



WWII Hero Worked from 'Home'

Herman Stern: Businessman, Community and Civic Leader, and Holocaust Rescuer

In 1932, local Jewish immigrant Herman Stern, owner of Straus Clothing in Valley City, received a letter from his niece Klara, asking to bring her to America as she could not find work in Germany. Due to the Depression, Stern was not able to assist Klara at that time. But after Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor in 1933, conditions worsened for the Jewish people in Germany. With the help of North Dakota Senator Gerald Nye and Governor William Langer, Stern acquired a visa for Klara, and later for nephews, Erich and Julius. So began Stern's work to help families flee Germany and obtain citizenship of the United States.

Word quickly spread throughout friends and family of the Sterns in Germany, and visa requests poured in. The difficulty of obtaining visas during this time was immense. Herman had to personally vouch for every person he brought over, promising that they'd become productive citizens and would not rely on the states' funding for welfare. He also had to ensure employment and find sponsors to help bring them over. Stern called on business acquaintances throughout the Midwest to sponsor and co-sponsor a number of the immigration requests. These acquaintances ranged in location from North Dakota, Chicago,



N. Dakota's 'Schindler'

■ Stern Clothing owner aided more than 130 Jewish refugees during Holocaust

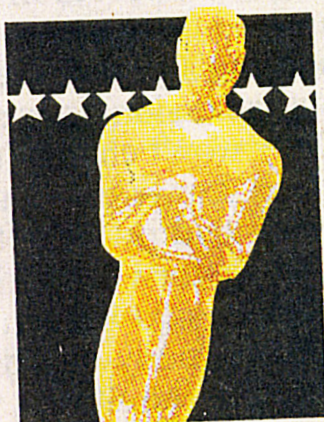
ON THE INSIDE

► Talk about your March madness? It's Oscarmania time again! See today's Arts & Entertainment cover.

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► "Schindler's List" opens in Grand Forks today. Movie review.

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Rescuers of Jews had similar traits

Oskar Schindler saved more than 1,200 Jewish lives during the Holocaust. But he was no saint. He drank too much, and he was unfaithful to his wife.

Yet he did have traits in common with others who chose to rescue Jews, says Nechama Tec, professor at the University of Connecticut at Stamford.

Tec interviewed 189 rescuers and 308 Jewish Holocaust survivors. Her findings are in her book, "When Light Pierced the Darkness" (Oxford University Press).

Tec says rescuers were diverse — men and women, rich and poor, educated and noneducated, old and young, religious and nonreligious. But:

■ Rescuers were outsiders or somehow set apart from their own community.

■ Most rescuers had a history of good deeds.

■ Rescuers viewed their deeds as nothing extraordinary. A typical response? We did what we had to do.

■ Their acts were not premeditated. Some did it spontaneously — someone knocked at their door and they said 'Yes.' Others did it gradually ... hiding a Jewish family for one week suddenly turned into housing them for a year.

■ Rescuers saw humans, not groups. "They did not see a Jew, they saw a helpless human being."

Tec's research showed that 51 percent of survivors helped by Christians were helped by strangers, 15 percent by close friends, the rest by people they vaguely knew.

— Cox News Service

By Kevin Bonham
Herald Staff Writer

North Dakota had its own version of Oskar Schindler, the man who inspired "Schindler's List," the movie expected to win several Academy Awards Monday.

His name was Herman Stern, owner of a chain of clothing stores, Straus Co., which still are operated around North Dakota. The Grand Forks store is located in South Forks Plaza.

Schindler was credited with saving more than 1,200 Jews during the Holocaust.

