

Spring-2006 Minnesota *BUS-eum* 2 Tour Report

About a year ago, I toured Minnesota with the **BUS-eum 1** exhibit “Behind Barbed Wire: Midwest POWs in Nazi Germany.” It was the proceeds from that tour, and the immediately-following tour across Wisconsin, that built **TRACES'** new, downtown-Saint Paul Center for History and Culture. Now, we are taking the **BUS-eum 2** around the North Star state, with Part I of the tour this spring and Part II next fall. This exhibit, however, is markedly different from its predecessor: this year's theme “VANISHED: German-American Civilian Internees, 1941-48” is “harder” as it looks at a disturbing, mostly unknown sub-chapter of the larger U.S./WWII drama. In this story, the U.S. isn't “the good guy” as such; this exhibit makes visitors think—then think more and harder. Perhaps for that reason, this exhibit seems more important and timely to me—but more “dangerous” to others...

Part I: spring 2006

Friday, 12 May 2006: Having slept overnight in the back of the **BUS**, parked in a Wisconsin library lot, hearing a pouring rain, I felt keenly aware of being “on tour”.

Forest Lake: 80

Katarina was well-organized; the constant rotation of middle-schoolers went well: half of each class watched the 15-minute NBC-Dateline documentary about this story in the **BUS'** Mobile Classroom/Theater in the back, while the other half viewed the display panels and cases up front, before the two groups switched places.

Tuesday, 16 May 2006: It's exciting to show the **BUS-eum 2** in the Metro area.

Mendota Heights: 200

Dean Simmons teaches economics at St. Thomas Academy, as well as serves as a **TRACES** board member. His colleagues from the staff enjoyed the **BUS** as much as their students. The school librarian happily bought almost every title we carry!

Bloomington: 55

Northwestern Health Science University's Greenwalt Library sponsored this showing, which attracted much interest from students, even if not the most numbers. What was great, was the librarian got a chance to actually meet students who she might otherwise never encounter, plus the school's administration as well as Board of Directors members now know that the library provides top-quality programming, too.

Wednesday, 17 May 2006: How appropriate, to be in the Minnesota Capital—and home to **TRACES'** permanent museum—for the day! For the first time, Renae “**BUS-sat**” and I worked in our office, across the park from the first showing. It was helpful for my trusted, competent assistant to know what a showing is *really* like...

Saint Paul: Central Library: 94

For various reasons, hosts and “commensurate” venues in large cities (the Twin Cities, Des Moines, Madison, Milwaukee) seem ALWAYS difficult to find. Happily, the good folks at the venerable Friends of the [Saint Paul Public] Library took keen interest in hosting what turned out to be three surprisingly strong showings. Great! Many “business-types” walked past the **BUS**, read the outside panels, or even peered inside as they hurried past, enroute to work; many returned over lunch break.

Saint Paul: Dayton's Bluff Branch: 99

Joanna was a flawless host, and her staff were helpful and kind. I enjoyed the mix of this “transitional neighborhood”—including two classes of mostly Hmong charter-school pupils. Having Metropolitan State University across the street added flavor. It's fulfilling, to have mixed-generational/mixed-ethnic visitation to this history exhibit.

Saint Paul: Rice Street Branch Library: 107

By this point, I was exhausted; the challenging nature of the Rice St. neighborhood proved trying. Still, attendance was strong and interest keen—a worthy showing! The area is quite Hardcore Inner-City, so I

was gratified to have so much interest, from visitors of all ages and different groups: African-American, Asian, Hispanic...

Friday, 19 May 2006: Today marked the first of a week of Out-State showings.

Minnetonka: 42

A bright, warm day, I enjoyed working with accommodating Denise. A few of her "seniors" questioned the nature of the exhibit, but Denise responded to them well. Many of the residents in this senior-living center had personal war stories to tell.

Elk River: 49

Public librarian Mick Stoffers (and her husband) spent considerable time in the **BUS** after Mick's shift ended. I felt gratified by their interest in the exhibit—and the donation she slipped me, saying "Go buy yourself something good for dinner..."

Saturday, 20 May 2006: Central Minnesota is a pleasing, rolling landscape of crooked roads, patchwork farms, industrious lil' towns... much like Ol' Germany!

