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The impact of Nebraska's collective memory of the Holocaust via digital exploration

How can we establish a digital repository that explores the impact and legacy of Nebraska Holocaust survivors and liberators of World War Two Nazi concentration camps while providing critical theoretical framing of collective historical memory?¹ Today digital access to materials related to the Holocaust and Holocaust studies offers numerous avenues for discovery and research previously not imagined. Digital compilation of community-centred stories unifies disparate historical resources. The Nebraska Stories of Humanity: Holocaust Survivors & WWII Veterans, Network & Educational Portal² integrates local and searchable narratives with digital humanities frameworks to establish a dynamic public platform. The site is populated with locally acquired digitised documents, photographs, and heirlooms from survivor and veteran families plus news articles, testimony and geographical and primary resources. Unlike other digital collections, all aggregated resources accessible at the site are transcribed and searchable, allowing access to information through several digital humanities repositories. The portal includes Application Programming Interface (API) functionality, anticipating the day when international virtual authority files share their APIs to further substantiate the portal's materials. Centring unique, regional stories through a fully transcribed and navigable collection elevates access and visibility to the narrative of survivor and liberator memories and contributions.

The project has become cross-disciplinary at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL) within the College of Education and the College of Arts and Sciences through the political science, history, and digital humanities disciplines. In addition to the programming team at the Center for Digital Research in the Humanities (CDRH), the project includes co-investigator Professor Ari Kohen, whose work is focused on political science; anthropologist and digital humanist Professor Carrie Heitman; and Holocaust historian Professor Gerald Steinacher, who also serves as one of the project's advisors. The project has been constructed by a team of programmers in the CDRH,

¹ This article includes sections that originally appeared in Beth S. Dotan, "Integrating Narratives with Digital Humanities Tools to Inform Holocaust Education Pedagogies," PhD dissertation, University of Nebraska, 2022.

² Nebraska Stories of Humanity website, accessed 23 April 2023, <https://nestoriesofhumanity.unl.edu/>.

which is part of the University of Nebraska Libraries system. Beyond the specific courses taught by Steinacher and a few other educators, no research centre in Holocaust studies exists at UNL. The project employs a host of student interns, who are invaluable to the contribution and growth of the website's content. To engage audiences beyond academia, a Stakeholder Committee also connects with a range of community organisation members. Thus, the cross-disciplinary academic nature of the project combined with the connection to the larger community through stakeholder relationships unlocks a plethora of heritage sharing and interaction.

In alignment with intended equitable principles in the United States today, it is imperative to note that the University of Nebraska is a public land-grant institution. A land-grant college or university "is an institution that has been designated by its [US] state legislature or Congress to receive the benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862, 1890, and 1994".³ Land-grants institutions provide affordable, higher education of quality to people of various backgrounds. At the time the acts were passed, acquired tribal lands became federal property, were later sold, and the profits were used for educational and economic development through land grants.⁴ The University of Nebraska, part of a system of campuses and programs across the United States, resides on the past, present, and future homelands of the Pawnee, Ponca, Oto-Missouria, Omaha, Dakota, Lakota, Arapaho, Cheyenne and Kaw peoples, as well as the relocated Ho Chunk (Winnebago), Iowa, Sac and Fox peoples. We therefore acknowledge the many legacies of violence, displacement, migration, and settlement (survivance) that bring us together in understanding that the opportunity to impact the state of Nebraska is a result of Native and Indigenous peoples' past experiences, informing our past, present and future as we pay respect to Native elders.⁵

During my doctoral experience at the University of Nebraska, I acquired new knowledge to broaden my scope of Holocaust Educational pedagogy and methodology as well as Holocaust memory. Through the diverse perspectives and backgrounds of faculty within my degree program – Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education (the teacher preparation program) – and the tools of the digital humanities, I was able to conceptualise and realise the structure of the web portal not only from a historical perspective but with educational and theoretical criteria in mind. Furthermore, because of Nebraska's status as a land-grant institution and a

3 APLU, Land-Grant University FAQ, accessed 28 April 2023, <https://www.aplu.org/about-us/history-of-aplu/what-is-a-land-grant-university/>.

4 APLU, Statement of Land Acknowledgment, accessed 28 April 2023, <https://www.aplu.org/about-us/land-acknowledgment/>.

5 APLU, Recognizing the Land, accessed 26 April 2023, <https://diversity.unl.edu/recognizing-land>.

US refugee-receiving state, our team strives to respect heritage diversity in every educational consideration.

