

A r o l s e n
A r c h i v e s

International Center
on Nazi Persecution

#StolenMemory

Mementoes of Nazi Victims

In the Arolsen Archives in Germany, there are nearly 3,000 “effects” from concentration camps: pocket watches and wristwatches, rings, wallets, family photos, everyday items such as combs, powder tins or razors, etc. Often they were the last remaining belongings of the victims of Nazi persecution, the things they had with them at the time of their arrest by the National Socialists. They belonged to people from more than 30 countries — many of them from Poland and the former Soviet Union.

In 2016, the Archives launched a campaign to return these stolen memories to as many families as possible. The exhibition tells what it means to people to hold these mementoes in their hands — and shows objects whose rightful owners the Arolsen Archives have yet to find.

#Searching

Maria Nanmova



We are looking for relatives of Maria Nanmova. A Russian, she was born on November 7, 1923 or 1925. Both dates appear on documents in the Arolsen Archives.

We have only a rough idea of the young forced laborer's fate. The Gestapo deported Maria to the Ravensbrück women's concentration camp on May 17, 1944. Her inmate number was

38639, and like the majority of foreign inmates, her category of imprisonment was "political".

She arrived at the Neuengamme concentration camp on August 31, 1944. That is the last we know of Maria Nanmova. The surviving photos and the jewelry open a small window onto her life.

Arrested and Robbed

"Effects" is an old word for luggage. Later it came to mean the personal objects taken from prisoners when they were jailed and returned to them upon their release. The concentration camps also had "effects depots." In camps located within the so-called "Old Reich", for example Dachau, Neuengamme or Bergen-Belsen, the Nazis kept up a pretense of law and order by storing the personal belongings under the names of the inmates — until their murder.

In the extermination camps in the East, on the other hand, the perpetrators merely collected the Jewish victims' property and disposed of it immediately. The Nazis turned their spoils from the concentration and extermination camps into cash. The proceeds filled the regime's war chest.

Found in 1945

Shortly before the liberation by the Allies, the SS cleared the concentration camps, sent the inmates on death marches, and set fire to records as well as the victims' belongings to cover the traces of the mass murder they had committed.

The largest surviving collection of personal property in the Arolsen Archives comes from the Neuengamme concentration camp. As the Allies approached, the camp commandant had the belongings and clothing of some 5,000 inmates removed from the grounds. British soldiers later found these "effects" in Lunden in Schleswig-Holstein. Personal objects from the Bergen-Belsen and Dachau concentration camps also survived, albeit in much smaller numbers.



Vicente Borjabad-Alguacil



We are looking for relatives of Vicente Borjabad-Alguacil. Little is known about the Spaniard born on October 27, 1888. Where he was before the Nazis deported him to Neuengamme, for example, has remained a mystery.

Vicente was in Nazi custody from July 18, 1944 onward. His camp index card gives his inmate category as "political" and his profession as

"police commissioner." He was among the 7,000 concentration camp inmates liberated by British troops in the Sandbostel camp on April 29, 1945.

His name is also found on a list of French Neuengamme inmates. His last address was in La Junquera on the French border. He died there after his return.

Fritz Urban



We are looking for relatives of Fritz Urban, born on July 16, 1916, in Innsbruck. Intermittently unemployed and homeless, he occasionally stole to keep his head above water. This led to his arrest in 1938 and a one-year sentence in the Graz prison and in Walchum, one of the Emsland camps. After his release, Fritz Urban was taken into so-called protective custody. This was the

start of his terrible odyssey as an “AZR” prisoner (Arbeitszwang Reich, “Reich compulsory work”). The SS deported him to the Sachsenhausen, Dachau, Neuengamme and Ravensbrück concentration camps. He was forced to work in various satellite camps for the armaments industry before he was finally liberated in Dachau in April 1945.

Lasting Impact

The Nazis divided concentration camp prisoners into categories indicated by colored triangles. Prisoners could be assigned to groups randomly. If someone's uncle or mother was stigmatized as a “career criminal” or “anti-social element”, this is often painful and even shameful for their relatives today. Therefore, this prisoner category is rarely found in the exhibition — at the request of the families. To this day, these victims have not been vindicated. They have never received compensation. It is urgently necessary to reappraise their fate. The relatives of people branded as “communists” or “homosexuals” also often fear social rejection today.

Deadly Subcamps

From 1943, the Nazi regime increasingly used concentration camp prisoners in the German war industry. Companies could request prisoners and exploit them as slave laborers. This led to a network of well over 1,000 subcamps located near factories important to the war effort. The hard labor, SS terror and disastrous conditions in the provisional accommodations resulted in high death rates. Women and girls had to perform difficult, dangerous work just like the male prisoners. The organization and administration of these forced laborers took place in the big concentration camps. This is also where the personal “effects” storage rooms were located in which the prisoners’ belongings were held.



