Making History “Real”—and Relevant: A New Exhibit Traverses the American Heartland, “Driven” by TRACES Center for History and Culture

A stained KKK robe and hood from Ocheyedan, a German-language baptism certificate from Sibley, a woman’s white-linen dress from 1919, a farm-auction bill from the Dirty ‘30s: What stories do they tell?

For starters, all of them have a spot in our all-new traveling exhibit “Hidden or Forbidden No More: Prequels to the ‘Greatest Generation’,” housed in specially-retrofitted school bus. It, in turn, explores five social movements or national moments that indelibly influenced the world of those who later experienced “Bust, Bang and Boom”—the Great Depression, World War II, postwar affluence.... even a moon landing.

The stories the cited objects—along with countless more, carefully integrated into the larger exhibit narrative, either in 3-D or exhibit-panel-illustration form—evoke an era, in a patinaed environment where “BUS-eum” visitors literally can step into another world, hearkening another time, space and mindset.

It is the finely-honed exhibit narrative, however, that weaves all the objects and “flat” documentation into a pithy, captivating, convincing storyline that brings past events and characters back to life, but always with an eye to universal aspects of the human experience: love and hate, courage and cowardice, health and malady, peace and war, success and failure, triumph and disaster, hope and despair. In the process, visitors view our contemporary world through a mirror that seems both distant and immediate, abstract and personal. In particular, the panels tap diary entries, letters, newspaper articles, artwork and other personal effects of individuals long gone, yet whose haunting words move us still, even today.

With first-person accounts of social issues of lasting relevance, presented against colorful backdrops, this compilation of unique artifacts and evocative props is housed under the bowed roof of a recycled school bus—an everyday, clunky space transformed into a hybrid, uniquely rememberable public forum. While the front half of the BUS features panels, vitrines and antiquated furnishings, the back half forms a “Mini-Auditorium” that can seat an entire school class at a time—just as well as it can host lively, engaging public discussions arising from presentations by guest speakers, a four-hour loop of TRACES-made videos or the BUS’ accompanying curator Dr. Michael Luick-Thrams, docent Veronica Guyader or a roster of others.

It is exactly this “moveable classroom” that facilitates such enriching discovery and dialog—and which involves issues just as or perhaps even more relevant today as they were some century ago: racism vs tolerance of diversity, both popular and governmental response to catastrophic natural or financial disasters, questions of individual responsibility in the face of collective failure to follow moral codes. The five sub-foci of the overall exhibit and multi-media presentations present case studies obscured by time:

— anti-German hysteria of WWI
— the flu pandemic of 1918-19
— Prohibition-era bootlegging in the American Heartland
— the “Second Wave” of the Ku Klux Klan in the Midwest of the 1920s
— farmer rebellions during the Great Depression

As a unifying focus, this exhibit and the related programming that takes place—in various forms and led by a variety of individuals or groups—focuses on a generation that assumed mythic proportions late in its existence and continues to provide an implied standard for all subsequent generations to meet. And yet,
ultimately, “Hidden or Forbidden” is not really about “them” but about all of us, their descendants. By putting them on the couch or under a critical social microscope, we actually are questioning long-standing narratives about ourselves, about what we have been led to believe and continue, nay choose to believe about ourselves as individuals, as well as the society of which all of us as parts comprise a complex, ever-changing yet continually-connected sum. As confronting such dynamics while focused on contemporary issues (think “build the wall” or, a bit further back, a disastrous war against Iraq, a country that never had deadly “yellow cake”) would be too controversial and contentious to be effective, this exhibit “borrows” historical case studies that, while stimulating to revisit and contemplate, lack visceral societal dynamite.

