

Spring-2006 Wisconsin BUS-eum 2 Tour Report

About ten months ago, in spring 2005, I ventured to the Badger State with the **BUS-eum 1** exhibit “Behind Barbed Wire: Midwest POWs in Nazi Germany.” Now, I return with the **BUS-eum 2**. This exhibit, however, is markedly different from its predecessor: last year’s theme pleased *everyone*—the right (who assumed the exhibit “honored our boys”) and the left (who saw the intimate descriptions of Midwestern POWs’ captivity in Nazi Germany as hard documentation of the horrors of dictatorship and war). 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...

Monday, 27 March 2006: I left Saint Paul with snow all around, and frozen lakes and rivers. As I filled the fuel tank, just south of Minnesota’s capital city, a trucker from the next island came over, read at the exterior panels and bought an exhibit guide, even before I’d showed “VANISHED” for the first time. He warned “Yep, they’d do it again...”

Prairie du Chien: 30

Nancy Ashmore is the ideal host for the Launching Venue of such a tour: she’s attentive, generous, forgiving and organized. After a chilly evening, with a light turnout, I felt particularly grateful for (the second year in a row) a “comped” room at the AmericInn; owner Wendy Vanderbilt’s dad fought in WWII and she supports our work.

Tuesday, 28 March 2006: It remained chilly today, with a wild wind from the west.

Prairie du Chien: 105

The students and teachers from Prairie du Chien High School who Nancy invited to tour the **BUS** responded well to “VANISHED”—open to and curious about an unknown story. As the first school group to tour the new exhibit, I felt relieved, as I didn’t know what to expect. It helps that NBC TV seems a respected, trusted source, and that the U.S. Government’s own 1945 (color) film of Camp Crystal City/Texas is self-revealing.

*Nancy Ashmore <nashmore@swls.org> of Prairie du Chien Public Library wrote:
We had many good responses to the exhibit, and I know that it has sparked many discussions such as the impromptu one at my book club last week. I hope that it has done the same at the school. Having the bus at the High School for a few hours worked very well, I thought; I need to work harder to get the other schools involved. I’m not sure what it would take.*

You are doing a truly marvelous thing here; I hope that you will be an inspiration to other organizations that could bring history to the people!

Nancy Ashmore

Mineral Point: 30

What a treat, to show the **BUS** on the “High Street” of this old, frontier mining town, with its quaint commercial and public buildings, and rustic setting amongst the rolling hills of southwest Wisconsin. Barbara Polizzi proved to be a friendly, accommodating host—even leading me to the ancient municipal offices, above the library, to warm my leftover dinner in a dying microwave. While the number of visitors to the **BUS** was low, the informal discussion that Barb had organized proved lively and worthwhile.

Wednesday, 29 March 2006: It continued to be cold, dark and unfriendly. At least Barb Polizzi “brightened” my day by arranging for a swim and shower at a local motel. After a chilly night in the **BUS**, the hot water in the whirlpool was like salve to my soul.

Verona: 111

The library staff was especially flexible and kind: due to a cancellation, we were able to open the **BUS** for much of the day, which in part resulted in the large number of visitors. Even though they were about to move to a new building, the director and her staff went out of their way to be attentive and helpful. The showing went very well!

Thursday, 30 March 2006: My assistant, Renae Youngs, grew up in suburban Madison. This morning, her father came to volunteer with the **BUS**: his help was much appreciated.

Madison: 100

For the first time, there was a tense “incident” in the **BUS**, involving some minority teens—first a half-dozen young men, then about the same number of screaming young women. Ultimately, I had to call the police to disperse a crowd that grew out of control. “Yikes!” I *never* imagined I’d have to do Riot Control in a mobile museum!

Friday, 31 March 2006: Having slept overnight in the back of the **BUS**, parked in a secluded lot, hearing “schoolyard” sounds, I felt keenly aware of being “on site”.

Monona Grove: 201

Host Valerie Edwards did a flawless job of organizing this showing. She got a colleague to moderate a panel discussion, with guests who included Wisconsin State Senator Mark Miller, whose wife’s parents were Japanese-American internees. The discussion went well, and the 71 audience members seemed to find it worthwhile.

Saturday, 1 April 2006: April Fool’s Day—and, happily, not a fool in sight!

Waukesha: 165

Despite having to deal with a family emergency, David Bostrom had thought of *every* conceivable detail related to showing this exhibit in his surprisingly pleasant town—and then some! Myself a confessed Ludite, I was impressed by the high-tech feature about the **BUS-eum**, shown on a big screen just inside the front door of the library, plus the various print-ad media that David and his staff had designed about “VANISHED”. A member of the Wisconsin Humanities Council (which for a second year in a row is under-writing this innovative exhibit), David expressed great approval of the exhibit itself, and deep satisfaction with the high visitor turnout and enthusiastic comments.

David Brostrom <dbrostrom@waukesha.lib.wi.us> of the Waukesha Public Library wrote:

Hosting the BUS-eum 2 on April 1st at the Waukesha Public Library was a unique and rewarding experience! The feedback from our customers was very positive. The majority of our visitors were astounded at learning that Waukesha County residents who were German-American citizens were interned for months or years in the 1940s, sometimes right in our “backyard”!

Our area veterans group called the Military Order of the Purple Heart eagerly supported this project financially, plus they helped customers while on the bus. Our Friends of the Library group was a primary financial supporter also, contributing more than \$300 to our BUS-eum 2 initiative. I was concerned about finding the monies to pay for this program but in the end it was fairly easy convincing groups to offer their support. I’m convinced this was because of the special nature of the BUS-eum’s topic. Next time, I would start

working on event details earlier, and perhaps directly involve other county veterans' organizations in the planning process.