One of the educational goals of the site is to enable users to understand the destruction of democracy in pre-World War Two Europe and to exemplify the power of individual' resilience. The site allows the visitor to contemplate the stark challenges of humans adapting to unexpected circumstances and trauma and confront new conditions in survival. Often living as the perpetual outsider, first within their homelands and later in their adopted new communities, survivors are forced to struggle for acceptance and equity within their new surroundings as well. As is frequently the case for immigrants and refugees, economic and cultural trials are ever present. Likewise, individuals returning to Nebraska following military service in the war often struggled silently to return to normalized life, tucking away mementos and memories from traumatic tours of duty in war-zones. To illuminate the experiences and processes of their journeys, the Nebraska Stories of Humanity portal discloses documents that serve as evidence of the dismantling of democratic structures and presents personal collections that denote hope for the future.

On many levels, the portal can serve as a blueprint to learn about other minority cultural groups who have settled in Nebraska. Social critic and Austrian priest Ivan Illich claimed technologies "could guide the reconstruction of education to serve the need of varied communities, to promote democracy and social justice".⁶ As a multifaceted tool, the website can be incorporated into critical educational theories and employ multidirectional memory to connect Holocaust pedagogy to state educational standards.⁷ This integration extends the resource, allowing it to function as more than a simple archive of historical primary documentation of one group, and rather as a model for creating a digital cultural heritage. Our project adapts diverse interfaces for storing and sorting essential information as we develop innovative approaches for relaying digital storytelling to regional and transnational audiences and researchers.

We seek to advance our work as technological options proliferate, and as such we view the work of the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) as a model and necessary resource for global Holocaust learning advancement. Bringing the Nebraska pilot and micro-collection to this EHRI forum elevates the remembrance of individuals presently featured on the site and allows our work to join the global initiative in digital Holocaust memory and education. Despite our seemingly

⁶ Quoted in Richard Kahn, "Chapter Three: The Technopolitics of Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich: For a Collaborative Ecopedagogy," *Counterpoints* 359 (2010): 96–97.

⁷ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

remote location in the world, we aim to contribute to the growing epistemology of Holocaust memory in a transnational capacity through digital humanities tools and digital storytelling as we situate the narratives of our collection.

For more than 20 years, UNL has used digital humanities methodologies and tools to create unique digital archives for use by researchers, scholars, and the general public. Projects such as the Walt Whitman Archive and the Willa Cather Archive have long aggregated materials from disparate repositories into cohesive, easily navigable websites.⁸ UNL has a tradition of involving student and community collaborators in developing and applying computational tools in the digital environment. Students are trained to follow exacting international metadata standards and their work takes place under the direction of trained professionals. The Nebraska Stories of Humanity Project carefully monitors and trains student assistants following the established guidelines of the CDRH. As mentioned, the project engages local stakeholder organisations, but also national and international repositories as well. As textual scholar Jerome McGann states, “[d]igital humanists have seen themselves within the longer tradition of the humanities, suggesting that the main value of their work resides in the creation, migration, or preservation of cultural materials”.⁹

Along with utilising the resources from already existing APIs, the project is taking an API-first approach. “The API-first approach to creating Text Encoding Initiative [TEI] – encoded digital editions offers tangible interfaces to textual data that can be used in tailor-made workflows by humanities researchers and other users, well-suited to distant reading techniques, statistical analysis and computer-assisted semantic annotation”.¹⁰ By focusing on API-first, we encode the documents with an understanding that they will be removed from original site structures but retain file context. Subsequently, these APIs create duality in acquiring and sharing archival information.

⁸ See the Walt Whitman Archive at <https://whitmanarchive.org/>; and the Willa Cather Archive at <https://cather.unl.edu/>.

⁹ Quoted in Johanna Drucker, “Humanistic Theory and Digital Scholarship,” in *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, ed. Matthew K. Gold (University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 85.

¹⁰ Toma Tasovac et al., “APIs in Digital Humanities: The Infrastructural Turn.” in *Digital Humanities 2016: Conference Abstracts* (Cracovie, Poland: HAL, 2016), 94.

