

Annual Report
West Virginia Commission on Holocaust Education
For fiscal year 2008-2009



Presented to:
The Honorable
Joe Manchin III,
Governor of West Virginia



The Honorable Members, WV Senate
The Honorable Members, WV House of Delegates
Superintendent of Schools Steven L. Paine and
West Virginia State Board of Education

The West Virginia Commission on Holocaust Education was created on April 8, 2003, via provisions of **House Bill 2879** and was funded as a line-item in the Budget through the Department of Education. Members of the commission include representation from the West Virginia State Legislature, the State Department of Education, and State Board of Education, and selected teachers, and citizens with strong interests and experiences in teaching the Holocaust. The commission was pleased to receive a line item in the budget of \$15,000 and the support from Superintendent Paine in providing the funds according to the wishes of the state legislature in the line item of the budget.



In March 2009 Terry McAbee and Mary E. Haas members of the commission went to Charleston with an exhibit on the past work of the WVCHE and talked to state legislators and people visiting the Capitol about the efforts and goals of the WVCHE. Many people asked how anyone could deny the Holocaust including a number of WWII veterans who were present at the Capitol that day.

During the 2008-2009 year the commission carried forth its mission as it has in the past and instituted additional efforts to promote its mission in conjunction with other institutions and groups throughout the state. The original emphasis on teachers and school age students is being expanded in this way to reach parents and groups that are also important teachers of the young people of West Virginia through their programs.

Exhibits:

Because the public lacks knowledge of the multiple events that led to the killing and its essential role in the Holocaust, informative exhibits are of great interest to people. People often express their views and questions especially, "How could people do such things to others and be so disrespectful to their efforts and lives?"

In November the commission prepared an exhibit for the Parkersburg Library to commemorate Kristallnacht (November 9-10, 1938) and to promote interest in reading books about the Holocaust. This exhibit in a case at the entrance of the library showed the massive destruction of Jewish synagogues throughout Germany and German controlled territory, the destruction of businesses, and the first imprisonment of Jewish men. Contacts will be made with



libraries throughout the state in hopes of finding other libraries interested in similar exhibitions to promote reading by adults and youth about the Holocaust.

PLAYING FOR TIME a play by ARTHUR MILLER, based on book by Fania Fenelon, was presented by the Morgantown Theater Company February 6 the, 7th and 8th 2009. The WVCHE cooperated with this group by presenting an exhibit visited by attendees and cast who wanted a deeper understanding of the events mentioned in the play.



A special display on Auschwitz was created especially for this play. Dr. Haas attended every performance answering questions and Dr. Levy talked with cast members concerning the authentic nature of the play.



The WVCHE has in the past worked in cooperation with theatre groups in ways similar to this or helping to procure exhibits related to the production to be viewed by those attending the plays. We encourage groups to have special productions for school age students or to offer reduced prices to groups of students, and we contact teachers whom we know teach the Holocaust to alert them to the presentation and encourage them to attend and to bring students.

Educating WV Youth and Teachers:

Dr. Levy made a presentation to future teachers during early November, 2009 at WVU Parkersburg. She stressed the importance of understanding the ideology on which the Nazis based their actions. This presentation was a follow-up to the 2008 presentation made by Dr. Haas and illustrates that working with higher education provides an ongoing opportunity that the WVCHE is expanding to

reach more future teachers and enrich teachers' understanding through knowledge.



In March Dr. Haas made a noon presentation to WVU students and faculty as part of the WVU brown-bag luncheons where she spoke and showed a part of the award-winning movie BLESSED IS THE MATCH. Students attending were very interested not only in the Holocaust, but also both the supportive and active roles of Jewish women during the Holocaust something that was new to them and to the members of the history faculty who were in attendance.

In conjunction with the WVU Women's Studies Department the WVCHE presented an evening screening April 7, 2009 in Gluck Theatre in Morgantown WV. More than 80 people attended the screening. Again the film was praised by those attending for its moving presentation and the supportive relationship between Hannah Senesh and her mother and Hannah's willingness to pay the ultimate price to advocate for her



internal flame of protecting human rights for all people. She was executed in Hungary for taking part in the only attempt of Jewish people to return to Europe in the hope of rescuing Jews from the grasp of the Nazis who were working at eliminating an entire people from the world. After the cold war the government of Hungary exonerated Hannah Senesh. Most people, including several Jewish people, during the reception at the screening indicated that they were unaware of this rescue mission and knew very little about the young poet even though they had read her poems and sung several that have been set to music.