Touring an actual retrofitted bus was a memorable experience for visitors, especially since it was such an unusual venue for learning about United States history. Because people are used to more conventional museums, the BUS-eum 2 was extremely effective. Plus, the displays were professionally presented, attractive, informative and plentiful.

The movie and videos in the bus were topnotch, too. People of all ages sat down or stood up to listen and view those audio-visuals. A-V types of products (and any "visuals" for that matter) are very popular with younger kids, too, and that was quite evident at the Waukesha BUS-eum 2 stop.

Perhaps adding interactive audio-visual displays, like colorful touch screens that provide information about WWII and internment history would also add to the overall allure of the exhibits. (I recently experienced a large number of these hands-on units, within various cultural and historical displays at the new Native-American Museum, in Washington DC. Like powerful magnets, they were a "big hit" with grade school-aged youngsters, who excitedly played and learned with these computer-generated products!)

Next time, I would definitely opt for sponsoring a humanities discussion, so that we could dive deeper into "the whys, hows, and will it ever happen agains". I'm pleased that you are willing to personally coordinate or facilitate those types of engaging forums.

All things considered, you did a fine job promoting the intricacies of American history and the shocking nature of the specific internment topics! I'm certain that many of our Waukesha customers will be reading these books that you sold to our reference staff after the event. I'm pleased we now have those tomes in our regular non-fiction collection, so that students and other researchers can access them in the future. Thank you for your incredible dedication to spreading these fascinating historical stories, and for making a worthwhile visit to the Waukesha Public Library with BUS-eum 2. I'll always remember the thrill of seeing the large BUS-eum rounding the street corner, heading toward our public library!

Sincerely,

David Brostrom

Sunday, 2 April 2006: How appropriate, to be in the “German Capital of the New World”—and home to *many* WWII-era German-American internees for a few days!

Milwaukee: 50

For various reasons, hosts and “commensurate” venues in large cities (Des Moines, the Twin Cities, Madison, Milwaukee...) seem ALWAYS difficult to find. Happily, the good folks at the venerable Turner (gymnast) Hall stepped in, last-minute, to host what turned out to be a symbolic showing. Despite low attendance, at least various print and electronic media members visited and reported on the **BUS**... and the German food was GREAT! As chance allowed, I strolled around this solid city, and *liked* it!

Monday, 3 April 2006: With only minutes to spare, I stole away from the **BUS** and approached the Milwaukee Public Library about purchasing at least some of the eleven narrative-history Midwest/WWII books **TRACES** has published. The push to get our books “out there” as far and as wide as possible is manifold: obviously, through our publications, we preserve unknown, unrecorded stories that otherwise would disappear [once their bearers die]. Second, “someday” when **TRACES** no longer is operative, through these written records these legacies shall live on, long after my staff and I no longer are traversing the Earth. Third, revenues from book sales are among our largest source of funding for our on-going tours, and run our museum/various projects.

Milwaukee: 25

A cold, rainy day until midday, most of the visitors were casual “walkers by”—for the second day in a row, however, Gunther Greis visited the **BUS**. A former German-American internee, his stories both riveted and saddened me and others at the exhibit.

RoseMarie Barber <rmbarber@ameritech.net> of Milwaukee’s Turner Hall wrote:

I think what amazed me most was the fact that people said “I didn’t know this happened” From what I saw the Germans seem to accept the fact they were in these camps and tried to make it home and make the best of a bad situation. I felt especially bad for the people who had worked their land for 25 years only to have to give it up and were never given any compensation. I hope you can bring the bus to German Fest. The next time you may want to pin down schools, making definite arrangements for student groups. Germans are too proud to grovel. Tuesday there were all these talk shows about the illegal aliens. If I had been better able to talk (I have a cold) I’d have liked to have called in and told them about what happened to the Germans. Everyone thinks they are a victim nowadays. I saw the article in the Journal yesterday; it should have been longer.

Good Luck on the rest of your tour, Rose Marie

Kenosha: 75

The library staff—including the director—seemed expressly pleased with the turnout, even more so with the visitors’ almost exclusively approving responses to the exhibit.

Linda Marcussen <lmarcuss@kenosha.lib.wi.us> of Kenosha Public Library wrote:

I hope you were pleased by the turnout here in Kenosha. We certainly were. I’ve been comparing notes with other employees who have interacted with (or overheard) visitors to the exhibit. One comment heard again and again was “I had no idea this happened—and in Wisconsin, yet.” Some people were struck by the similarity between the German-American experience and what’s happening right now. Another unexpected, but welcome, outcome of the exhibit was that Northside issued many new library cards! The exhibit had drawn people to the building for the first time. And, the books we set out about the topic were snapped up immediately.

As far as suggestions to improve the planning process, it would have been helpful to have all of the nuts-and-bolts details explained at the time of our first conversation. While I think everything turned out to be satisfactory, knowing more at the very beginning might have my end of the process go more smoothly. In any case, thanks for bringing the BUS-eum to Kenosha. It's unlikely that we would have learned about this important episode in our country's history if you had not come. Best of luck to you on the rest of the tour.

Linda Marcussen

Tuesday, 4 April 2006: Southeast Wisconsin is a pleasing, rolling landscape of crooked roads, patchwork farms, industrious lil' towns... much like Ol' Germany!