Neonella Doboitschina



We are looking for relatives of Neonella Doboitschina of Russia, born on October 11, 1923. At the age of twenty, she came to the attention of the Gestapo. She was one of the many female forced laborers the Nazi regime exploited to keep the war economy going. The grounds for their arrest were usually minor offences, including contact to Germans.

On May 5, 1944, the Gestapo deported the young student to the Ravensbrück women’s concentration camp. The transport to Neuenamme followed on August 31, 1944. It is not known what happened to her after that. The photos with dedications show memories of happy times. Her friends called her Nelly.

Finding the Owners

Compensation offices in Germany attempted to return the personal objects after 1945. In 1963, the Arolsen Archives (then known as the International Tracing Service) took responsibility for the nearly 5,000 remaining envelopes and resumed the search, often with the help of national Red Cross associations. After 1974, however, the number of objects returned each year dwindled substantially. In view of the limited means available at the time and the ongoing East-West conflict, it seemed futile to continue the active search.

In 2015, the Arolsen Archives published photos of the personal objects online. The number of returned objects rose immediately, thanks in part to the support of volunteers from various countries. The Archives launched the #StolenMemory campaign in 2016 and began actively searching once again. Since then, some 250 families have had their relatives' "effects" returned to them — along with their memories of the victims of Nazi persecution.

All of the photos and names can be found here: www.stolenmemory.org

#Found

István Rokza



“I can’t tell you how much it means to me to have this pen.” Yaron Roksa knew almost nothing about his father’s fate. Until a journalist found the family. Along with the ink pen, Yaron received a lot of information — including the fact that, as a Jew in Budapest, his father had gone by a different name. István Rokza was 16 years old when the Nazis

deported him to the Neuengamme concentration camp to perform forced labor in 1944. He lost the fingers on his right hand. After being liberated in Bergen-Belsen, he was first taken to an Allied hospital and then sent to Sweden to recuperate. In 1949 he emigrated via Salzburg to Israel. From then on he was known as Yosef Roksa.



Jewish Victims

The majority of the “effects” in the Arolsen Archives holdings once belonged to victims of political persecution and imprisoned forced laborers. The few envelopes containing personal possessions of Jewish inmates of Neuengamme are especially worthy of mention. They belonged primarily to Hungarian Jews. The SS had deported them in 1944 — presumably from the Budapest Ghetto to Neuengamme by way of other camps — to perform forced labor.

In the extermination camps set up to carry out the mass murder of the Jews, for example Auschwitz, Treblinka or Sobibor, the Nazis sold off their victims’ property immediately.

Ready to print

Join the #StolenMemory campaign by staging your own exhibition!

- We give you access to a high-quality exhibition.
- We help you produce your own individual exhibition for presentation indoors or outdoors.
- You can choose individual #StolenMemory posters.
- You need space for a minimum of 29 posters (Required wall space: about 70 running meters, with a poster size of 1.50 × 1.20 meters).
- We help you prepare the texts in two languages (English and a language of your choice).



Rudy de Wijs



Gerald t'Sas never could have imagined receiving his uncle's diary: "The photo gave my uncle a face. And the notes give him his identity back."

The Nazis arrested the twenty-one-year-old Rudy de Wijs on August 18, 1944. His family never knew what happened to him; he simply disappeared one day. He died in a subcamp

of the Neuengamme concentration camp on November 7, 1944.

The photo in the notebook had come to the attention of a Dutch journalist in the Arolsen Archives online archive. It took extensive research, but she finally found out who he was.

Czesław Bilnik



“This is all that remains of my father,” Wanda Różycka-Bilnik told us. When she heard about the pocket watch in the archive in July 2017, she immediately set out for Bad Arolsen. The Nazis had arrested Czesław Bilnik in the winter of 1943 because he and his wife had come to the aid of Polish partisans. His daughter was four years old at the time.

“If the Gestapo had realized we were hiding a wounded partisan, they would have set the house on fire.” Czesław Bilnik was deported first to Gross-Rosen and from there to the Neuengamme concentration camp. He died in May 1945 in the tragic bombing of the “Cap Arcona”.

An Arolsen Archives Campaign

The Arolsen Archives, an international center on Nazi persecution, preserves the world’s most extensive collection of documents on the victims of National Socialism. Yet it also holds post-war Allied records about the fates of the deportees and survivors of the camps, ghettos and prisons. Every year, more than 16,000 persons inquire with the Arolsen Archives in search of information about individual fates, and about the Nazi era and its aftermath.

The holdings are listed in the UNESCO Memory of the World register. We use this unique source for a variety of projects seeking to anchor memory, knowledge and information in our lives today.

www.arolsen-archives.org

Join the Campaign!

Please join the community and help us return the mementoes stolen by the Nazis to their rightful owners. Time is of the essence. Visit our website to see photos of the personal belongings and the names of victims of Nazi persecution. You can use the information there to conduct research and share important clues with us.

www.stolenmemory.org

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