A generous gift has given the commission a copy of this video including the permission for future use as we deem appropriate. The WVCHE will seek opportunities to show the film throughout the state. Since it is particularly of interest to women, we will begin by seeking opportunities to present this video in conjunction with women's history month or to women's groups.

Arts and Writing Contest:

The arts and writing contest was advertised electronically through the WV Department of education in both the fall and spring semesters. The plan to contact faculty senates was disrupted by the loss of the commission's computer and its files. As a result few entries were received. We did receive one outstanding poem from a 10th grader. Upon inquiry we learned that her school had an awards program and so the certificate and award were sent to the school for presentation to her during this assembly. Others were mailed a small

certificate acknowledging participation in the contest. Since most entries failed to meet the criteria of addressing the yearly theme and provided only superficial understanding of the Holocaust, this issue became a major discussion at the spring meeting for the WVCHE where the theme: **Looking the Other Way: Humanity's Failure to Respond** was selected for the 2009-2010 contest. Plans were made for better communication with the teachers. We agreed that this theme would likely to be more appropriate for young learners than the theme selected for 2008-2009. Teacher members of the WVCHE were asked if they would like to come to the summer institute at WVU to present to the teachers attending their grant funded institute on participating in the Arts and Writing Contest. This they did and distributed to these teachers the application form, rules, and theme and showed some past winning entries. We hope that this combined with improved communications with teachers will again yield a large number of entries of hi quality.

Remembrance:

April is the month when major services to commemorate the Holocaust. The week that includes Yom Ha Shoah was again declared as a time to remember the victims of the Holocaust by Governor Joe Manchin III. Services were conducted in several areas of the state.

Dr. Haas attended the service at Temple Shalom in Wheeling where the congregation had invited the community and the faculty and students from Wheeling Jesuit to join them in remembrance and following the service viewing the film BLESSED IS THE MATCH.



Youth from Temple Shalom provided readings and poems. When invited almost everyone in attendance came forward and joined in lighting a candle of remembrance for the victims. The service ended appropriately with the singing of the poem by Hannah Senesh, *Eli, Eli*. The WVCHE provided some literature as well as the film BLESSED IS THE MATCH. The congregation provided light refreshment and individuals attending made voluntary contributions to the work of the commission. Again, this

audience with its wide range of ages and background knowledge appreciated learning the story of Hannah Senesh, and was greatly moved by this film.

In Morgantown the inter-faith service was at the Presbyterian Church and members from multiple congregations participated. Dr. Levy was asked to speak briefly about remembering the victims, Dr. Haas about the meaning of the Holocaust, and Jacob David a second-generation survivor read an essay by a Holocaust Scholar that he personally found very moving. Rabbi Feder spoke on remembering the Holocaust and led the Kaddish. The remainder of the service included an organ solo and the reading of several poems. Those in attendance were invited to come forward to light a candle in remembrance of the victims while a simple hymn was song by the choir and congregation.



Following the service people greeted each other over simple refreshments. The WVCHE provided a small display concerning the Holocaust. Before leaving the ministers of the Morgantown Church of the Brethren/Mennonite accepted the invitation to host the service for next year. This inter-faith group has already set a planning date for the service next year and is working to include more churches and to establish an inter-faith choir for the service next year in Morgantown.

In March Dr. Haas went to Charleston to visit the WV Council of Church in Charleston and spoke with the director. He indicated a willingness to work with the WVCHE and indicated that we should put forth program ideas. He also indicated that some of the churches would probably be willing to host exhibits or films. Dr. Haas provided him with a flier for religious leaders that outlines appropriate times for remembrance and a rationale for Holocaust Education and asks clergy to consider that fact that they too are teachers of youth who can benefit from lessons on the Holocaust.

Because West Virginia Jewish population is small with only a handful of synagogues and rabbis and the small number of survivors are decreasing in number, the WVCHE realizes that recognition of the victims of the Holocaust may need to be done without the help of a Jewish community. Some teachers have done remembrances with their students in the past. More can be encouraged.

