Far From Hitler: the Scattergood Hostel for European Refugees, 1939-43

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In 1939 the American Friends Service Committee oversaw the creation of a hostel for refugees fleeing Nazi Germany at Scattergood, a vacant Quaker boarding school near West Branch. Before the facility closed in 1943, 186 European refugees passed through its doors on their way to building new lives in America. This brief work is the catalog for a traveling exhibit sponsored by the Iowa Jewish Historical Society. It is composed of a series of essays, most a single page long, each of which examines an aspect of the Scattergood story. These include the oppression that forced people to flee Europe, the troubles they had reaching America, the organization of the hostel, profiles of the staff and refugees who made up the community, facets of Scattergood life, the hostel’s closing, and Scattergood’s meaning for those who sojourned there. A page of illustrations from the exhibit accompanies nearly every essay. The work also includes lists of Scattergood refugees and staff.

Few of the publication’s nearly 200 illustrations—mostly photographs, with some documents, artwork, and small objects—have captions. The lack thereof often leaves the reader wondering who the people portrayed are, if they are the ones referred to in the accompanying essay, and sometimes what they are doing.


In this fascinating piece of Iowa history, Michael Luick-Thrams contends that enemy prisoners of war “underwent pivotal changes as individuals and as a group—thus fundamentally influencing postwar German values and institutions” (i). Through vivid primary documents, Luick-Thrams depicts the growth and transformation of Ger-