There is a kind of emotional safety value built into the historical distance that modern observers enjoy from then-hot social issues au courant circa 1914 to 1939. Thus, TRACES’ staff, interns, volunteers and guests can, indeed, assist communities to have difficult conversations about real issues—often with local ties. To cite a few examples: Algona, Davenport and Osage were just three of numerous communities that burnt German-language books and sheet music during World War I; Lincoln, Iowa, was once named “Berlin” and Lakota was founded as “Germania”—and were renamed around the same time that Iowa’s governor forbade the speaking of “foreign” languages in public. Long forgotten, the 1918 flu pandemic severed Decorah, Grinnell and Mount Vernon from their respective college populations for days, even weeks; some 7,500 Iowans perished in just a month or so while state and local governments flayed about in vain, trying to stop a spreading plague. A few years later, Greenfield, Marshalltown and Newton held Klan rallies or offered “gate discounts” on “KKK Days” at their county fairs; Sheldon was the site of annual summer Klan conventions and, from atop nearby Ocheyedan Mound, the Klan alternately burned crosses at night and held “Easter Sunday sunrise services,” such as on 20 April 1924. Templeton was but the most visible of rural-Midwest communities that dabbled in lawlessness as local farmers fought to survive by distilling “corn into hooch;” some of those same farmers, later on, nearly hung judge C.C. Bradley of Le Mars for refusing to stop forced foreclosure auctions, while fake-news radio entrepreneur Norman Baker of Muscatine got Tipton-area farmers so hopped up, that they waged a “Cow War” against local lawmen: Iowa’s governor decreed martial rule in both cases—yet who alive today speaks of, let alone knows about such dramatic events? How could such drastic moments have been so fully erased from collective memory? What have we lost as individuals and as a people in the stubborn taboo-ization of that legacy?

By gently yet clearly and consistently dragging such “hidden or forbidden” historical ghosts into the light of day, the TRACES Center for History and Culture constitutes a real force for healing—and in this, its most extensive and finely-crafted exhibit yet, it incorporates the power of real objects while utilizing the technological, audience-building tools uniquely available to it. In this way, the “Little Museum That Could” is both modern in its methods yet authentic in its production values as well as overall impact.

Regarding a “real truth of history,” TRACES projects continue—as they always have—to focus on distilling the “right” questions rather than pretending to offer the “right” answers. Instead of sowing ideology, it skillfully harvests for examination a diversity of stories in the communities the BUS-eum visits. Because its ultimate work, as a social-history-based public-service organization, involves "truth-telling," TRACES is ever-vigilant to remain true to a wholistic, inclusive approach to “truth-seeking” in all aspects of its exhibits and programming. This, we have done since 2001 and intend to do into the foreseeable future.

Thus, we are pleased to propose four distinct and separate-yet-complementary forms of programming:
Program One:

1. “Bringing History to Life: How First-Person Perspectives Transform Third-Person Processes”
   This presentation elucidates how looking, together, “through a distant mirror” (Barbara Tuchman) can shed light on contemporary social issues and problems, facilitating shifts in awareness and attitudes. Dr. Luick-Thrams will outline how this project got started, how it took shape and its current/future reach.

2. Presenter is Dr. Michael Luick-Thrams, Executive Director of the TRACES Center for History and Culture, based in Mason City and Erfurt, Germany

3. His head shot and biography:

   Having grown up on a Century Farm in Northcentral Iowa, Dr. Luick-Thrams has history degrees from Iowa State (bachelors, 1985), Goddard College (masters, 1991) and Humboldt Universität (Ph.D., 1997). He lives part of each year in Thüringen (where he is a part-time professor at Erfurt Universität), and much of the rest in the American Heartland. The author or editor of sixteen books, he most recently completed a genealogically-based, three-volume social history of the Midwest (*Oceans of Darkness, Oceans of Light*) and *Turkeyfoot: What is Our BIG Problem*, about his 2016 US-Senate campaign in Iowa. Once the steward of a bricks-and-mortar history museum in St. Paul’s Landmark Center, he now directs two non-profit social-history-based educational organizations, TRACES Center for History and Culture in the Midwest and Spuren in Erfurt, Germany. He enjoys the support of motivated and enriching interns, volunteers and staff.

4. Dr. Luick-Thrams will present his ideas, then elicit reflective responses and facilitate group discussion in any form that fits the conference’s needs, be they as a speaker, presenter, facilitator, tour guide, etc.

