

Gripsholm Reunion & 75th Anniversary Commemoration of German-American Internment during WWII

Location: New York & New Jersey
Dates: February 14-15, 2019
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On February 15, 1944, the MS Gripsholm left New York harbor with 1,145 passengers of German descent, including children. The children were native-born Americans or Latin Americans, including 19 infants. Most passengers (over 850) had been abducted or coerced from Latin America. Some 1,000 had suffered internment in Texas. All belligerents had granted neutrality to this Mercy Ship, so the sole wartime danger in the Atlantic crossing were mines. Upon reaching Portugal, the Gripsholm's passengers were exchanged for Americans and Latin Americans held by Axis powers, including Jews captive in the Vittel camp, diplomats, and POWs. In war zones in Germany, "exchangees" suffered bombardment and deprivation.

New York/ New Jersey was the district with the highest detention rate of German American "Enemy Aliens" in the United States. This NY/NJ event is the third and last in our "Year of Remembrance," as we seek to win public and official recognition of German American Internment during WWII.

*Former WWII internees and their families invite the public
to join them at these free events.*

NY/NJ "Remembrance" Program (Overview)

Thursday, Feb. 14: "Reckoning"
Friday, Feb. 15: "Reunion"
Tuesday, Feb. 19: "Recognition"

NY/NJ Events (Overview)

Thursday, Feb. 14 (Manhattan & Ellis Island)—

10 am – noon: Pop-up exhibit and Internee Q&A: "Who Was on the Ship? Who was in the Camps?"
2-4 pm: Internment on Ellis Island—We Remember

Friday, Feb. 15 (Jersey City)—

2-4 pm: Mapping Internment onto New York
Mini-workshops to record testimonies, design historical markers, build model ship
"Gripsholm," extend interactive map, perform improv sketches of internment history
4-6 pm: **Gripsholm Reunion**

Tuesday, Feb. 19 (calls & letters to elected representatives in Washington)—

All-day Call for US government bill granting official recognition of all internees. February 19 is the official "Day of Remembrance" of WWII Internment, yet thus far only Japanese and Italian internment have been officially recognized. German Americans & others have not.

Event Details

Thursday:

Pop-up exhibit—

The surviving internees featured in our “Year of Remembrance” project invite all other former internees, their descendants, and all figures in this history to present their stories to the public and press on this 75th anniversary of the Gripsholm exchange voyage, Feb. 15, 1944.

Who else figured in this history?—Internees of other nationalities (Japanese and Italians were the most numerous); foreign diplomats charged with protecting internees; Jews, both those interned as “German Enemy Aliens” and those exchanged; the Red Cross, and other charities; U.S. officials (State Department, FBI, and INS); military and civilian authorities in charge of internment camps and detention sites; local residents living near the camps; families of MS Gripsholm crews and management (the last of the 1944 Gripsholm crew died in 2015); families of civilians & soldiers exchanged back to the United States on the Gripsholm, arriving in March 1944 (including General MacArthur’s nephew and Mary Berg).

The public will curate its own historical reckoning by circulating among the individual presenters, each stationed beside mini-exhibits of their memorabilia, photos, memoirs, and government documents. The exhibit concludes with a Q&A featuring presenters as panelists.

Ellis Island Internee commemoration—

- *Honor the memory of those interned on Ellis Island and record this history
- *Call for historical plaque and official recognition of Ellis Island as a major internment site
- *Read aloud the names of the men, women, and children who were interned on Ellis Island
- *Shower rose petals in the water—yellow for the children; white for the adults

Friday:

“Mapping Internment on New York”--

Mini-workshops offerings:

- Oral history interviews with former internees and their descendants
- Map-making: contribute to online Internment Map, “[Following Their Footsteps](#)”
- Model ship-building: children and visitors are invited to build a model of the Gripsholm.
- Letter-writing campaign and outreach to elected officials, media, and social media
- Design memorials and plaques to record this history in public spaces
- Teachers’ Resource workshop: design lesson-plans and identify resources for classrooms

Gripsholm Reunion--

- *List the Mercy Ship voyages and acknowledge the diverse players in this history
- *Read aloud the names of the passengers who boarded the MS Gripsholm February 15, 1944
- *Remove individual “Enemy Alien” tags and symbolically welcome home those expatriated
- *Shower rose petals in the water from Pier F—yellow for the children, white for the adults

Tuesday:

Letters and phone campaign from all over the US to elected officials and media calling for official recognition of German American internment on this official “Day of Remembrance.”