Burlington: 75

Judy Rockwell had prepared a well-attended showing. The visitors seemed interested.

Sturtevant: 61

Sturtevant village clerk Donna Deuster had "signed on" late in the process, but wisely had matched our visit with voting day: although parked in front of the village hall for a mere two hours, we had a busy 61-member stream of excited, curious visitors. Donna already is waiting for "next year's" exhibit—if only I knew what it will be!

Donna Deuster <villageclerk@sturtevant-wi.gov> of Sturtevant Town Hall wrote:

I would like to tell you about the wonderful feed-back I received the rest of the week for those who had the opportunity to visit your exhibit. The books I purchased helped people find answers to questions they hadn't thought of until they had gotten home. I always sent them out with your web-site address so their search for reasons and answers could continue.

We would welcome the return of any program you may be traveling with in the future and with more advance notice would certainly combine a related interactive community program with it.

If you hadn't been able to come to the Village I would certainly have been traveling to another site to take part in your most enlightening information.

Thank you for your dedication and interest in human freedoms!

Wednesday, 5 April 2006: Although Donna graciously invited me to stay with her and her husband, I chose to drive at least half way to the next morning's showing—and unexpectedly found myself (and the **BUS**, of course) parked near the tranquil shores of Lake Geneva... WHAT a town! Despite my partner's disapproval of such "dangerous" antics, I went for a moonlit stroll along the shore, in both directions of the picturesque village center and beach—past grand houses, parks, barking dogs... I walked for *miles*!

Janesville: 250

Linda Belknap and her library director (a fellow Iowan!) were not prepared for the amazing response: we had lines outside the **BUS**, waiting to view the exhibit and the films, and so extended the showing to a full six hours! I was in Top Form, however, as Linda had arranged for a Friend of the Library to take me to the nearby Y, which I used both before and after the exceptionally successful showing. Janesville is very pleasant.

Linda Belknap <belknap.linda@als.lib.wi.us> of Janesville's Hedberg Public Library wrote:

I think in general the Janesville audience would fall under the category of "visibly moved." Those with some German heritage were particularly engaged. Some viewer reactions I heard:

-A man who went through the bus with three middle/high-school age students was very concerned and said he is sad that the government attitude toward individual civil liberties has not changed a lot since that time.

-Two of the men who attended both the exhibit and the community conversation thanked me separately for hosting the bus. Both found the content timely, troubling and very important.

-A staff member who grew up near Sparta and attended the exhibit and program with her friend left me this note: "Thank you for bringing the TRACES bus and program. Neither Myrna nor I had ever heard of the German-American internment."

My thoughts about the experience:

-The TRACES office does a good job of getting info out at all stages. Some of it necessarily has to be of a group, form-letter nature, but I also received individual communications promptly by email and phone when appropriate.

-If it would be possible to set up the tour dates farther ahead, some of your suggestions for publicity would be more do-able. In particular, our schools plan their field trips months ahead of time. By the time we received our tour date, it was too late to approach the schools with the field trip suggestion.

-I spent a lot of time on the initial speakers-panel idea for our related program but didn't find anyone who felt knowledgeable enough to sit in the "expert" chair. Although the more informal, unstructured conversation we ended up having was perhaps riskier, I think other hosts and their communities might be more comfortable with it. Hosts would probably still want to contact key people whom they know are interested in civil liberties, history, etc. to encourage their attendance, but that wouldn't be as daunting as the highly-academic approach your guidelines suggest. Many of our community members are just regular folks who do care about the past, present and future.

-I was thrilled (and relieved) at the large Janesville turnout. Catching the interest of the local daily newspaper for an article with photos after the visit was also a plus. To me, this shows how important libraries continue to be in the lives of citizens, serving an educational and community role even beyond the already-valuable traditional one of providing books and other materials for a miniscule portion of the local tax bill.

Thanks, and good luck!

Linda Belknap <belknap.linda@als.lib.wi.us> later added, upon request, notes on the program:
Hello, fellow BUS-eum 2 hosts:

Michael asked me to tell you a little about our program related to the BUS-eum 2 stop here in Janesville this week.

I initially tried to organize a panel of speakers. Although people (civil libertarians, history professors, community activists) were interested in the topic and wanted to know more, no one felt knowledgeable enough to sit up front at a table. So I changed it from a panel to an informal community conversation with no particular agenda and no speakers. This was kinda risky but it worked out fine. We had 16 people attend. (250 visitors to the bus.) I set the chairs up in a semi-circle and encouraged at least first names on nametags to add to the friendly feel. I set up coffee, tea and cookies. We were fortunate to have a staff member from Senator Russ Feingold's Madison office on hand to briefly share an update on the senator's efforts to introduce federal legislation recognizing the government's role in the internments. So, I

just did a brief welcome and introduced her. When she finished, I just invited people to share and they did! Our participants were very willing to share both personal tales of relatives affected and viewpoints about civil liberties, the justification for the government to compromise same in times of crisis, etc. Four of the people I had initially invited to be speakers ended up coming and contributing, so the end result was much the same as I had envisioned. So as not to intimidate people, Michael sat in the back of the room and let the conversation flow for 40 minutes before adding a few comments. I tried hard not to worry about filling every second with talk, and I think that relaxed atmosphere helped people feel at ease.

That's about it. Good luck!

