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**Traveling Exhibit Press Kit
“A Reason to Remember: Roth, Germany 1933-1942”**

“A Reason to Remember: Roth, Germany 1933-1942” tells the personal story of the five Jewish families who lived in the small village of Roth. The exhibit introduces the families as they lived in 1933 and details what happened to them during the Nazi era.

The demise of this tiny Jewish community is chronicled in detail, using primary source materials such as photographs, documents, and artifacts, as well as eyewitness testimonies. The exhibit illustrates how the relations between these families and their neighbors were systematically dismantled.

Visitors are engaged in a personal, intimate, and emotional way with the lives of Roth’s former Jewish residents and become well acquainted with the men, women, and children of the village. Visitors are also challenged by what they see in this exhibit to think critically about the choices they make when they are called upon to respond to prejudice or any other type of injustice.

Why Roth?

What happened to the Jews of Roth occurred in much the same way throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. The exhibit places the story of the Jews of Roth within the overall context of the events of the Holocaust. The Nazis kept meticulous records. Numerous documents found in the archive at Marburg, the county seat of the district in which Roth is located, reveal in detail what happened to these families as well as the complexity of the process of annihilation. It began with the segregation of Roth’s Jews, and evolved into their being removed from the local economy, the confiscation of their property and assets, and their deportation to Theresienstadt, to slave labor camps, or to the ghetto in Riga, Latvia. Ultimately, all those deported from Roth perished in Theresienstadt, Auschwitz/Birkenau, or Stutthof.

Life in Roth

As small as the Jewish community in Roth was, it had everything it needed to sustain a complete Jewish life including a synagogue, kosher meat, a mikvah for ritual immersion, a teacher who taught Hebrew language and Jewish religion to the children, and a Jewish

cemetery. The facilities and services were used by Jews living in the villages that surrounded Roth as well.

Despite their religious differences, the Jews of Roth were well integrated into the life of the village. Their children attended the village school together with the Christian children. They participated fully in local cultural and recreational activities, including sports teams and theater troupes. They did business with their neighbors. In each of the families, the men had served in the German army during World War I.

Impact of Nazism

The stark contrast between the ordinariness of their lives and the radical way in which their lives were changed by the Nazis and their collaborators through persecution and terror provokes immediate questions. The transformation was not immediate and it was laden with complexities and contradictions. Even after Hitler became Germany's chancellor, life for Roth's Jews did not immediately descend into marginalization, oppression, and persecution. The destruction of the community occurred in stages, step-by step during the years between 1933 and 1942.

A handful of documents attest to attempts by some local villagers to help the Jews. Many more documents offer insight into the obstacles that stood in the way of escaping from the Nazis and the impediments preventing those who escaped from rescuing their relatives who were left behind.

As visitors move through the exhibit, they are continually confronted by the choices made by the victims as well as those made by the perpetrators, collaborators, resisters, and bystanders.

The Fate of the Residents

No Jewish family living in Roth at the time of the Nazi occupation escaped the Holocaust. In three of the five families, some family members fled Germany but were unable to bring all of their relatives out with them. The remaining two families were completely annihilated. Most of the survivors were younger people who managed to escape with help from relatives in the United States or South Africa. One survivor was able to go to Great Britain in 1939. Those unable to flee were mainly the elderly or the impoverished. One family in which no member survived consisted entirely of women. This pattern is similar to that of other Jewish communities in Germany.

The story of the Jews in Roth concludes with the letter written by the head of the Gestapo to the mayors of Roth and surrounding villages that documents the final deportation of the Jews from the area. Its chilling words, completely translated into English, serve as a permanent record of the cruel and deceptive means the Nazis fabricated and implemented to annihilate the Jewish people

Historical Context

The last panels in the exhibit place the story of Roth's Jews in historical context with statistics about the impact of the Holocaust on Jewish communities throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. In addition, there is information about what happened to non-Jewish victims of the Nazi regime including Roma (Gypsies), the physically and mentally handicapped, Poles, Soviet prisoners-of-war, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, political prisoners and African Germans.

The exhibit closes with a montage of images that illustrate other instances of hatred, prejudice and discrimination that occurred after the Nazis fell from power. They surround a quote by Sir Edmund Burke, "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing." The photos illustrate that bigotry and intolerance continue to exist and give us a reason to remember.