The Catholic schools in West Virginia have courses in social justice and teachers of these courses often consider the Holocaust as an appropriate topic of study. Teachers may work together for remembrance programs. Nora Sheets, an art teacher at St. Francis in Morgantown has been among the judges for the Arts



and Writing Contest, and has done a number of projects related to the Holocaust with her art classes. Students must research and include accurate information with the art-works they produce to assure appropriate meaning to their works. This year her students created large portraits of heroes. Students selected the heroes to match their criteria of a hero. One of the criteria was: puts their life in jeopardy. Among their

heroes were five whose acts were directly connected to the Holocaust. The collective work was displayed at the school and in April at the Morgantown Arts Center.

Ms. Sheets intends to encourage additions of more heroes to the display including additional people associated with the Holocaust and genocides. Displaying art works and projects is a way students can honor the victims and heroes of the Holocaust. The Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland has The Crocus Project in which students remember the one and a half million children who died in the Holocaust by planting yellow crocuses. People throughout the world were invited to join in the project. The planting of gardens of yellow tulips began in 1943 to encourage Jewish people in the US to call attention to Americans of what was happening to Jews in Europe. Following the war yellow tulip gardens have been used for remembrance of the victims. Tulips planted at Kristallnacht bloom in April near the date for Yom HaShoah. The WVCHE will make teachers aware of these projects as potentially appropriate ways to remember the victims. Hopefully, this will stimulate other appropriate ideas.

The WVCHE has presented summer teacher institutes to help teachers with what and how to approach teaching the Holocaust. As chair of the WVCHE, Dr. Haas knew that additional funding would be required for such an institute in 2009 and that the WV Humanities Council was open to such a proposal as part of their summer teacher institute program. As a Professor at WVU Dr. Haas was eligible to write such a grant and gain the necessary support of College of Human



Resources and Education at WVU. The grant was successfully obtained and executed in June. Assistance in contacting teachers was provided by the State Department of Education by listing the grant on their website. Dr. Haas and her colleague, Dr. Waterson were the co-primary investigators and organized and taught the course. Other contributions from members and teachers affiliated with the WVCHE included: Dr. Levy who was the key-note speaker

on the first day. She was so pleased with the interest and enthusiasm of the participants that she returned later in the week and spoke more about her personal experiences. Terry McAbee and Brenda Williams spoke about the Arts and Writing Contest. Nora Sheets attended the sessions throughout the week and presented the use of art projects with students to investigate and express their knowledge of social issues including the Holocaust. The teacher participants appreciated all of the presentations and resources made available to them during the institute. They were very interested in hearing the teachers and a survivor from the commission and to learn of its efforts as a support group to teachers interested in helping them to educate youth on this important and difficult challenge. All of the participants were certified teachers and had taught about the Holocaust. Since the majority of the teachers were middle school teachers, they were interested in the various activities that would engage their students through a variety of modes as well as increasing their own and student knowledge of the Holocaust.



This institute also included a two-day visit at the USHMM taking place only days after the killing of Stephen Tyrone Jones, the security guard at the USHMM. Participants had many questions concerning Holocaust education and other genocides. Through the institute, each reported learning much more about the causes and events of the Holocaust and came away more committed to teaching about the Holocaust with greater depth and confidence to stress the importance of human rights and chronology to promote understanding of the many and complex events associated with the Holocaust. They commented on the message on the sign at the front of the USHMM. They selected that location for a group picture with Peter Fredlake, Director, National Outreach for Teacher Initiatives at the USHMM, who coordinated activities at the USHMM for our institute. Teachers also expressed the willingness to continue learning and asked to be considered for future workshops and institutes. These teachers became eligible to be members of the teacher council and will receive direct communications from the WVCHE because of their interests and efforts in studying. Each prepared lessons to teach in the coming year about the Holocaust and will do so with the support of their school administration as a requirement for



acceptance in the institute. This successful experience has been well received at WVU and laid foundations for future efforts in Holocaust Education with WVU.

The WVCHE looks forward to another productive year promoting Holocaust Education in the state of West Virginia and thanks Governor Manchin, The West Virginia Legislature, and the State Department of Education for their support of our efforts.

This nine page report is respectfully submitted for the present members of the West Virginia Commission on Holocaust Education by its chairperson.

Mary E. Haas
Chairperson
July 21, 2009
(304) 276-9297 cell
(304) 293-4386 work phone
604 I Allen Hall
Morgantown, WV 26508
Maryhaas1@mac.com