*Linda Belknap
Adult Program Coordinator
Hedberg Public Library
316 S. Main St.
Janesville, WI 53545
phone (608) 758-6591
fax (608) 758-6583*

Thursday, 6 April 2006: Having feared that like the state park at Lake Geneva, that Aztalan State Park might be gated shut, I spontaneously pulled the **BUS** over and parked the night in a NAPA Auto Parts parking lot in Jefferson. Ruffled by an unexpected late-night parts delivery truck, I rehearsed a tiny White Lie, that my bus needed "attention" and thus would be ready and waiting for the shop's AM opening...

Watertown: 106

As the Thranses first lived in Watertown/Wisconsin upon arriving in "Amerika" from the German province of Pommern ("Pommern" *auf Deutsch*) in 1855, Watertown has a special place in my consciousness. Hans Baierl (which translates either as "Little farmer" or "Little Bavarian" in German) was helpful, well-organized and accommodating.

Friday, 7 April 2006:

Oconomowoc: 51

This year Carol Gonzales and I didn't have to battle near-hurricane winds and driven rain. Still, the numbers of visitors wasn't what it could have been, in part because the local newspaper wasn't exactly cooperative, and the town has no radio station.

Saturday, 8 April 2006: Sun and warmer temperatures made for a pleasant day.

Brookfield: 110

Steffanie Hanus actually oversaw the day's showing, aptly organized by her colleague Kathy Tuttrup. Ironically, we sell in the **BUS** a book about Stalag Luft 1, where Steff's father was an American POW in Nazi Germany during the war. She bought the book and presented it to him, which provided both of them considerable satisfaction.

Stephanie Hanus <Hanus@ci.brookfield.wi.us> of Brookfield Public Library wrote:
The BUS-eum tour at the Brookfield Public Library was successful. Of those that went through, many seemed to have had some kind of reaction, which varied from surprise that the internment had happened at all, to a more personal reaction from memories or experiences they had had.

Overall I think the setup of the exhibit was good. It allowed people to spend as much or as little time as they would like. The only thing that I could think to change would be if you could somehow make the bus handicapped accessible.

Thank you for sharing the exhibit with us. I know many of our patrons, and staff, learned about a period of history that we would not have heard about otherwise.

Stephanie

Monday, 10 April 2006: Again, one of the first Days of Spring of this current tour: *joy!*

Germantown: 88

Like last year, Roberta Olson was fun to work with. And, again, like last year, we had “alternative learners” come in large numbers—last year home-schooled kids, this year pupils from a nearby, private Baptist Bible school... It was quite an experience, for all!

Wauwatosa: 81

Another venue unplanned when I left Saint Paul, the Wauwatosa East High School teacher of German who spontaneously organized this showing was pleased with the turnout, for which her school’s students earned extra credit. Many adults came, too.

Tuesday, 11 April 2006: It was a beautiful day on which to leave Greater Milwaukee and head back into Rural America! The countryside was gentle and pleasing...

West Bend: 80

A “temple to the book” in a pleasant town, directed by a friendly, able man, the West Bend Public Library was a joy to have as a host! Michael Tyree made it fun, too!

Beaver Dam: 78

Despite minor-yet-irritating Mechanical Difficulties enroute to Beaver Dam, I actually arrived/set up *just* in time for the showing there. Sue Mevis was flexible and patient.

Wednesday, 12 April 2006: I spent the night at my cousin Paul Ehrhardt’s organic truck and chicken farm just northeast of Sun Prairie. It’s always a joy to see him, his brilliant, cheery wife Kay Jensen, and their two children. And, the home-grown dinner of roasted, alfalfa-fed chicken and hothouse California spinach (which resembles maple leaves) was GREAT! The bottle of Merlot we quickly polished off added to the jolly mood, shared with Paul’s parents, who were my age when I visited our Wisconsin kid in the mid-’70s; now that they have hearing aids and health “challenges” I feel old!

Sun Prairie: 142

Last year’s showing was painfully thin, so I celebrated with Jean Anderson when the rainy clouds lifted and a record number of people descended upon the **BUS-eum**. The conversations I overheard were lively and worthwhile. Jean already looks to next year!

Wednesday, 12 April 2006: With only a morning showing, I knew I had a relatively leisurely day ahead of me: after another “spontaneous” showing at a suburban-Madison middle school, in the morning, that afternoon I could drive to the heart of the Driftless area slowly and deliberately, taking in the arrival of spring in what is one of my most favorite places on the planet. I could soak in the region’s tender beauty.

Waunakee: 280

Ten classes of 25 pupils, plus numerous adults (including “walk ins” from the community) visited the **BUS** in just a few hours—the pupils in perfectly timed and executed 20-minute shifts. That way, all of the kids got to see the NBC-TV video, and cast their eyes over the panels and props as they exited out the front of the **BUS**.

Friday, 14 April 2006: The day started promising, as I knew my partner would be coming that afternoon from the Twin Cities to spend the weekend with me. Such tours are important and rewarding—in so many ways—yet taxing. “Family time” is crucial!

Jud and Judi hosted me that night in their log cabin, perched on the bluffs above the Kickapoo River; all evening, the Sandhill cranes and Canada geese, re-emergent frogs and other wildlife serenaded us. Judi’s home-cooked meal was a treat! A neighbor, who milks goats, came, and we held a peaceful Quaker meeting on the porch as the sun set, shadows crept across the hills and nature sang to us timeless hymns.

Soldiers Grove: 51

Jud and Judi hosted the showing in “America’s First Solar Village” (so re-built after a devastating flood in the 1970s that wiped out the previous town center), as Cele Wolf was in Fiji. Afterwards, we went for a sinfully delicious double cheeseburger an’ rings!