Program Two:

1. “Strolling through a Time Tunnel: A Guided Tour of the BUS-eum’s Realia and Fantasia”
   This guided tour examines how the TRACES’ team has used both realia and imagination to create a coherent-yet-diverse space where narrative history comes alive in 3-D as well as multi-media forms. Ms Guyader will emphasize the BUS’ goals, uses and limits, citing real examples, with an in-BUS discussion.
2. Presenter is Veronica Guyader, Communications Coordinator for the TRACES Center for History and Culture

3. Her head shot and biography:

Hailing from Wright County, Iowa, Ms Guyader completed Spanish Cultural, Historical and Literature studies at Universitas Castellae, Valladolid, Spain (1999); she graduated from Iowa State University with a degree in Spanish Civilizations and Cultures, and Cultural Anthropology (B.A., 2005), then continued her education at ISU in Community Development, Rural Sociology, and Socio-Cultural Anthropology (2006-2009). A museum enthusiast since a very young age, Ms Guyader has been involved with various museums in Northcentral and Northwest Iowa since 2000, bringing with her skills of piecing together historical narratives, designing and creating displays and exhibits, research and management. Past involvements include: Board member of the Fort Dodge Historical Foundation, Executive Director of the Fort Museum and Frontier Village; presently, in addition to her work at TRACES: Advisory Historical Committee member-Webster City’s Wilson Brewer Park, Historic Park and Museums; cultural and museum consultant for the Swedish Foundation of Iowa’s Swede Bend Settlement-Stratford; she’s Executive Director of the George Reeves Memorial. Her current research is in British colonial maritime history, and mid–1800s frontier life.

4. Session format: Ms Guyader will give a guided tour of the BUS-eum’s displays and video narratives, explain purpose, and encourage discussion with participants concerning their initial thoughts and feelings as they learn REAL “Hidden and Forbidden” histories coming from Midwestern communities, share some of the REAL stories coming from this season’s visitors to the BUS-eum, and lastly, the impact this project has. Feedback—both positive and critical—as well as hearing participants’ experiences will be encouraged.
Program Three:

1. “Strolling through Lush Meadows and Land Mines: The Potentials and Pitfalls of First-Person History”
This presentation outlines how TRACES’ team has both tapped the excitement of narrative social history, and confronted or avoided the shadow sides of using “real” historical materials or figures in its work.

2. Presenter is Kristine Zylstra-Tabke, Operations Coordinator for the TRACES Center for History and Culture

3. Her head shot and biography:

Kristine grew up on a farm near Sibley, Iowa, and has a degree in K-12 Music Education from Northwestern College in Orange City. She currently resides in Marcus, Iowa, and most recently taught 5-8 and K-6 Vocal Music in Cherokee for 14 years. In December of 2019, she met Dr Luick-Thrams at a gathering in Decorah, and fell in love with his project. She began working with him in January as the Operations Coordinator. She loves seeing the educational/cultural/historical impact the stories the BUS-eum exhibit has on people.

4. Session format: Kristine will share her experiences—including the ups and downs—of being new to the museum world. What is it like pitching a new exhibit to institutions with many pertinent and real connections to what is happening in our world today—for ex., parallels between the 1918 flu pandemic and today’s corona virus: What can we learn from the past? The session will be highly interactive.
Program Four:

1. “Denial or Diminishment: My Experiences While Out Piercing Bubbles Shielding Uncomfortable Truths”
   This presentation begins with a retelling of actual encounters as a guest speaker in Northwest Iowa schools or other places—and audience members’ responses, ranging from disbelief to merriment to confession about that 4-state region’s likely [tens of?] thousands of KKK members during the 1920s.

2. Presenter is Robyn Wilson, Volunteer Presenter and in-BUS Docent for the TRACES Center for History and Culture

3. Her head shot and biography:

The below KKK hood and robe, from Robyn, hang in the BUS-eum as provocative-but-cathartic artifacts.

