

Scattergood exhibit to be dedicated at Cedar County museum

Alma Gaul | Posted: Wednesday, April 8, 2009 6:05 pm



Sandy Harmel, coordinator of the Cedar County Historical Society Museum in Tipton, Iowa, stands in the doorway of a new exhibit donated by the now-closed Traces Museum in St. Paul, Minn. The display tells of the story of the 186 people — men, women and children — from nine European countries who were relocated to the former Scattergood school located a few miles from West Branch, Iowa, in an operation run by two Iowa Friends, or Quaker, congregations. The panels are mounted against a theater-like backdrop resembling the exterior of a house, with peeling clapboard siding, windows and a front door. More panels are mounted inside, where furniture is arranged to give the feel of the early 1940s. (Kevin E. Schmidt/QUAD-CITY TIMES)

TIPTON, Iowa — Sandy Harmel was working at the Cedar County Historical Society Museum in Tipton one day before Thanksgiving when the phone rang.

On the other end was a man she had never met, with a story she had never heard.

The caller was Michael Luick-Thrams, a 46-year-old Iowa native and Quaker who told her the amazing account of the Scattergood Hostel — just a few miles from Tipton — that had been a resettlement house for Europeans fleeing Hitler.

Luick-Thrams had learned of the Scattergood Hostel as a young man and dedicated years to researching it, tracking down as many of the refugees as he could.

He wrote a book titled “Out of

Hitler’s Reach” and created a display that was housed in a museum called the Traces Center for History and Culture, in St. Paul, Minn. The museum was closing, and Luick-Thrams was offering the exhibit to Cedar County. Consisting of 13 panels with text and photos and a few artifacts, the

exhibit is now set up in the Tipton museum, where it will be dedicated at 7 p.m. Wednesday with a program/slide show by Luick-Thrams.

“It’s important for this story to be told and retold,” Harmel said. “When Michael called, it was a shock. It was really hard for me to believe that such an event took place in our own front yard, and I had no clue that this ever happened.”

The panels are mounted against a backdrop that looks like the exterior of a house, with peeling clapboard siding, windows and a front door. More panels are mounted inside, where furniture is arranged to give the feel of a 1940s living room.

“It helps you travel back in time,” Harmel said.

There also are 16 framed photos from Scattergood guests and staff, and the artifacts include a pocket watch, two wooden bowls and several pieces of china. Photos show the guests sharing meals, scything grass, shucking corn, harvesting tomatoes and picnicking.

The Scattergood Hostel Video

