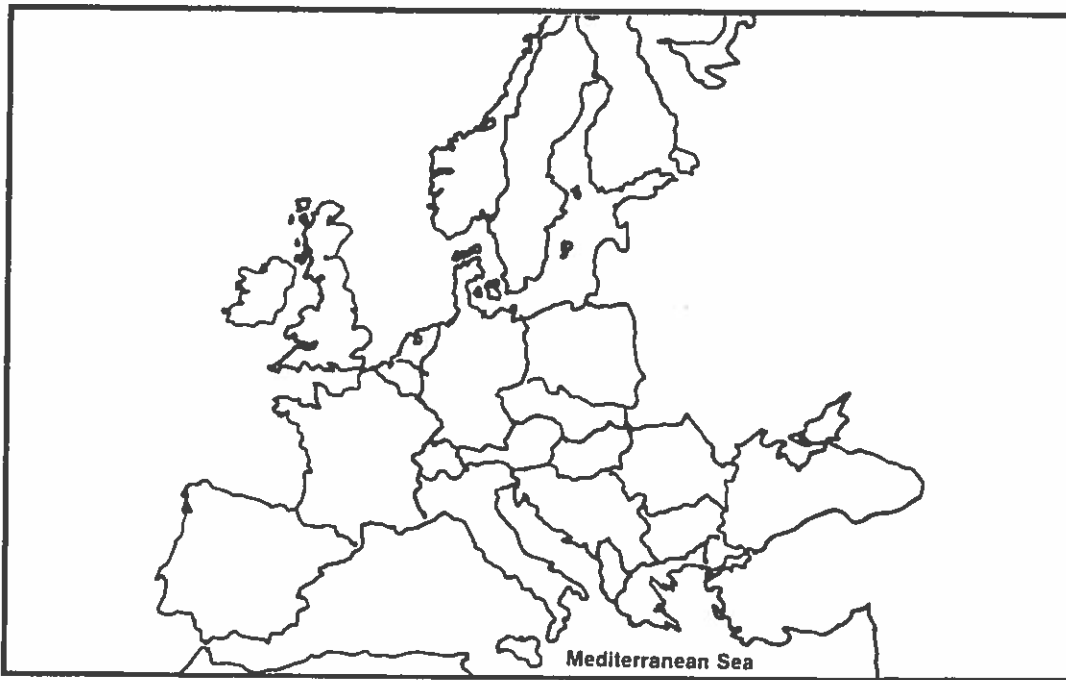
The refugees rode an emotional rollercoaster as they waited for news of their fate. They feared a return to the "homeland" that had persecuted and expelled them.

Finally, President Truman agreed to allow the refugees to apply for immigrant status without returning to Europe. Today, many of the Oswego refugees are leaders in American medicine, law and business. They have made tremendous contributions to American society. The Oswego experience forces us to ask what might have been if more refugees had been brought to the United States and placed in other safe havens.

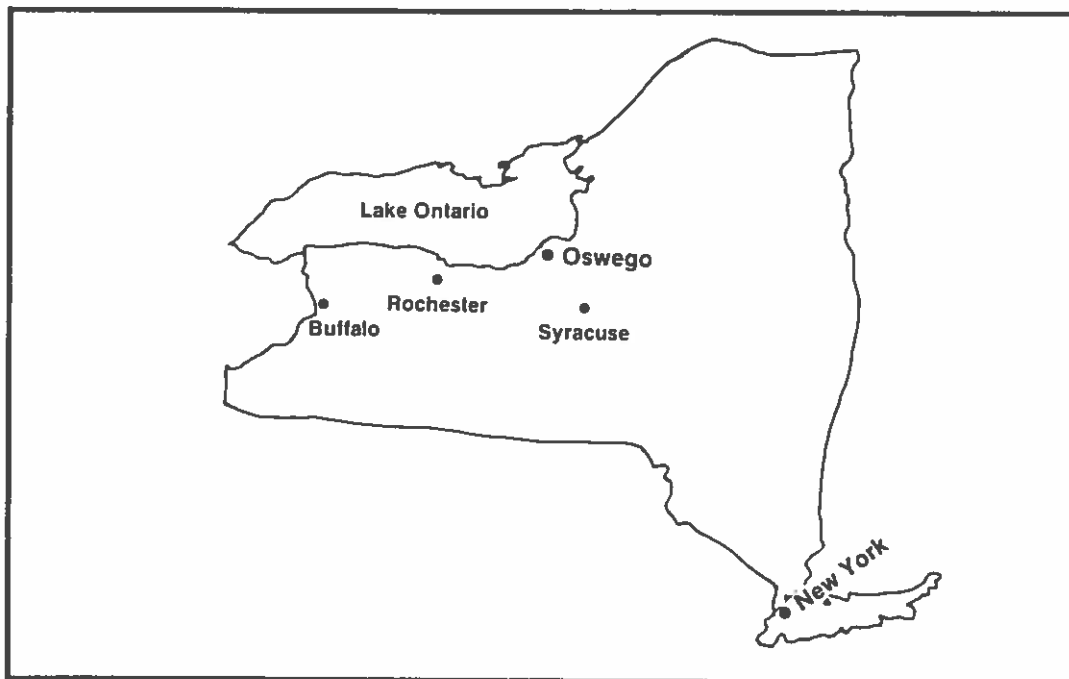
SUGGESTED AUDIENCE:

Safe Haven contains several archival film scenes from various concentration camps. Some of the pictures may be disturbing. Therefore, we suggest an audience of 8th grade and older.

Safe Haven is best used as a companion to Holocaust study. It is not intended as a primary source or introduction to Holocaust study.



The Fort Ontario refugees came from 18 European countries.



The refugees arrived in New York Harbor August 3, 1944. An overnight train ride took them to their new home in Oswego. They did not know then that they would be confined for 18 months.

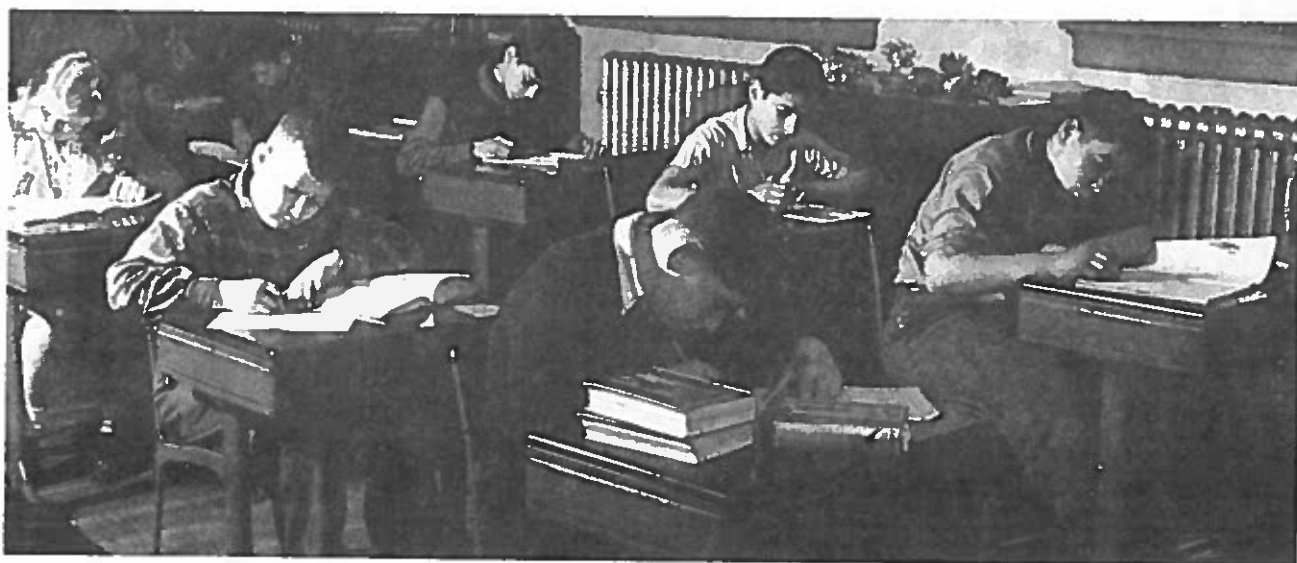
SAFE HAVEN TIME LINE

This timeline includes general historical events. Specific events relating to *Safe Haven* are in bold type.

