

The John and Molly Pollock Holocaust Collection at Centennial College, Scarborough, Ontario

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Description: I will be discussing various aspects of the John and Molly Pollock Holocaust collections, such as the history of the collection, its donation to Centennial College, the role of the collection, a description of the collection, bibliographic access, physical access and future activities.

Kerstin Camenietzki has thirty years of library experience, most of them in library technical services. She has worked as a catalogue librarian at Centennial College, The Bibliocentre Division, and as manager, Cataloguing at The Bibliocentre. She catalogued the John and Molly Pollock Holocaust Collection. She has been an active member of the Ontario Library Association, and served as Councillor of the Ontario Universities and Colleges Library Association, a division of OLA.

Introduction

The John and Molly Pollock Holocaust Collection is a collection of almost 1,000 books dealing with the Holocaust. It was donated to Centennial College in September 2000 to foster studies in the manifestation of racism and hatred.

The Donors: John and Molly Pollock

How did the Collection begin? The donors, John and Molly Pollock, grew up and live in Toronto. John Pollock was eleven years old when the Second World War started. As news of the atrocities started to reach countries outside Europe, John began collecting books on the catastrophic events and the tragedy unfolding. His mother lost her family. That was the beginning of the Collection.

John Pollock explains that as the collection grew, its focus shifted from documenting history to also serving “... as an instrument for study and research” to be used to help prevent a tragedy such as the Holocaust from ever happening again. When John and Molly Pollock presented the collection to Centennial College, they noted that “Today, as we look back on that sad period, we are resolved that we will in our own small way with others do all that we can to prevent such a calamity from recurring again.”

Donation to Centennial College

The Pollock’s’ choice of donating their collection to Centennial College was somewhat unusual for several reasons.

First, Centennial College is a community college and it offers courses in business, engineering technology, health and transportation. One might have expected the Pollocks to donate their collection to a more traditional academic institution.

Secondly, Centennial College is located in Scarborough, in the eastern part of Toronto, some distance from the predominantly Jewish community in the Bathurst corridor in central Toronto.

The late Jerry Goodis, who introduced the Pollocks to Centennial College, became instrumental in bringing the Collection to the College. The placement of the collection at Centennial signaled a pivotal change in the way Holocaust materials are being used in this country. As Centennial College President, Richard Johnston, noted:

“The Pollocks wanted to see their vast collection of books in circulation outside the traditional university or Jewish settings, and instead be available at an institution serving a multicultural, multi-denominational student group. Centennial College is recognized as one of the most culturally diverse post-secondary institutions in Canada with almost 100 ethno-cultural groups represented and 80 languages spoken on campus. ...The Pollocks wanted their collection to be available to a community that is as diverse as the world we live in.”

Now, let's take a look at the books:

The Collection focuses on non-fiction, published from the 1930's to the 1990's. There are major works on the Holocaust as well as memoirs of survivors. According to Professor Franklyn Bialystok, a Toronto historian: “books published before 1960, particularly those written in Hebrew and Yiddish are of special interest. The collection represents the first phase of Holocaust research”.

Most items are published monographs in English. There are some titles in Yiddish, Hebrew, French, German and Danish. There are also a few works of fiction, some periodical articles and a few newspapers from the 1938.

Probably one of the more interesting and valuable books in the collection is *Der Giftpilz*, or *Poison Mushroom*, published in 1938 by Julius Streicher, who was publisher of the Nazi propaganda paper ‘*Der Stuermer*’. *Der Giftpilz*, which was distributed to all German schools, became a very powerful tool in promoting hatred towards Jews and indoctrinating young children.

Establishing the Holocaust Collection at Centennial College

In November 2000, an Advisory Committee was formed by President Richard Johnston to advise the college on the housing, development and promotion of the Holocaust Collection. It was determined that the Holocaust Collection would be housed at the Learning and Resource Centre at the Progress Campus in a secure area with appropriate temperature and humidity control. Existing space was renovated to provide a reading room and adjacent collection storage room where materials are stored in acid-free containers.

Access Policies

Access to the collection is by appointment. A faculty member often arranges class visits for a general overview of the collection in order to prepare the students for assignments based on the materials in the Holocaust Collection. The books may be used in the reading room, under supervision by library staff. We provide photocopies. At present, the reading room and collection is open two days a week or at other times by special appointment.

From the start, before the Collection arrived at the College, it was considered a special collection. Consequently, rules for special and rare books collections were adopted and the Collection became non-circulating. Our early experience with the collection indicates that the non-circulating rules may be contradicting the very purpose of our mission statement, which is to provide access to materials on the Holocaust. In light of this, we are currently reviewing the access and use guidelines to explore whether a small collection of selected titles might be made available for short-term loans.