Monday, 17 April 2006: After a rejuvenating-albeit-WET Easter weekend, spent with family, the tour resumes. The break as welcome, as I’m starting to wear and lag...

Kewanee: 68

Rarely have hosts been so enthusiastic and fun! Co-sponsored by the local library and historical societies, I much enjoyed working with the good people of Kewanee.

Tuesday, 18 April 2006: Waking up in Kewanee was a mixed experience. On one hand, it truly does resemble a coastal port town in New England or the Maritimes, and I enjoyed strolling along the Main Street just after sunrise. I also liked walking out onto the pier, accompanied as I was by dive-bombing gulls and curious geese. At the same time, I had to think of the high-school boy I met, some 20 years ago, while enroute to Door County. I don’t remember how or where we met (it was along the way, co-incidentally), but he visited me at the campground that evening and shared my fire. He confided that he had AIDS and that he felt isolated and sad in Kewanee... I could not help but wonder what Fate handed him—and assumed he is long-since dead, as the “cocktails” that have prolonged the lives of so many AIDS victims wasn’t around yet. As I lingered along the streets of his hometown, I meditated on whether or not his people still live in this quiet, postcard-perfect little town, and, if so, what they now know or feel about their son’s wickedly premature death. Did he die surrounded by love, or by fear and disownment, as he feared? Did he find happiness, before dying?

Manitowoc: 123

Hallie had to leave town unexpectedly, but Rachel did a fine job of making this showing comfortable and efficient. After the showing, I stopped at the Wisconsin Maritime Museum, across the waterfront, and “checked out the competition”...

Green Bay: 210

Attractive, fun Sue Lagerman once again put on a good show—with a program in the meeting room with WWII veterans telling their wartime stories. Attendance was great!

Wednesday, 19 April 2006: I appreciate staying with Jack Fry and his wife in their cozy, waterfront home. Fellow Peace Corps volunteers and world travelers, they were ideal hosts.

Menasha: 202

Jack had a brilliant idea: he planned for the Rotary Club he belongs to, to meet at the library for a sandwich lunch. Once a Rotary exchange student (1981-82, to Skipton in North Yorkshire/England), I addressed the Rotarians for a few minutes, then they went outside to view the **BUS**. I’ll encourage future hosts who can, to also invite civic or other groups to meet/lunch on-site, then tour the **BUS**: I’d be happy to address them!

Jack Fry <Fry@menashalibrary.org> of Menasha Public Library wrote:

I was quite pleased with the way things went with the HS students. I haven't had an opportunity to talk with teacher Bill Sepnafski, but I think he thought it a worthwhile expedition for his kids.

I was also quite pleased with the "community conversation." The reactor panelists made thoughtful comments. You chipped in where appropriate—mostly with information and clarification. And the rest of the audience for the most part "got into it." One member of the audience I think summed up the session by indicating that regardless of point of view or opinion, it is critical for citizens to continually attempt to keep aware of government actions.

Thanks for coming. It was a stimulating day.

Jack

Clintonville: 191

The many Friends of the Library volunteers and staff who oversaw this showing made this stop especially enjoyable. The large turnout pleased us all, and the panel discussion proved to be provocative in positive ways, and well received. I also appreciate the *Bier und Brat* that Peter and Sanny Oberhauser treated me to, later.

Sanny Oberhauser <oberhau@dotnet.com> of Clintonville Public Library wrote:

It was an exhibit that brought knowledge of a part of our history that few people know of—and when they/we learn of it we are astounded and disappointed. Since your visit here, I've been around the state at conferences, etc., and talked quite a bit about your exhibit and the internment of German-Americans. To a person, no one had heard of it. As you may recall, we had a high school girl on our panel who had done quite a bit of reading before appearing with us. Furthermore, she studied the exhibit and listened to the discussion. When I asked her near the end of our panel discussion for her reactions and what she'd been writing, she said something like it really disappointed her to learn this about our government—she will no longer trust what she hears and reads. This experience will forevermore affect the kind of citizen she'll become.

As to Sen. Feingold's attempt to introduce a bill that would force our government to recognize this internment, I just called his office and again talked with Katy, who saw your exhibit in Janesville. I addressed questions about his bill and the ability of an anonymous Senator to block a bill. She took my questions and will get back to me. That fact is almost as upsetting as the internment! If I learn anything of interest, I'll write you. This has been a rambling message—you made me aware of something that is very troubling.

Today I drove over to Appleton for convocation at Lawrence University to hear Salman Rushdie. He's an amazing guy—witty, but ended his hour-long lecture with an appeal. He'd talked earlier about "lines" in our society, and that in the mid-sixties, when he went to college, activists began to cross the lines, to question the authorities. He said it is up to the artists to cross the lines—others will fight to keep them within the lines, but the writers and other artists must cross them. My mind went back to your exhibit and our conversation and the two events had similar messages. It was an honor to hear someone who has crossed so many lines. And, you certainly are one who is willing to cross and question the lines that are drawn. Keep it up!

I hope your tour continues to go well,

Sanny

Thursday, 20 April 2006: The temperatures have returned to seasonal norms. I awoke at 5.30 and drove through a peaceful, sunny-yet-cool morning to Wautoma.

Wautoma: 48

As Beth Knuth only expected about 30 visitors to the exhibit, we both were pleased that the actual attendance (monitored in large part by her generous husband, Ed) exceeded her expectations by more than 50%. Hurrah!