Robyn was born and raised on a farm near a Round Lake in Southwest Minnesota. She graduated from the University of Minnesota, with a degree in Agriculture Education. Her employed life consisted of the teaching of agriculture, serving as an elected official and a program planner for the Iowa Department of Human Services. She lives in Lake Park, Iowa. She has been retired for six years and does some substitute teaching. Robyn became involved with TRACES’ BUS-eum when she offered to share KKK memorabilia.

4. Session format: Robyn will present the KKK artifacts, discuss where they came from and people’s reactions to them. She will share information from her continuing research on the subject and what it all means to her. There will be time for audience members’ questions as well as experiences or opinions.
Samples of Our Documenting “Hidden or Forbidden” Sub-chapters of Midwest Social History:

The caption to the above Ocheyedan Press-Melvin News speaks volumes; the below photos betray more:

Three of five TRACES-made, narrated and animated PP presentations continually shown in the BUS:

Part I of “The Killer: The 1918 Pandemic” is viewable by clicking on the below link
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8bWeJKJVWE&feature=youtu.be and Part II at this one:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnX_I7OiBPE&feature=youtu.be ; “America’s White Cancer: The Second Wave of the KKK” is at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qJpaWchSjC&feature=youtu.be
The below iconic “Greatest Gen” image comprises half of the external intro panel—and is a starting point for discussion, as the factual contexts behind it bring the vast mythos around it into question.

Audubon-native Bryce Bauer’s (right) book is not only featured on it, but he plans to speak in the BUS.
Some Scenes of the BUS-eum from “Before” and “After” Retrofitting:

To access the exhibit’s catalog, click on the below link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/167YD6kgTowK40APL3dn-hf9OeTZ4AAP/view?usp=sharing
Hidden or Forbidden No More:

Prequels to the “Greatest Generation,” 1914-39

Exhibit Summary

They witnessed the First World War—and fought the Second. In between, they endured a depression longer and more severe than America has ever experienced, before or since. Together, they built a New Deal that touched every aspect of American life. Then, after WWII—during the country’s most extended, game-changing economic boom—they raised an exceptional generation of children, even as they landed the “Eagle” on the moon. And, they forged a postwar world order that ushered in globalization and untold prosperity for millions.

Those shining achievements, however, have long blended out shadowy national moments and events preceding WWII. Some fundamental experiences that indelibly shaped that legendary generation included:

This panel refers to all five sub-stories of Hidden or Forbidden No More: Prequels to the “Greatest Generation” as the exhibit’s logo.
Project Summary

The core of this project consists of the BUS-eum, a mobile museum housed in a retrofitted school bus that brings history to life for audiences at libraries, schools, museums, colleges, civic groups, etc. working in concert with volunteers to host a series of related programs that explore social history, with implications for today. Audiences served are evenly distributed: urban and rural, young and elderly, as well as multi-ethnic. Besides popularizing stories facing extinction, these five case studies offer a rich resource to those across the nation who seek to build and sustain civic-minded, critically-thinking and caring communities.

From February to November 2020, TRACES Center for History and Culture will tour the American Heartland, then the Northeast of the United States, with a five-part exhibit-based program: The Kaiser, the Killer, Whiskey Cookers, the Klan and Cow Wars: Reactionary Movements in America’s Heartland, 1914-39. Its dovetailing topics explore milestones in American social history:

1) “Kickin’ the Kaiser: Anti-German Hysteria in the American Heartland during World War I” explores among others
   - the vast size and extensive scope of the pre-war German-American community in the Midwest (40-80% in places)
   - historical tensions between Anglo (i.e., East and later West Coast) elites and “those Krauts out on the prairies”
   - the “flip” that occurred in April 1917 when the US entered the war; anti-German sentiment became “salonfähig” (German for “socially acceptable”) and exploded overnight with, for some, literally deadly consequences
   - the US government’s efforts to thwart German-American power, influence and institutions on the home front; and
   - the hidden connections between wartime anti-German sentiment and subsequent enactment of Prohibition in 1920

2) “The Killer: 1918’s Flu Pandemic” outlines
   - suspected and documented origins of that disaster, as well as charts and maps of infection’s rates, routes and tolls
   - articles, photos and other print-media documentation of the disease and its vast impact; a short related film; and
   - Americans’ response to it, both measured & hysterical, effective & useless: “How would we respond today...?”