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|------|-----------|---|
| 1933 | January | ● Adolf Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany. |
| | March | ● Dachau, the first concentration camp, opens. |
| 1936 | | ● Rolf Manfred's family flees Germany for Italy. |
| 1938 | November | ● Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass). 200 synagogues are destroyed, 7,500 Jewish shops looted, 20,000 Jewish men arrested, many of whom were sent to concentration camps. |
| | November | ● Steffi Steinberg-Winters flees Germany for Italy. |
| 1939 | September | ● Germany invades Poland. World War Two begins. |
| | | ● Manya Hartmeyer-Breuer flees Germany. Her flight leads through Belgium, France and Italy and includes time in five concentration camp. |
| 1940 | May | ● Germany invades Holland, Belgium, France. |
| | May | ● Auschwitz Concentration Camp opens. |
| | May | ● Adam Munz escapes from Belgium ahead of Nazi troops. He travels south through France and over the Alps, by foot, into Italy. |
| 1941 | September | ● All Jews in the Third Reich are forced to wear yellow Star of David. |
| | | ● Germany invades Yugoslavia. |
| | | ● Leon Levitch flees Yugoslavia for Italy. |
| | December | ● Japan attacks Pearl Harbor. |
| 1942 | January | ● Wannsee Conference: German leaders develop official plan to murder all the Jews of Europe, "The Final Solution." |
| | | ● Fred Baum flees Yugoslavia for Italy where he is arrested and jailed for lack of proper papers. |
| | November | ● State Department evidence confirms Nazi plan to exterminate the Jews of Europe. State Department officials order a halt to further information about "The Final Solution." |
| 1943 | April | ● Warsaw Ghetto uprising begins. |
| | | ● Allied forces begin the liberation of southern Italy. |
| | July | ● Treasury Department lawyers discover cables to the State Department confirming Nazi mass murders and the State Department effort to suppress the information. |
| 1944 | January | ● FDR creates the War Refugee Board. |
| | June | ● Allied forces invade Normandy. |
| | June | ● FDR tells Congress of his plan to establish "Emergency Refugee Shelter" for 1,000 refugees to be brought in outside immigration laws. |

SAFE HAVEN TIME LINE CONTINUED

- 1944 July ● 982 refugees sail from Naples to New York on board the troop ship *Henry Gibbins*, pledging to return to their homelands after the war.
- August 3 ● Refugees arrive in New York Harbor.
- August 5 ● Refugees arrive at Ford Ontario, Oswego, New York.
- August 17 ● Manya Hartmeyer marries Ernst Breuer.
- September 1 ● Quarantee is lifted. Refugees can go into town of Oswego on six-hour passes.
- 193 refugee children enroll in Oswego Public Schools.
- September 20 ● Eleanor Roosevelt visits Fort Ontario.
- October 7 ● Revolt by Auschwitz inmates. One crematorium is destroyed.
- December 23 ● Dorothy Thompson broadcasts Christmas program with refugees on NBC Radio.
- December 28 ● One of the refugees commits suicide.
- 1945 January ● 9 students admitted to Oswego State Teachers College.
- February 19 ● Coal accident kills a refugee worker.
- April 12 ● Franklin Delano Roosevelt dies.
- May 8 ● Germany surrenders.
- May 19 ● Shelter Director Joseph Smart resigns to work for refugees' freedom.
- May 21 ● Oswego city leaders send a "Memorial to the President and Congress" asking that refugees be allowed to stay.
- June 25 ● The House Committee on Immigration opens two days of hearings at the shelter on the future of the refugees.
- August ● Japan surrenders.
- December 22 ● President Truman issues directive that allows the refugees to remain in the United States as legal immigrants.
- January ● Fort Ontario refugees are bused to Canada to get proper visas to enter the U.S.



193 refugee children and teenagers enrolled in Oswego's public elementary junior and senior high schools. Many of the students had not been in a classroom in five or six years while they were running from the Nazis. (photo courtesy National Archives)

PROFILES

Safe Haven examines the Holocaust and the Fort Ontario experience in microcosm. There are really 982 stories to be told. The documentary focuses on six former refugees.



ADAM MUNZ fled Belgium with his parents when the Nazis invaded in May 1940. He was part of a group of about 1200 who walked from southern France across the Alps into Italy only to find German troops waiting for them. In Italy he hid for many months in a monastery. Adam is now the director of Psychological Services at the St. Luke's site of St. Luke's/Roosevelt Hospital in New York City.



MANYA BREUER fled Germany in 1939. She spent time in five different concentration camps and narrowly escaped capture by the Nazis when she was on a train without the proper papers. Manya was the first to be married inside the camp in Oswego and gave birth to a baby girl in the camp. She appeared in many of the camp shows and went on to sing with many local opera companies in the Los Angeles area.