Adams: 47

Dan Calef did a good job of “trying” to muster the numbers, but local press/media did not help. Still, those who came seemed to get much out of the exhibit.

Friday, 21 April 2006: Bridget Christenson arranged for me to park the **BUS** in the lot of the Best Western near Mauston—complete with electrical hook-up, a swimming pool and shower... Jay Leno, a complimentary copy of “USA Today” (ugh) an’ mo’!

Mauston: 105

Bridget also kindly arranged for two local high school girls to help me throughout the showing, as their school was selling “slave labor” for the day to raise funds; the **BUS** hasn’t been this clean in weeks! It really is a godsend to have cleaning help!

Bridget Christenson <b.christenson@wrlsweb.org> of Mauston’s Hatch Public Library wrote: I wanted to thank you again for bringing this important exhibit to our town. I am pleased with the attendance and feel honored to have brought a little knowledge/understanding about German-American civilian internment to the Mauston community. Those 105 in attendance learned much. As an educated person I learned SO much from the exhibit: thank you. I never knew how much I did not know about US internment. I was pleased with the results: the exhibit was very meaningful.

Honestly, the mechanics of the tour, the set up, the pre- and post-correspondence—I think you have down. I think years of experience has shown you what works and doesn’t and I have no criticism, constructive or otherwise, in regard to the exhibit.

Thank you again and safe travels,

Bridget

Sparta: 96

Like last year, Marg Fromm was gone, but her assistant, Michelle Koenig (“King” *auf Deutsch*) was a perfect host—friendly, warm, accommodating, helpful. The visitors bought many books, the rain finally broke and the weekend began!

Sunday, 23 April 2006: Having camped on an island on the Mississippi and spent part of Saturday night exploring historic, lively downtown-LaCrosse-on-a-weekend-night, the sunny and bright Sunday-morning world seemed like a different world.

La Crosse: 75

University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse history professor Don LaCoss was nowhere to be seen when I arrived on the campus, so I intuitively set up the **BUS** between the social-sciences building (Wimberly) and the main cafeteria. Glad I did, as students on weekends go ONE place: to CHOW! When we finally matched up, both Don and I lamented most students’ absolute and stubborn indifference to the exhibit. As he said, it wasn’t so much evil among the Germans that lead to the rise of Nazism, but apathy!

Don La Coss <lacoss.dona@uwlax.edu> of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse wrote:

I was very pleased with how everything went on 4/23, and I enjoyed my conversations with visitors at the exhibit and with some of my students in class this last week.

For future university hosts of the BUS-eum, I'm torn about having done a Sunday visit. On one hand, Michael found a great place on campus to set up on a late-Sunday morning—lots of foot traffic as students wandered between dorms, cafeteria and the gym. But, I wonder if a weekday visit would have drawn more people... there would be more students wandering around, to be sure, but most would have been rushing to their next classes, so it may or may not have translated into a bigger draw.

The only certain advantage to a weekday visit would have been putting together an on-campus panel discussion of some sort. But again, that does not necessarily guarantee more BUS-eum visitors. As it was Sunday, we may have drawn more folks in for a spontaneous visit with signs on the nearby main streets to lure people from the community onto campus.

Finally, if I were to do it all over again, I would have re-doubled my publicity efforts and tried to do something more than sending out press releases to the local media and hanging posters. After all, it's an effort to get people interested in history under the best of circumstances and the subject of this particular BUS-eum tour was powerful enough to frighten away the more timid newspaper and radio news editors.

Monday, 24 April 2006: Having driven stunning back roads along the Black River, all the way from LaCrosse to Black River Falls, I pulled over just west of Melrose and spent the rest of Sunday afternoon doing what normally I have no time to do: read, rest, sort out paperwork, clean the BUS... I parked Sunday night on a gravel road just out of town—and felt spooked the entire night; I'm not sure why...

Black River Falls: 100

The Black River Correctional Center is a boot-camp-styled minimum-security prison. I found being there both interesting and odd. The young men seemed particularly interested in the stories of internment—likely because they know incarceration too well.

Black River Falls:40

Again this year, librarian Mary Lent coaxed local veterans groups to pay for and staff the BUS showing. Despite the modest showing, they already are planning to have the BUS return next year, for 1.5 days, to visit three local school districts... GREAT!

Mary Lent <m.lent@wrlsweb.org> of Black River Falls Public Library wrote:

The people I have talked to who saw the exhibit were quite surprised that this took place in our country. They pretty much knew that German prisoners of war were in the area in World War II but they were not aware of the internment of German-American civilians, or that the internment of some lasted for two years after the war. It was a good learning tool.

You know I was disappointed in the turn out but I have turned it into a positive thing. If the veterans had not sponsored your visit and you had not come, the newspaper would not have a big spread on the subject in this week's paper. I will send you a copy of the article. I think this follow-up story will reach many people who did not come to the exhibit and therefore enlighten them on the subject. When I think about it perhaps a very detailed article of the exhibit after the exhibit would reach more people than actually came to the exhibit. I can put a positive spin on most things I guess. You came and people learned.

Mary

Marshfield: 57 + 25 (for the program)

Last year, the showing at Marshfield was one of the best attended, as well as one of the most enjoyable for me, for Mary Adler and her delightful boss/buddy Lori Belongia did everything conceivable to make for a successful and “painless” showing. This year they were as attentive and helpful as last—and the program in the library meeting room seemed as well received, albeit more thinly attended. It was their great efforts that made this year’s lower numbers of visitors that much more disappointing...