3) “Whiskey Cookers: ‘Gentlemen Bootleggers’ on the Prairie” documents
   - the unlikely, clandestine Prohibition-era whisky cottage industry spread throughout the German-American village of Templeton, Iowa. It arose, in part, from the economic hardships of the era and ultimately drew the ire of the KKK.

4) “The Klan: America’s White Cancer” presents
   - Back Stories behind the three waves of America’s terroristic hydra, with emphasis on the Second Wave, which in the 1920s stormed the American Heartland but was less anti-African American than rabidly anti-Catholic and -immigrant; mostly-white Iowa had a surprisingly high rate of Klan membership, yet later it was all but erased from public memory.

5) “Cow Wars: Farmer Rebellions in America’s Heartland during the Great Depression” illustrates (with photos, documents, maps, realia) related yet differing agrarian rebellions during the early years of the Great Depression that mirrored rural folks’ desperate attempts to survive, for example:
   - the “Farmers Holiday Association,” which strove to forcibly increase farm-commodities prices through blockades
   - the “Cow War,” when Iowa dairy farmers violently stopped Federal agents from TB-testing their herds; and
- loosely-organized “Penny Auctions,” which tried to keep bankrupt farmers on their farms through collective action

A much-experienced docent, Iowa-born historian Michael Luick-Thrams (Ph.D., Humboldt Universität in Berlin, 1997), narrates these interrelated presentations, which conclude with small- and/or large-group discussions; they also can be presented as part of other events, workshops and community forums or festivals to participants ranging in age from [junior or senior] high schoolers to senior citizens, as:

To truly learn from past lessons, such significant stories must have space in popular memory; both seniors and parents, though, lament what they decry as a failure to transfer a sense of history—our cultural legacy—to younger citizens. Separately but even more so as a complementary set, these programs combat collective forgetfulness: They are a vivid warning of what can happen when civil culture fails to protect individual rights, maintain social cohesion and solve shared ills.

While the failure to transfer social awareness stunts young people’s later job skills and hobbles their economic performance, the failure to transfer cultural information erodes their social skills and discourages their civic involvement. This program develops cultural competency, which in turn informs how we behave as individuals, live together and govern ourselves. To grow and change, we have to know who we’ve been.

Source of the photos, Penny Morse wrote “burning German books in [May] 1918 in front of Cedar Valley Seminary” in Osage, Iowa.

**Project Background**

1. **Organizational Information — Mission, History, Activities, Populations Served, Future Plans and Partners:**

**TRACES** Center for History and Culture sees history as encounters among various ways of living, which transcend borders or eras. We invite people to converse about their history and origins, and the history of their regions or nations as well as their families’ roles in that history. As we tell stories, we experience history. And, in so far as we live our own stories authentically, we shape history. Out of this awareness arises a responsibility to shape our world justly and peaceably. Committed to universality and accessibility by all, **TRACES** does not espouse partisan politics or prescribed ideology; racism or violence has no home here.
Volunteers founded TRACES ([www.TRACES.org](http://www.TRACES.org)) in 2001. We built a diverse project out of old letters, photos, dusty journals, yellowed articles, art or other artifacts, and hundreds of recorded interviews. We preserved, then popularized the last “traces” of encounters between Germans and Midwesterners from 1933 and up until 1948. We showed in concrete ways how war affects people on both sides of a conflict.