1 Cultural heritage

My research considers how a digital repository exploring the impact and legacy of Nebraska Holocaust survivors and liberators of World War Two Nazi concentration camps can integrate critical theoretical framing of collective historical memory. The Nebraska Stories of Humanity website centralises access to the history of the Nebraska Holocaust survivors and World War Two liberators of Nazi camps in a collection of searchable stories in aggregate. As the digital era provides access to content that was formerly remote, we can address our regional collection within the UNESCO definition of emerging digital heritage: “Many of these resources have lasting value and significance, and therefore constitute a heritage that should be protected and preserved for current and future generations”.¹¹ This endeavour considers how we might reimagine the use of archival materials of Nebraska survivors’ or veterans’ stories by interacting in new ways with Holocaust documentation. On 27 April 2023, when a group of students was asked about their introduction to the portal in an undergraduate course, one student commented, “I learned that there is such a rich history of the Holocaust and World War Two in Nebraska. I didn’t know how much the state holds of this part of history”.

This introductory prototype of five highlighted individuals provides the framework for expanding the collection. Presently, more than nine hundred posted items across five stories have been transcribed, translated, cropped and reviewed. The search engine is designed to enhance searchable categories through exploration by year, people, language, creator, format, places and source. Through the commitment of our devoted interns and CDRH development team, we continue to expand this body of material to ensure that our collection is a transnational, transcultural, and interdisciplinary contribution to public history and cultural heritage.

2 Use of narrative

Woven within the historical destruction of World War Two are the lives of many who survived the tragedy. Content relaying the challenges of beginning a new life for survivors or returning to Nebraska following service in the war is a vital component of documented testimony today. A common framework of inquiry found

¹¹ UNESCO, Concept of Digital Heritage, accessed 28 April 2023, <https://plus.google.com/+UNESCO>.

within recorded testimonial collections, both audio and video, includes descriptions of life before, during and after the war. A broad personal history is revealed.

When testimony is accompanied by documentation and primary resources that substantiate the story, the commentary acquires a new degree of validation. The vision of the Nebraska Stories of Humanity web resource is to provide an extensive reflection of each accessible collection. Sometimes no formal testimonies are available, but other resources assist in piecing together a semblance of a personal history. Consequently, transcribed documentation can either stand independently or meld with testimony as a more complex narrative, ultimately providing a meaningful legacy for each story.

Researcher Michal Dahlstrom discusses how “narratives follow a particular structure that describes the cause-and-effect relationships between events that take place over a particular time period that impact particular characters”.¹² Digital tools can enhance detail and confirm memory within a collective. Dahlstrom suggests four steps for processing narrative information: “motivation and interest, allocating cognitive resources, elaboration, and transfer into long-term memory”.¹³ This sequence constructs a platform to leverage narrative not only for the general visitor of the web portal but, in particular, for educators and researchers to interpret how components of these stories of humanity ultimately enhance learning.

In addition to understanding how narratives are amplified in the Nebraska Stories of Humanity website by uniting transcribed documentation and testimony, cultural storytelling has played a key role in the vision for the project. In critical educational theories, scholars of colour, such as Theodora Berry, bell hooks, Delores Delgado-Bernal, and Paulo Freire, use storytelling to strengthen students’ depth of knowledge. They integrate their personal stories into teaching methodologies to encourage students to also share their own experiences. The act of storytelling motivates personal expression and creates opportunities to hear others’ narratives. In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks notes that by acknowledging the intergenerational trauma of Black women, others might become witness to their testimony, while those hearing their testimony can reciprocate in healing.¹⁴

¹² Michael Dahlstrom, “Using Narratives and Storytelling to Communicate Science with Nonexpert Audiences,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111(4) supplement (2014): loc. 13614.

¹³ Dahlstrom, “Using Narratives,” loc. 136415.

¹⁴ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

By sharing experiences about survivors of the Holocaust and World War Two liberators of Nazi camps who settled in Nebraska, we can confront the moral questions that are raised when speaking about an oppressed group of individuals or people.¹⁵ The power of sharing stories can open eyes and hearts. These methodologies embrace cultural values and heritage preservation. The act of storytelling, according to the philosophies of the aforementioned scholars, can situate the accounts available through the portal by “imparting knowledge about life experience others have not lived”.¹⁶ The portal then becomes a bridge for learning about minority cultural groups that settled in Nebraska, using critical educational theories in conjunction with multidirectional memory to connect Holocaust pedagogy to state educational standards.