Mary Adler <madler@marshfieldlibrary.org> of Marshfield Public Library wrote:

We had almost all very positive remarks about the Buseum-2 visit. A few people “missed the bus” because of the time on the TRACES website listing the later Tuesday time slot, rather than starting at 9 a.m. as you so kindly did for us. One lady called later to say we were making America look bad and she didn’t think it was right. But, again we did receive very positive feedback on the whole.

*Thanks,
MA*

Tuesday, 25 April 2006: Thanks to Mary and Lori, the room at the AmericInn afforded me a restful, restorative sleep. The wind, rain and chill of the previous night, however, had shifted to “only” a cloudy chill. Still, the warm reception on the part of the staff compensated the naughty weather. Because Mary so selflessly covered for me, I was able to go for a sorely needed back treatment (pun only slightly intended); the healing touched helped a lot!

Marshfield: 56

Oddly, the number of people peaked at almost an identical number to the previous evening’s showing. Nonetheless, as I left for the next showing, Lori already was plotting how to lure in more school classes and others for “next time”. Her faith in the value of the exhibit and the importance of popularizing this topic gratified me deeply.

Plover: 108

From the gourmet cream-of-chicken-and-wild-rice soup (thanks to her husband’s skill in cooking) she so generously provided for dinner to the overnight electrical access she made available to keep my mini-heater churnin’ through the frosty night, Darla Engwall was a peach to work with. She reported many positive visitors’ comments.

Darla Engwall <Darla.Engwall@uwsp.edu> of Plover Public Library wrote:

Actually, I thought it all went well. I was very pleased with the turnout, even if the local newspaper and TV stations were not as cooperative as I would like them to be. I got a lot of positive feedback from those who attended, and had a few people show up the next day wanting to see it.

If I could change anything, I would probably book a longer time slot so the schools could take advantage of it. And it would have been nice if we could have had a better parking space. All things considered however, I was very pleased with everything.

Thanks again!

Darla Engwall

Wednesday, 26 April 2006: Having left Saint Paul a day shy of a month ago, by today I simply was wearing out. A remedy? I “hid away” all day atop Wausau’s Rib Mountain, armed with a GREAT book (“The Invitation” by Canadian writer Oriah Mountain Dreamer), my worn journal,

some trail mix and water. It was so helpful to not speak with anyone until the day's end, and to connect with my Self. Although most folks mistakenly read me for an extrovert, I'm actually quite shy and reserved, and I long for Michael Time whenever I can steal it. As I watched vultures and hawks take turns riding thermals up and over the slopes of Rib Mountain, and as I looked out meditatively, over the stunning view, my soul recharged.

Merrill: 58

Stacy Stevens had all parts of the Merrill showing meticulously organized, and we all enjoyed the results! She hoped for 30 visitors, she claimed, so having nearly double that warmed all our hearts. Again, as I left, Stacy, her director and I plotted how to get the nearby middle-school teachers and students involved in a day-time showing in '07.

Monday, 1 May 2006: After a four-day weekend in which I drove to Iowa to see my parents and my ex, do some business, see my partner in the Cities and take in too many cultural or social events with friends (seeing "United 93" and attending a retirement party, etc.), I was basically ready to resume the tour, although eager for its end. Despite a fourth day of rain, meandering across the Northern Wisconsin countryside provided its own joy.

Colfax: 97

Lisa Ludwig was a pleasure to work with, especially as she had arranged for a local teacher to bring 65 middle- and high-school students to see the NBC "Dateline" video and tour the museum in the BUS. The townspeople who came also seemed engaged.

Menomonie: 87

Parked near that beautiful, unique, lakeshore-hugging library, the BUS attracted a lot of interested people, some of whom stayed for the panel discussion at the end of the exhibit's showing. I welcomed the gifted motel room, as by now I really am ragged.

Tuesday, 2 May 2006: The four days' rainfall had stopped, it had turned warmer and the sun actually shined. Purposely plying back roads, I absolutely delighted in the stunning countryside, driving from Menomonie to Chippewa Falls. And, how can't enjoy being in this cute town!

Chippewa Falls: 172

I appreciated Rosemary Kilbridge's reoccurring "spotting" me, so I could go find food and innocent-yet-restorative diversions throughout the eight-hour "Falls" showing.

Wednesday, 3 May 2006: I'm glad to drove to Barron to camp overnight following the Chippewa Falls showing, as the Rice Lake High School social studies program head spontaneously "signed up" for a two-hour showing the day before. Such "organic" interest in and showings of this exhibit are gratifying and exactly what we hope to see.

Rice Lake: 137 + 61

Based on a "tip" from a Friends of the Library member (the folks who sponsored the public mid-day showing of the BUS, the Rice Lake High School showed "VANISHED" to 137 of their students and staff. The library showing itself was less than last years, but as I explained to director Carla Powers, there are advantages and disadvantages to both mid-day and evening BUS showings: senior citizens (normally keenly interested in WWII history) are loathe to drive at night to see an evening showing, so come out in larger number for mid-day showings. "Working people" on the other hand find it nary impossible to get away over their lunch breaks, so prefer evening showings. School kids can come mid-day (as they did in Rice Lake) for extra credit, given by their teachers, or formally, as class outings; at night, though, they can come with their parents, which proves to be a "family-building" experience. So, neither a mid-day nor an evening showing will draw all possible groups of visitors. Also: a "thin" showing is effective and worthwhile, even if at first, on the surface, it appears not to be. Local newspaper and radio coverage let the public, as well as library board members and Friends, know that adult-programming work IS happening at the local library. Also, all of the visitors who did view the

exhibit will talk about it to their friends and colleagues and families... And, as Carla pointed out, hundreds if not thousands of people (depending where the **BUS** is parked at a given showing) SEE the **BUS** and know that “something is going on”—so NO showing is ever “wasted” or in vain.