Out of that material, we first created an extensive web site, then multi-media exhibits. Except for celebrities with connections to Iowa such as Anne Frank and the von Trapp Family Singers, we sought obscure biographies. We showcased, for example, the impressions of Iowa’s 1936 Olympic team, who in Berlin witnessed Nazism up-close. We exposed Midwesterners who at least initially favored the Nazi project: Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh and others. We quoted an Iowa graduate student who was studying in Berlin when Hitler took power: Clear-Lake-native Harold Vedeler watched the torch-light processions and, later, observed the Nürnberg Trials as an agent of the U.S. occupational forces. We interviewed over 100 POWs: Germans who’d been held in the Midwest and Midwesterners held in Nazi Germany.

Granted IRS 501(c)(3) status two days after “9/11” 2001, TRACES built upon academic research, documentation and interpretation undertaken by Iowa-born, Ph.D.-historian, Dr. Michael Luick-Thrams. Its WWII-focused projects reflected the times—for one, issues related to war: human rights, propaganda, censorship, incarceration (refugees, POWs, civilian internees), due process, as well as other moral issues.

TRACES has proven singularly successful in reaching its goals. We made a rich and precious legacy accessible to people in all corners of the Midwest—over 4,000 communities in 12 states: all combined, more than a third of a million people. We published 15 books, read by tens of thousands; similar numbers utilized our web site. The overall project reflects TRACES’ enduring mission as embodied in its logo “We bring history to life,” in that we make history relevant to all audiences—from students to educators, from youth to seniors, hobby historians to academics, professionals to laborers, and from farmers to corporate executives. Particularly gratifying, veterans from both sides of WWII have been able to understand their fading experiences anew, as have one-time refugees and internees; the widows and descendants of such imprisoned players of that war, as well as countless others, have expressed deep gratitude for what we manage to do, on little money and mostly interns or volunteers.

Now that the generation that lived WWII is mostly gone, however, TRACES is shifting its focus from preserving “traces” of World War II to issues of civic life: What have been our strengths and weaknesses over time as communities; what resources do we possess at present; what futures are open to us—solo and as a society—as we face numerous trials and grope our way forward? In response to current shared challenges, TRACES focuses on issues of family history juxtaposed to that of communities as a fulcrum for conscious social change. Thus, TRACES’ newest project, The Kaiser, the Killer, Whisky Cookers, the Klan and Cow Wars, considers the lessons of the past as it ponders potentials for the future. As we revive and publicize mostly-forgotten stories from and about America’s Heartland, the Midwest, we find keys to better understanding who we are, how we became who we are, and who we might yet become as families, as communities, and as a people—as Midwesterners, as Americans and as global citizens. This is now TRACES’ sole mission.
preparing a Ku Klux Klan parade in Mason City, Iowa—mid 1920s; article about a funeral procession in the same town, same era

To craft such a comprehensive, ambitious project, TRACES has launched networked collaboration with would-be partners, including: the state genealogical societies, statewide AARPs, retired school personnel associations, local Lifelong-Learning institutes, plus local hosts; see our website for fuller lists. We also partner with local historical and genealogical societies, community libraries and area museums.

2. Project Description — Needs or Problems It Addresses, Activities Planned, Project Timeline + Key Staff:

TRACES’ newest project, The Kaiser, the Killer, Whiskey Cookers, the Klan and Cow Wars, offers host communities unique programming that is a starting point for grassroots discussion, supported by a mix of interactive activities, and local engagement: e.g., senior citizens are encouraged to speak in the BUS or hosts’ buildings after a program; evening public forums can conclude a community’s program experience; follow-up offerings assure lasting impact after the speaker departs—as do social media, on-line teaching materials available to educators, and related books. It strengthens civic culture, accentuates lasting community connections and reinforces regional identity. Knowledge of the past sheds insight about the present and imparts wisdom for the future.

The pervasive goal guiding Kaiser/Killer/Whiskey Cookers/Klan/Cow Wars is that visitors leave it with a fuller, clearer sense of how our past cast the present, and how lessons learned from previous successes or mistakes might effectively inform future choices. Above all, that exploration starts with family and community histories, which are both implicit as well as explicit parts of these fading stories. It is our programming’s inquiring nature that has led the Humanities organizations in each of the twelve Midwest states plus in Texas, New Mexico, etc., to award underwriting grants to support presenting past series in their states; Humanities Iowa presented TRACES with its 2003 “Best Project” award.