3 Multidirectional memory

Multidirectional memory, a concept coined by scholar Michael Rothberg, can help deliver scaffolded knowledge for considering the trauma and survival of immigrant and refugee groups.¹⁷ In Nebraska, as mentioned, settlers and their descendants live on Indigenous people's ancestral lands, thus bear a responsibility to acknowledge other historical tragedies and survival. Nebraska has also long been a refugee-receiving site and immigration destination for many cultural groups. Since 2013 the state ranked highest in the United States for refugee arrivals per capita and for refugee arrivals as a share of immigrants.¹⁸

Many groups, including Chinese, Germans, Czechs, Eastern European Jews and Latinos arrived in Nebraska in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, followed in subsequent decades by those from war-torn environs of Iraq, Kosovo, Bosnia, Sudan, Liberia, Somalia, Syria and Burma, to name only a few.¹⁹ One *Omaha Jewish Press* article dated 19 November 1949 (and posted on the Nebraska Stories of Humanity Website), reported on “the largest group of Jewish refugees arriving in Omaha, Nebraska from post-war European Displaced Person

15 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000).

16 bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 89.

17 Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*.

18 Immigration Research Initiative, “Refugee Resettlement per Capita: Which States Do the Most?,” accessed 30 April 2023, <https://immresearch.org/publications/refugee-resettlement-per-capita-which-states-do-the-most/>.

19 Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, “Re-Inventing the Wheel: Nebraska's Immigration History,” accessed 30 April 2023.

camps since 1907”.²⁰ The documentation available at the website provides insight into the lives of those who escaped humanity’s unthinkable destruction during the Holocaust and found the inner strength to move forward and start anew in Nebraska.

In recent years, Kitty Williams, an Auschwitz survivor whose narrative will soon be included on the site, embraced opportunities to support and share presentation time with Shireen Ibrahim, a survivor of the ISIS genocide of the Yezidi people who resettled in Lincoln. Whereas Rothberg acknowledges that memory competition does exist, he reminds us that “multidirectional memory [can serve] as a spur to unexpected acts of empathy and solidarity [. . .] and is often the very grounds on which people construct and act upon visions of justice”.²¹ The influx of refugee and immigrant communities requires that our schools, school districts and institutions of higher learning engage multiple language learners and their situations and honor their cultures. Thus, while studying about those who experienced the Holocaust, we can also leverage learning about today’s refugee and immigrant communities who have settled in our state.

It is critical to note in this discussion about multidirectional memory that renowned African American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois penned an influential essay in 1949 titled “The Negro in the Warsaw Ghetto”.²² Following a visit to that recovering war-torn city, which had been 80 percent destroyed, Du Bois was struck by the irony that the cherished Warsaw Old Town was rapidly being rebuilt, while the Jewish Ghetto, entirely burnt to the ground by the Nazis in 1943, remained acres of rubble. Rothberg references Du Bois as a model for multidirectional memory when he reconsiders his concept of the “color line”. Du Bois, he states, “sees the ruins of the ghetto [as] common property, a public resource for reflection on the lines of race, culture, and religion that divides groups from each other even as they create new possibilities for alliance”.²³ Multidirectional memories provide a pathway for recognising tragic histories and the survival of others in a manner that can unite people through their diverse cultures. Articulating the tools to integrate these new ways of knowing require thoughtful and creative strategies.²⁴

²⁰ Nebraska Stories of Humanity landing page, accessed 30 April 2023, <https://nestoriesofhumanity.unl.edu/item/soh.sto000.00001>.

²¹ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 19.

²² Michael Rothberg, “W. E. B. DuBois in Warsaw: Holocaust Memory and the Color Line, 1949–1952,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 14(1) (2001): 169–89.

²³ Rothberg, “W. E. B. DuBois in Warsaw,” 132.

²⁴ Dotan, “Integrating Narratives with Digital Humanities Tools to Inform Holocaust Education Pedagogies,” PhD dissertation, University of Nebraska, 2022, 32–33.

4 Digital storytelling in the Nebraska stories of humanity

The first five stories in the prototype webpages exemplify diverse experiences during the Holocaust in addition to geographic representation of various parts of Nebraska. Items included in their stories provide insight into their journeys and contributions to historical knowledge about the time period. Collection is ongoing; therefore, the archive is not yet comprehensive. As international Holocaust institutions continue to expand access to the historical record and items are collected from families and community contributions, the stories included in Nebraska Stories of Humanity will also grow.