LEON LEVITCH fled Yugoslavia with his parents in 1941. His promising musical career was interrupted by the war but he continued to study music even in the Ferramonte concentration camp in Italy. Leon learned to tune pianos and was often invited to Oswego homes to tune and restore old pianos. He founded the Department of Piano Technology at UCLA and has written several chamber music pieces and two symphonies.



STEFFI STEINBERG-WINTERS fled Berlin in 1938 for Italy. Her father died in an Italian internment camp, leaving Steffi and her mother alone in war-torn Europe. After six years of running, Steffi was able to return to high school in Oswego where she graduated with honors in just one year. Steffi continues to correspond with Ralph Faust, the former high school principal. She now works as an administrative assistant in an import office.



ROLF MANFRED fled Germany with his family in 1936. Because of the limited quotas, his family was able to get only one visa into the United States, which was given to Rolf's older brother. Rolf excelled at Oswego High School and continues to correspond with Ralph Faust. Rolf is now a chemical engineer. He helped develop many of America's missile systems: the Polaris, Minuteman, Sidewinder.



FRED BAUM fled Yugoslavia in 1942 just ahead of invading Nazi troops. In Italy he and his sister were jailed because they didn't have the proper papers. Fred speaks several languages and served as camp translator among the refugees and for the camp administrators. After the war Fred worked for the United Nations in Europe. He is now the President of Atlas Trading Company, which imports shoes, in New Jersey.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

NUMBER OF REFUGEES

Yugoslavia	369
Austria	237
Poland	146
Germany	96
Czechoslovakia	41
Russia (USSR)	17
Rumania	17
France	15
Turkey	10
Danzig	8
Spain	5
Greece	4
Libya	4
Bulgaria	4
Belgium	3
Hungary	3
Italy	2
Holland	1
	<hr/>
	982



The refugees had no passports. Their only identification was Army tags which read "Casual Baggage." (photo courtesy National Archives)



The refugees were not permitted to work outside the camp but were expected to do all the internal camp maintenance. (photo courtesy National Archives)

RELIGION

NUMBER OF REFUGEES

Jewish	874
Roman Catholic	73
Greek and Russian Orthodox	28
Protestant	7
	<hr/>
	982

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why did President Roosevelt refuse to take further action to save the Jews of Europe? How did the following factors influence his decision: the continuing war, anti-semitism in the U.S., restrictionist immigration laws.
- What else could the United States have done to save European Jews? Should the U.S. have bombed the crematoria at Auschwitz?
- All wars produce refugees — civilians fleeing the war zone. Other countries are always reluctant to offer them shelter, for they are generally without financial resources. How did the Jewish refugees during World War II differ from other refugees? Why were they leaving their homes? What would have happened to them if they had stayed? Should this have made any difference in the international response to their situation?
- Why did the U.S. government demand that the refugees return to Europe at the end of the war? Why would the refugees sign such a form?
- The fence surrounding Fort Ontario was not put up to keep the refugees in. Why did they react so strongly against the fence and barbed wire?
- Why did the refugee teenagers do so well in school, despite the language barrier?
- There was always a play or concert at Fort Ontario. Is it odd that there would be such a vibrant cultural life in an internment camp?

CLASSROOM AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

- Have students research the response of other countries to the plight of European Jews during WWII. Canada, Switzerland, Sweden?
- Research newspaper clips detailing Nazi atrocities as early as 1941 and 1942. Why does the myth persist that Americans just did not know what was happening to the Jews in Europe? Was the information too terrible to believe? Did the newspapers of the day do a good job getting the information across?
- Research immigration law. Compare and contrast the law in the 1940s to today's law. Are there similarities between the refugees from Europe in the 1940s and the refugees of today from Central America? What are the differences?
- Divide your class into two groups. One group should develop arguments **for** bringing in the European refugees in 1944 while the other group argues **against** the plan. After the debate, split the groups again. The group that argued **for** bringing in the refugees should now argue **against** letting them stay, while the group that argued **against** allowing them in now argues **for** granting the refugees immigrant visas.

SUGGESTED READING

Gruber, Ruth. *Haven*. New York: Signet, 1984.

Lowenstein, Sharon R. *Token Refuge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Wyman, David S. *The Abandonment of the Jews*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Feingold, Henry L. *The Politics of Rescue*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970.



After 18 months of internment, the refugees were finally allowed to leave Oswego. Because they had come into the country outside the immigration laws, the refugees had to go to Canada first to get the proper visas to enter the U.S. as legal immigrants. (photo courtesy National Archives)