Most people aren’t trained historians. Still, Americans care deeply about their families, friends and communities. By attending programs in this series, they take with them empowering tools—knowledge and resources to use as they form anchored opinions and well-founded stands in the future.
Johann Meints, a German-American farmer near Luverne/MN, tared and feathered in August 1918 for allegedly not buying “enough” Liberty bonds: He later took his assailants to court—and lost, as “treasonous.”

Children inspecting anti-German sign posted at an entry to the Chicago suburb of Edison Park/IL, after the US entered World War I in April 1917.
about the docent: Having grown up on his family’s Century Farm in Iowa, Michael Luick-Thrams (Ph.D. awarded by Humboldt Universität in Berlin, 1997: dissertation about WWII-era refugees accessible at: https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/handle/18452/15150) divides his time between Germany and the American Heartland, as he serves as executive director of a non-profit, educational organization in each country—Spuren e.V. (http://de.traces.org/vision-und-mission) & TRACES (www.TRACES.org); both provide social-history-based public programming to educational and cultural institutions of various kinds. He is most recently the author of Turkeyfoot: What is our BIG Problem, about his 2016 campaign for the US Senate; The Eagle’s Long Shadow: US Americans inside Nazi Germany; and a Midwest social history, Oceans of Darkness, Oceans of Light—a Pentalogy: Our Troubles and Treasures in the New World. (For details, see http://roots.traces.org/michael-luick-thrams or find the author’s complete works at www.amazon.com.) TRACES offers pre-visit activities for a program in a given community, as well as post-visit ones. We encourage hosts to offer follow-up public forums. TRACES’ social-media portals (Facebook, blog) provide a platform for those who wish additional contact. The exhibit is available in catalog form, since some prefer print media to electronic; through it, all ages can access its contents long after a program.

3. Project Evaluation — Expected Outcomes and Methods to Evaluate “Successful” Results:

For our organization, “success” looks like this: Visitors of all ages attend our programming, view our catalog, attend a related workshops or an intergenerational (typically, evening) community forum. “Success” includes the sale of narrative-history books by regional authors or by TRACES, about any of the numerous topics which we’ve previously featured (German or Midwest POWs in either country, refugees at Scattergood Hostel near Iowa City, Anne Frank’s Iowa pen pal, etc.). “Success” involves spontaneous as well as facilitated conversations between docents or community members; it includes follow-up exchange via social media or other forms. We will have been “successful” if after a given visit to a community, it’s obvious that a relatively large number of residents have considered the story of reaction-based social movements in the Midwest, and subsequent discussion to consider our state’s current issues. Ultimately, TRACES strives so that through the resources we offer them, the people we serve better understand who we are, how we became who we are, and who we might yet become as families, as communities, as a people... and as Americans.

photo: Western-Iowa farmers block other farmers’ taking goods to market in order to force commodities prices up
As TRACES has done after all past programming, we will review evaluation forms from program hosts and participants, received both during a given visit (submitted directly) and post-visit, emailed. We integrate all grading (we use a point system; we can provide evaluation-form templates for both hosts and participants) as well as consider all written-out comments. We invite participant feedback during an exhibit showing or program, as well as that from hosts at short “debriefing” sessions as we close a program or end a forum. We also have asked a professional historian, Matthew Schaefer of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum in West Branch (Iowa), to serve as an external evaluator. Other trained individuals will evaluate the effectiveness of both our physical resources (the Power Point presentations, videos, catalog, etc.) and intangible programming throughout. See you at the program!

Michael Luick-Thrams opening the exhibit “Behind Barbed Wire”, shown in spring 2015 at Universität Heidelberg’s Center for American Studies (HCA). He directs two educational organizations, TRACES Center for History and Culture in the Midwest (www.TRACES.org) and Spuren e.V. in Germany (http://de.traces.org/vision-und-mission)