While the project's editorial staff continues to build upon existing story collections, the content used to expand additional individual narratives will be updated on an ongoing basis. The website reveals both an intimate exploration into the featured individuals' lives and a public perspective for acknowledging their contributions as community members. We strive to publish these materials within the proper context and accuracy. Taking into consideration personal memory and interpretation of historical events by each individual, content from war narratives present multiple versions with each circumstance.

The curation of the site content allows for easy navigation, especially for educators and students to compile narratives from many perspectives. Assuring that the voices of both those who shared live testimony in the past and those who never spoke publicly are heard through this collection of transcribed aggregated materials, immortalizing the narrative in perpetuity. Co-Project Investigator on this project Professor Ari Kohen notes,

Akin to bringing these important witnesses into the classroom, this website presents a 360-degree view into the lives of survivors and liberators – before, during, and after the Holocaust. And, importantly for students in Nebraska classrooms, it connects us to these people directly: the people whose stories are told here are our neighbors and they raised their families, did their work, own businesses, and worshipped in the same places where we live today. Although we cannot bring them into our classrooms any longer, through this website we can get to know them as complete individuals and we can continue to learn from their stories of survival.²⁵

The following examples provide a glimpse into some aspects of how this digital storytelling is evident.

²⁵ Nebraska Stories of Humanity, Project history, <https://nestoriesofhumanity.unl.edu/about/history>.

5 Irving Shapiro

There are numerous drafts of speeches given by survivor Irving Shapiro, who lived in Gering, Nebraska. At the conclusion of one of these documents are both typed and handwritten comments (see Figure 1):

We were condemned to die without a judge or jury, and very seldom did we find a neighbour on whose door we could knock and ask for shelter. Let us not forget our brothers and sisters who still fill the skies with their smoke.

By our deeds let us make sure that such a Holocaust, the darkest memory in the history of men, shall never be allowed to happen again.

It is the ordinary people that we must convince of the necessity – the obligation to remember the Holocaust. As Jews we have no choice. The 6 million cry out from their unmarked graves that they be remembered. As an eternal people Jews are blessed with a long memory.²⁶

After settling in western Nebraska following the war, Irving, his survivor wife, Clara, and their children were among the few Jewish families and the only Holocaust survivors in the town. Irving became a well-known Gering businessman, integrating new immigrants from Latino countries into his workplace. He understood the plight of the immigrant, the refugee in a new land. Later in his life he was encouraged to speak to various groups and schoolchildren about his experiences. The portal collection includes a series of speeches he gave over the years. Using TEI, these speeches will be accessible in order to be comparatively researched and examined, along with his memoir as told to Howard Shaff and Audrey Shaff, *A Time in the Life of Israel Szapiro #129564*.²⁷

From 1942 to 1945, Irving was imprisoned and assigned to forced labour at Majdanek concentration camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, Buna-Monowitz concentration camp (Auschwitz III), and, at the end of the war, at Dora-Mittelbau concentration camp. He subsequently experienced death marches as the camps were emptied of their prisoners. At Majdanek, Irving was separated from his younger brother, whom he continued to search for throughout the rest of his life.

Their father, Hershel, and mother, Mala, were murdered in the Treblinka death camp in 1942. Irving married Clara Zaltzman in September 1945 in Neustadt, Germany. They later emigrated to Canada with their eldest daughter, Tatiana. In 1955 relatives provided sponsorship for them to move to the United States, where they settled and built successful businesses in Gering. Irving and Clara had two additional children, Hershel and Marlene.

²⁶ Nebraska Stories of Humanity, Irving Shapiro speech draft, <https://nestoriesofhumanity.unl.edu/item/soh.sto003.00032>.

²⁷ Irving Shapiro, *A Time in the Life of Israel Szapiro, #129564* (Keystone: Permelia, 1988).