Gilman: 66

Lori Cooley and her husband (who she provided me, as host, for the duration of the showing) went “the extra mile” to publicize this event—and their efforts to hang bright posters around town, appear on a Public Television news feature, contact all the local groups they could think of, etc. paid off, as about 15% of the town’s population toured the exhibit! (The only glitch was: we had a misunderstanding about the actual showing times, which caused a bit of confusion—but apparently all but one Early Comer returned. We were hard to miss, as Lori had the **BUS** parked at a major convenience shop on Main Street!) I was grateful to leave 15 minutes earlier than scheduled...

Thursday, 4 May 2006: ...as I drove over 90 minutes through the dusk-darkened woods of Northern Wisconsin to get to the Merrill Public Library, where a week ago staff had offered me a place to park overnight, with electrical hook-up, so I could be nearby for an 8AM mechanic-shop visit this morning. One hour and \$58 later, the **BUS** was fine. I was relieved, to have *not* added a deer’s impression to the grill, Wed. PM.

Antigo: 111

By this point in the tour, I much appreciated Cynthia Taylor’s warm, welcoming humor and our pleasant repartee. So bolstered, I even “shoo-ed” her away, to run home, dash into her house and bolt her door before “the young bear” returneth for another night of marauding and generally terrorizing our poor-but-dear library director... Seriously, both she and I were amazed by the strong showing, much helped by the front-page article about the coming **BUS** showing, and by a teacher who had kids come for extra credit.

Saturday, 6 May 2006: What a joy to be back in Marinette, this pleasant, interesting town!

Marinette: 46

Host Pat Kosuth was pleased by the turnout, as she was “hopeful to get 30”; she appreciated that the **BUS** will have many more “ripples” than just the showing. She liked the exhibit, and heard many positive, engaged comments from its viewers.

Monday, 8 May 2006: I’m not used to “days off” so enjoyed this one quite a bit, even though the sunny, cloudless morning later gave way to a downpour as I drove through the woods of Northern Wisconsin. I made an impromptu decision to overnight in Rhinelander, as the Best Western where the library there quartered me last year was so enjoyable. I did stop at the “Wisconsin Library of the Year—2005” to show the two Chrises what we would like to show at their library next year... It seemed to be a possibility...

Tuesday, 9 May 2006: Another day of rain, plus a broken shock absorber or broken spring. In any event, the **BUS** is now sagging to the right, and looking exceptionally sad and dejected... The breakdown made me 30 minutes late...

Washburn: 51

...but Gina and Darrell at the Washburn Public Library graciously went with the flow, and both seemed exceptionally pleased with the good turnout. I was pleasantly surprised to see Susan and Fritz Franzen, old friends from my incarnation in Iowa. A board member from Wisconsin Humanities Council also toured the **BUS**, which was great. He, too, seemed pleased, with both the relatively high turnout and the exhibit.

Wednesday, 10 May 2006: Having pulled over to a roadside spot north of Hayward last night and sat out torrential downpours, I awoke to a quieter, somewhat dryer world. By the time I was north of Cumberland, the weather turned and the sun actually broke through the clouds.

New Richmond: 57

The library staff was friendly and flexible. I enjoyed the showing, and appreciated the warm reception, given that the tour's nearly at an end and I'm, well, utterly spent.

New Richmond: 125

As an educator, it warmed my heart to see how receptive to and genuinely interested in the exhibit the inmates seemed, for the most part. Admittedly an unusual audience for such a project, taking "VANISHED" to correctional centers reaches a segment of our society that also is enriched by knowing about such histories. I look forward to visiting such sites in the future, too.

Donna Stelter <Donna.Stelter@doc.state.wi.us> of the Wisconsin Department of Corrections wrote:

I have taken some time to talk with inmates and staff since your visit. Many had wished that they had had more time to view the items. So, the next time we will schedule for a little longer visit. Many commented that they learned a lot and were very pleased with the project overall. What will be the topic for next year? Thanks for coming. It was very informative.
Sincerely, Donna Stelter

Thursday, 11 May 2006: As the last day of the 2006 Wisconsin **BUS-eum 2** tour, I felt mixed emotions: on one hand, I was glad to be concluding this marathon, statewide showing. At the same time, I end it, knowing that (including River Falls) 5,135 Wisconsinites went through the **BUS**, and that hundreds of thousands read about it in the four articles/editorial in the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, the *Capital Times* and *Wisconsin State Journal*, or in local newspapers, as well as heard reports on various radio or TV stations across the state. Response to the exhibit has been almost exclusively positive and enthusiastic: most people recognize the topic's timeliness.

River Falls: 63 + 30

The noon-hour brown-bag discussion went well, with strong attendance (and excellent chicken-rice soup!) and thought-facilitating exchanges between those present. The librarians had arranged for Mike, a frequent library volunteer, to "BUS-sit"—a welcome respite from my constantly being in the **BUS**.

Hudson: 84

Linda Donaldson was among the first of the tour's hosts to sign up, and, ironically, the last to have the **BUS** show at her library. Linda and her staff were warm-hearted and attentive—even bringing me bedding for the unusually cold night (with a low predicted in the mid-30s!).

—END—