Bibliographic Access

The Collection has been fully catalogued, using AACRII, LC subject headings and LC Classification Schedules. Records appear on the online library catalogue for Centennial College, www.lrc.centennialcollege.ca/ and are also available through Bibcat to community colleges throughout Ontario.

To facilitate access, a **subject guide** has been prepared. This guide follows commonly used subjects and terminology found in most Holocaust bibliographies. We have posted it on our web site (see below)

Impact of the Collection on Centennial College

As a direct result of the placement of the Collection in the college, our faculty began developing courses related to the Holocaust. Three courses are offered in General Education:

Two of them focus on *Literature of the Holocaust* and *Propaganda*, offered under 20th century world history. Students explore social, political and cultural contexts of materials for the period from 1933 to the end of the war. Courses are revised and change somewhat from year to year. Next year, a course on genocide will be offered.

Already in the 1960's in France, a poll was taken of young people born after the war to find out their knowledge of WWII. The report had the chilling title: "*Hitler? Connais pas.*" Annette Insdorf noted that her students in the United States, who are between 18 and 22 years old, very often had never heard of Auschwitz. Therefore, it is not surprising that new Canadians and young Canadian-born students today often have little knowledge

of the Holocaust. An understanding of the way the past has shaped the world we are living in is particularly important in a multicultural society like Canada.

In addition, the use of a research collection can be a valuable, learning tool for students who are computer-proficient before grade school, but often lacking in research skills.

The John and Molly Pollock Holocaust Collection Web Site

To promote the Collection to a wider community outside of Centennial College, a web site was developed and selected materials were digitized, with funding from *Canada's Digital Collections Program*, Industry Canada. I selected books to be digitized and prepared a general outline for the site. It took a great deal of time to secure copyright permissions from publishers and authors and their estates. Commercial publishers turned out to be quite challenging. Since so many mergers have taken place in the publishing industry, it is often very difficult to locate copyright holders. Survivors and children of survivors were immensely helpful and willing to contribute. Many librarians provided great help and assistance.

Under the guidance of the College web coordinator, a web site was developed by five students from the New Media Design program of the Centre for Creative Communications at Centennial College. As a sampling of the Collection, extracts from selected works appear in a chronological order and are accompanied by images, maps, audio-video excerpts and interviews. We hope that it will bring viewers to our Collection and to other Holocaust collections.

As we continue to see intolerance towards "others", incidents of discrimination, antisemitism and racism both in our society and elsewhere, it is both important and timely to offer our students courses on the Holocaust, on propaganda and genocide and provide them with knowledge of the past in order to prepare them to deal with the future.

Students today may turn too readily to the internet for quick information, often without the skills to evaluate the quality of the sources they find. Our web site is an attempt to lead students to more informed views and to develop a curiosity to find out more about the Holocaust.

Example: Der Giftpilz from our web site: text and commentary

To promote our collection, we take part in local events and conferences such as this one and in the **Annual Holocaust Education Week**, held in Toronto in November.

In 2001, the first year that we took part in these events, Rabbi Emeritus, R. Erwin Schild, read from his biography "*The very narrow bridge: memoir of an uncertain passage*", published the same year.

Last year, our program was dedicated to the Rwandan genocide: "*Teaching the Holocaust and genocide*", presented by Leo Kabalisa, a high-school teacher in French in Toronto and a refugee from Rwanda. A panel of educators discussed the issues with participation from the audience. The event was held at the College.

This year, our third year of participation in the program, we will be hosting a program aimed at teachers and students. Our theme is "The Holocaust as represented in the media:

with examples from recent films and other media. The planning is under way and will be finalized shortly.

The Holocaust Education Week gives us an opportunity to make contacts outside the College and to introduce the Collection to the community at large.

What remains to be done

Collection development, maintenance and staffing are important issues for the future of the Collection and relate, of course, to funding. Current funding allows a librarian two days/week, some additional hours for a library assistant or student and a limited allocation for new books and supplies. The College is currently seeking additional funding to support the Collection. We welcome donations of materials relevant to the Collection and plan to add reference works and some films.

In order to promote the Collection to a larger audience, we have discussed mounting a traveling exhibit, using sample items from the collection. Visiting schools and classrooms is also on our agenda.

Cooperating with other institutions is another way of enhancing the visibility of the Collection.

Conclusion

A notice in the New York Times last year caught my eye. It reported on the opening of a *Memorial to Anne Frank and Human Rights* in Idaho. The thoughts of John Pollock were echoed in this article, namely to foster education and reflection. I end with a quote from the article: “Especially after the September 11 incident, it’s imperative that many cultures and countries find a way to live together.” I think that *The John and Molly Pollock Holocaust Collection* at Centennial College promotes the same values and helps our students gain an insight into the past to prevent the Holocaust from ever happening again.

For more information, you may contact:

The Pollock Holocaust Collection directly at: pollock@centennialcollege.ca or visit our website:

www.centennialcollege.ca/holocaust_pollock