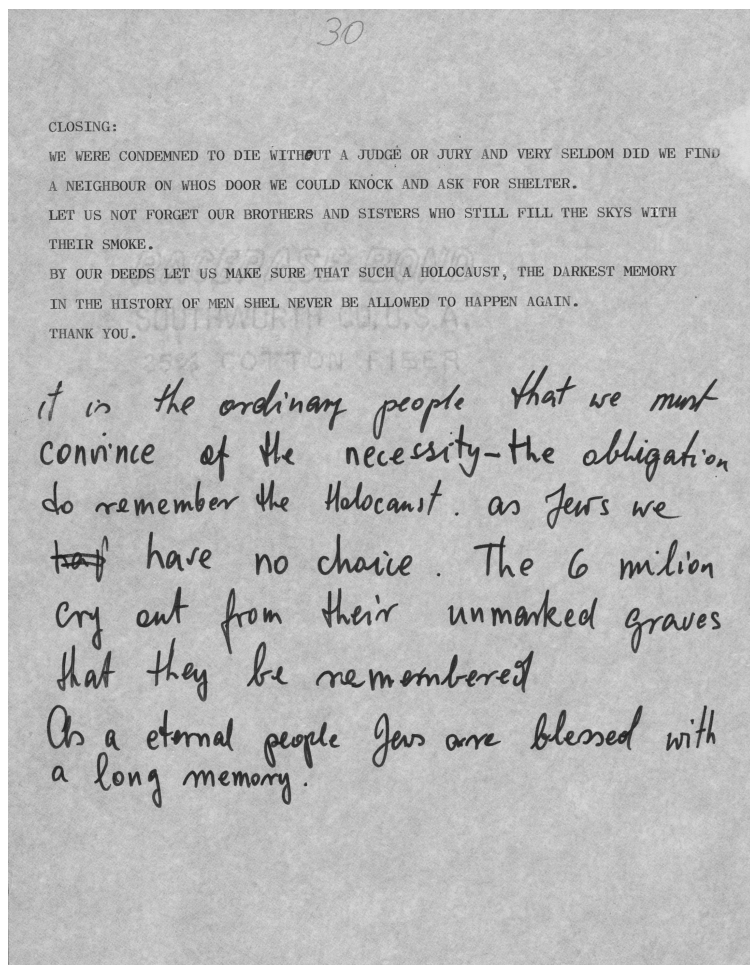


Figure 1: “Nebraska Stories of Humanity.” Irving Shapiro Speech Draft. <https://nestoriesofhumanity.unl.edu/item/soh.sto003.00032>.

With the opening of the archives in East Germany, some years following Irving's death, Hershel located previously unavailable documentation regarding Abraham's demise in a German hospital during the last days of the war. These materials in PDF format from Bad Arolsen are in the process of being transcribed by the project team as searchable content for the website. The addition of these documents, and the events held by the family to memorialize Abraham, subsequently become a layer of Irving's narrative that previously could not have been centrally accessible.

6 Bea Karp

Bea Karp was born Beate Stern in Lauterbach, Germany, in 1932. She and her family were forced from their home and transported by passenger train to internment camps in the south of France. Bea and her sister, Susie, were saved by the Jewish French Underground (*Œuvre de secours aux enfants*, or OSE) and were hidden in numerous chateaus and convents until the end of the war. They were never reunited with their parents, who were murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. Bea and her sister first went to live with family in London after liberation. Later, through family connections and funds from Sears and Roebuck, Bea arrived in the United States by plane in 1947. After living in New York, she and her husband later settled in Nebraska, where they raised four daughters.

Bea was fortunate to maintain significant artifacts in her personal collection. In addition to a few pieces of clothing and a bag made by her mother, there are documents from the family's forced deportation from Germany to France and a bundle of postcards written in German to her and other relatives by her parents during their incarceration in the French detention camps. Bea also preserved letters penned in French from girlfriends and caregivers that were written throughout and after the war. Much of this collection is available in pdf format on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website.²⁸ Having open access rights to these materials, we have translated and transcribed these documents and included them, along with many other items, in Bea's collection at the Nebraska Stories of Humanity.

Social worker and child rescuer with the OSE, Vivette Samuel, was responsible for Bea's rescue from Rivesaltes concentration camp in the south of France and her placement in chateaus held by the OSE in the first few years of the war. Children were moved by the underground from one chateau to another numerous times to remain one step ahead of the Nazis. Vivette followed Bea's whereabouts and included her as a flower girl in her marriage to another rescuer, Julien Samuel, at Couret, France, in October 1942 (see Figure 2). Materials that reflect the relationship with the Samuel family have shed light on information that was not previously known.

In Samuel's book, *Rescuing the Children*, we learn about the tremendous efforts made to assist children, not only during the war, but also after liberation.²⁹

²⁸ US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Beatrice Pappenheimer Papers, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn515178#?rsc=24830&cv=0&c=0&m=0&s=0&xywh=-1272%2C-153%2C4652%2C3047>.

²⁹ Vivette Samuel, *Rescuing the Children: A Holocaust Memoir* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).