Little Falls: 95

Although the day began rainy and gray, by early evening the weather turned beautiful and the public library's patrons seemed to enjoy the exhibit, shown in tandem with the Friends' annual book sale; the two events "fed" each other quite well, and the "crowd" the sale attracted was well-read. I enjoyed seeing a film and walking around town, afterward. The river-shore park was exceptionally beautiful.

Sunday, 21 May 2006: I did not know it until later, but quite coincidentally I walked some three miles to Charles Lindbergh's boyhood home on the banks of the Mighty Miss (which at this point is not quite so "Mighty" but rather "Hefty"), on the *exact* anniversary of his landing in France in 1927, after the first trans-Atlantic solo flight!

Cokato: 105

Mike Worchester is one of the most animated, sociable hosts the **BUS** ever had. Again this year, he made a full-blown production out of the showing—and it paid off! He had chairs outside the **BUS**, for people to sit, talk, reminisce and compare notes, and tasty cookies and drinks inside the museum, to draw folks into its own exhibits.

Monday, 22 May 2006: Early summer has arrived; being on-tour isn't "so" bad...

Atwater: 84

Lynda did an excellent job of drawing both townspeople and local middle-schoolers to this public-library showing of the **BUS**. She even served a homemade chop-suey-and-fresh-fruit lunch to her regional library director and me. Already, we are discussing the possibility of having the **BUS** return to that region next fall. Why not?

Tuesday, 23 May 2006: Having feared that the state park at Fort Ridgely State Park might be gated shut, I spontaneously pulled the **BUS** over and spent the night in a parking lot; only after returning to Saint Paul did I discover that "someone" reported me and thus the State of Minnesota sent me a bill, per post, for \$18! Still, I was "adopted" by a friendly Golden Retriever who popped out of a field, walked several miles with me during a pleasant evening stroll, and slept most of the night in the **BUS** (I let him out, early-morning, when he seemed to need to pee); he was waiting for me, under the **BUS**, when I awoke and went outside at dawn. It was with considerable sadness that I found his farmer owners, but now I'm looking for a Golden Retriever of my own to take with me, on next fall's tour: "No mo' loneliness!"

Fairfax: 96

A real "community event" on Main Street, this showing was a great deal o' fun! (I enjoyed lunch!) The librarian and staff had done a great deal of strategically-placed publicity, plus involved people. Brown Co. Historical Society board members in Neu Ulm came for a look, so expect a showing in that town, in the not-so-distant future.

Fairmont: 77

This year Lenny Tvedten and I didn't have to battle near-hurricane winds and rain. Still, the numbers of visitors wasn't what it could have been, in part because the local newspaper wasn't exactly cooperative. Still, those who came showed much interest.

Wednesday, 24 May 2006: Last night's "missing" winds arrived today: **WHAM!**

Austin: 90

Ann Hokanson again oversaw the midday showing, aptly organized by her and staff. Ann is another one of our most-supportive, most-liked Repeat Hosts: she's great! She uses these events to get to know her patrons better, more personally.

La Crescent: 50

Folks kept "droppin' in" so I kept the **BUS** open almost an hour after the hosts left! One of the reasons, was that a son and granddaughter of a former internee, from Rockford/IL, drove to La Crescent to see the exhibit! It was a honor, meeting them.

Thursday, 25 May 2006: The kind librarian helped me find a local bus mechanic, so I had all the fluids checked and topped. Being early, I pulled over alongside the banks of the gorgeous Mississippi River and read, napped and savored the scenery.

Winona: 83

Nicole from the Winona Historical Society was *much* fun to work with, and several staff took turns helping to show the **BUS**. Two TV crews and 2 reporters came! The museum obviously had done some thorough publicity, involved many of its volunteers in the **BUS** showing, and used the exhibit to bring visitors into its exhibits.

Friday-Sunday, 26-28 May 2006: I showed the **BUS** over the Memorial Day weekend at the Wings of Freedom Air Show, at the Red Wing Airport, near Bay City/Wisconsin. On Friday hundreds of school kids ran rampage through the **BUS**, and on Saturday and Sunday several hundred more adults came for a quieter look.

attendance so far (not including more than a thousand Air Showers): 1,406

Part II: fall 2006

[to be added]

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