Figure 2: “Nebraska Stories of Humanity.” Beate Stern (Bea Karp) at the wedding of Vivette Samuel. <https://nestoriesofhumanity.unl.edu/item/soh.sto001.phot.008>.

“The OSE was busy following up on the children who had emigrated”.³⁰ Due to information in Samuel’s book, we have been able to corroborate Bea’s testimony regarding her movements at the end of the war and translated correspondence saved in her possession. One urgent letter in her collection between French officials and the OSE make it clear that Bea and her sister were to be removed as quickly as possible in the spring of 1944 from the convent in Milleau. The girls had been moved when the OSE chateaus were shut down and children were dispersed to places such as Switzerland, to other communities in the French countryside, and to various convents in other locales. At the end of the war the OSE workers were greatly concerned about the well-being of these hidden children, knowing the stress of separation, fear, and exhaustion they experienced during the war years.

There was also the problem of the children who had been placed in convents. Some of them were tempted to convert and even had themselves baptized. Certainly, they had been saved, and that was the essential thing. But what was one to do with the promise made to parents to raise their children as Jews? At the time, we felt obligated to keep that promise.³¹

In our research we found a photograph taken at Chateau La Borie Children’s Home circa 1945, in which Bea was identified in a group portrait of “Jewish Displaced Persons”.³² We might surmise that she may not have recalled spending

³⁰ Samuel, *Rescuing the Children*, 135.

³¹ Samuel, *Rescuing the Children*, 133.

³² United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Ruth Zarnicer Wertheimer.

time in La Borie after the war due to the haste to remove the girls from the convent and ultimately resituate them in London with relatives. Bea never recalled this memory in her recorded testimonies, nor in the hundreds of times she spoke at schools and in the public. By triangulating the personal translated and transcribed correspondence with photographs and references from Vivette Samuel in one location, we have begun to recover additional information about Bea's difficult journey.

7 Utilising digital humanities tools

Incorporating digital humanities tools to augment the archival collection is essential for elevating survivors' narratives. To date we have created three interactive maps that visualise the journeys of Bea Karp, Clarence Williams and Irving Shapiro. These maps include pop-up links to other materials in the collection and to outside resources to obtain further historical context. While some uncertainty regarding exact dates and locations exists due to extreme situations during the war, artifacts often assist in confirming locations. In the case of Staff Sergeant Clarence Williams, a soldier in the 42nd Rainbow Infantry, which liberated Dachau concentration camp, the project team was able to construct a detailed map from his extensive archive of over 250 letters written to his wife, Gretchen. Even though Williams had to be evasive in his writing due to wartime censorship, he was keen in providing locations and experiences in his correspondence shortly after the end of the war. Further, his beloved wife made notations with dates and places on every envelope she received.³³ We are hopeful that Williams's son, Tom, will yet discover Gretchen's letters written to her husband at the front.

The digital humanities provide new research tools and present a multitude of options for learning about memory and Holocaust history. These tools give new meaning to the way people encounter data and artifacts, facilitating the possibility of realising patterns in the materials or discovering side-by-side perspectives that may not have been considered previously. In the pop-up windows in Williams's map, for example, small artifacts he saved throughout his tour are highlighted.³⁴ The notes he jotted on the backs of the items give insight into the personality of Williams as a soldier, a man and a husband.

³³ See the Clarence Williams collection at the Nebraska Stories of Humanity website: <https://nestoriesofhumanity.unl.edu/stories/clarence-williams>.

³⁴ See Clarence Williams's map at <https://nestoriesofhumanity.unl.edu/maps/clarence>.

Another digital tool to be included in the next phase of this project will allow network-wide analysis, in order to visualise the extensive relationships of the survivors and liberators throughout the state and in the world. "Network analysis examines relationships among entities, such as persons, organizations, or documents. Operating at multiple levels, it describes and makes inferences about relational properties of individual entities, of subsets of entities, and of entire networks".³⁵ The advantage of creating network analysis is to highlight the individual's connectedness to the community, and how far-reaching their survival and their life's contributions are tied to each of us personally. One example might be a graphic visual representation of the number of students who have heard Bea or other survivors give testimony over the years.

Digital projects are intended to be accessible and informational and touch people's lives from educational and humanities perspectives. What is the power of the tool on the receiver side? Staff Sergeant Clarence Williams's letter dated 30 April 1945, following the liberation of Dachau by the 42nd Rainbow Divisions a powerful and key piece of correspondence in the corpus of this collection. Williams banters for more than a page and a half about convoy traffic, unexpected German gunfire at their vehicles, and a request to his wife not to send any more hard-boiled eggs in her packages. The remaining two and a half pages include a detailed description of the unit's entrance into the camp and all they witnessed. This letter, discovered more than 20 years ago, has played an important role in connecting local school students with Nebraska Holocaust history. But what about the rest of the collection?

To understand the impact of our project, student intern Ethan Tylski, transcriber of the collection of Williams's handwritten letters for the database, comments on the work he completed:

I had the honor of reading, transcribing, and encoding around 250 of Clarence's letters in the past two years. One of the big takeaways from that entire experience was that Clarence was a great man, living in the worst of times.

Stuck in my bedroom for the first few months of the pandemic, Clarence and I had a lot of alone time. Although Clarence never knew me, I often felt that we were having a conversation. The words that he wrote often stuck with me for days, or even weeks. There were parallels between what was going on in his life and my own. He missed his family, he grieved the loss of human life, he wanted to see a better world.

Over time I discovered that Clarence and I weren't so different. Although writing eighty years ago, I found that we shared many interests. Clarence was an avid photographer

35 Peter V. Marsden, "Network Centrality, Measures Of," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Elsevier 2015), xx.

and extensively documented the course of the war. I also love photography. Clarence loved a game of cards. I also love cards, but he never won very often and neither do I.

But Clarence, more than anything else, loved his wife, Gretchen, and he wrote to her nearly every day. He missed her dearly. I also miss my partner sometimes, but obviously the circumstances are quite different. I live ten miles away from my partner, Clarence was five thousand miles away. His letters to her often consisted of his day-to-day frustrations; often he was concerned about what type of snack she should send him through V-Mail. Although embroiled in the chaos of war, he never forgot his family. He often asked about them and wanted to hear from them. And he proudly carried a photo of Gretchen and bragged to everyone in his battalion. I can also relate to that.

I mention all of these moments because Clarence's story exemplifies the focus of this project. His is a story of humanity. Even people living eighty years ago were just as human and alive as we are today. They experienced love, anger, and confusion just as much as we do.

I hope you all get the chance to comb through Clarence's letters. I am positive they will impact you as much as they have me. In particular, his letter to Gretchen after liberating Dachau. It is visceral. His words are seared into my memory. By reading his letters you too become a witness of human atrocity and engage in the most human of acts, empathy.

It is my belief that studying history is, in fact, an act of human empathy. By understanding the lives of others, we come to better understand our own lives. That is why this project is so important and the results of this research are so invaluable. Clarence Williams was a great man, living in the worst of times. We can all learn from him.³⁶

8 Conclusion

While the goals of the project are to bring together disparate materials from outside collections, families, and local resources, the outcome has been much more than the simple gathering of items. Linking the transcribed, digitised artifacts to substantiate testimony metadata creates newly evolving narratives with vast educational and research implications. A supportive and creative stakeholder group that meets twice annually has seen potential in the use of the varied resources, spurring public events within their organisations. These activities unite the academic production of the website and community engagement, defining the success of digital cultural heritage efforts.³⁷

From an education perspective, the Nebraska Legislature has recently passed Education Bill 888, which requires Nebraska schools to teach about the Holocaust

³⁶ Ethan Tylski, University of Nebraska student intern, on his experience working with the project at a speech given at the project launch on 22 April 2022.

³⁷ Judith Elst, Heather Richards-Rissetto and Jorge Garcia, "Creating Digital Heritage Content: Bridging Communities and Mediating Perspectives," *Digital Culture and E-Tourism: Technologies, Applications and Management Approaches* (2011): 140.

and other genocides in their multicultural education units. This website provides an excellent resource and teaching tools for educators to adopt, particularly for students in remote rural areas within our state. As a multidisciplinary learning tool, the “computational and the cultural must be explicitly entangled in order for the user to have a comprehensible and meaningful encounter at the interface”, as implied by Victoria Walden on the integration of digital Holocaust memory, education, and research.³⁸ Recognising the intersections of this resource, educational programming and collaborations are a high priority for the next phase of the website, along with the addition of other stories. Research to evaluate how this digital tool is used by students as a learning tool and as a critical resource will assist in understanding the impact of the Nebraska Stories of Humanity as a unique project, but also as part of a larger movement in digital Holocaust memory.

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