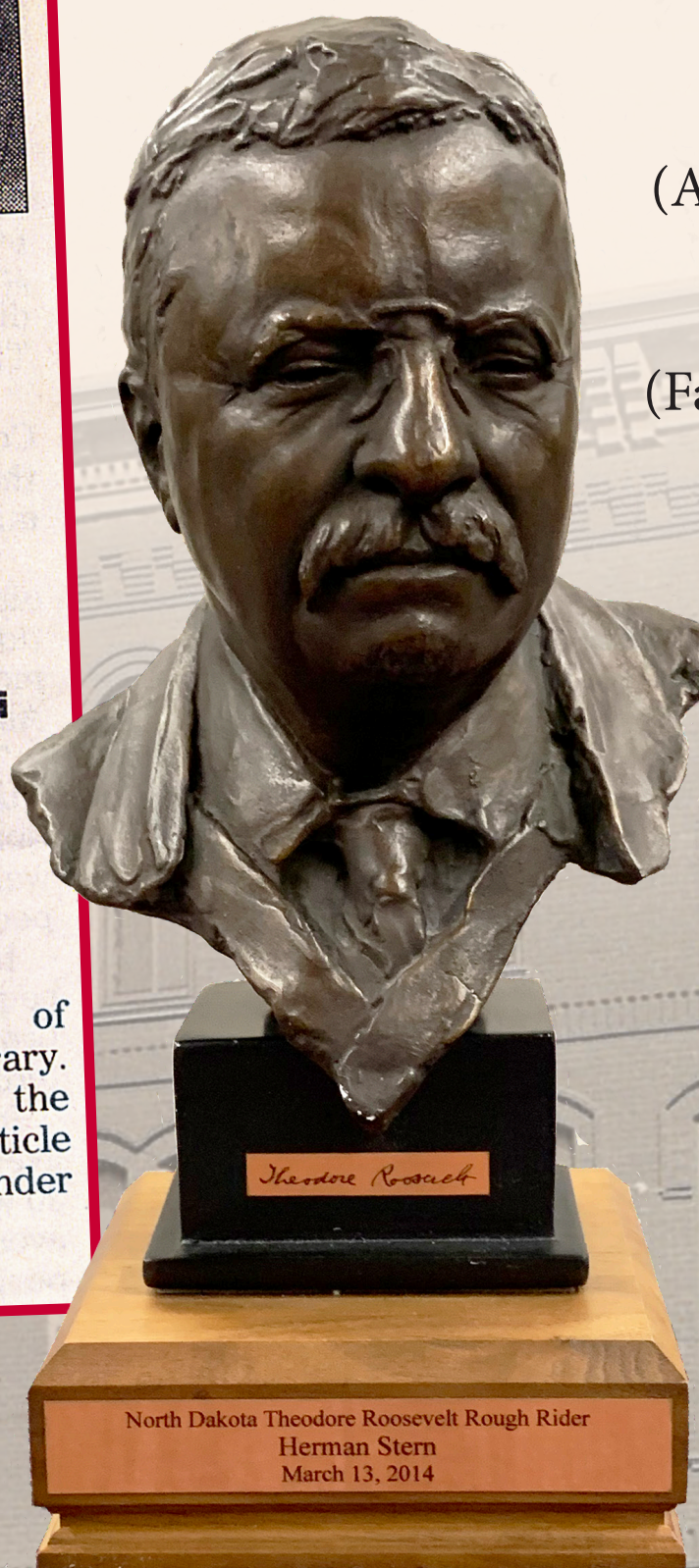
Stern played an important role as well.

Starting in 1933, the Valley City, N.D., businessman sponsored more than 130 Jews who lived in Germany or other German-held countries or were confined in Nazi concentration camps during the Holocaust, according to historical papers in the Special Collections division of UND's Chester Fritz Library. Some of the information from the collection was printed in an article in North Dakota Quarterly, under



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North Dakota Theodore Roosevelt Rough Rider
Herman Stern
March 13, 2014

Minnesota, and New York, and by 1938, Stern helped relocate roughly one hundred German immigrants to the United States.

As Herman learned more about the antisemitism and Hitler's plans for the German Jews, he began to work on bringing his three remaining brothers - Adolf, Julius and Moses - to America while still making efforts to rescue European Jews of German ancestry. He was able to secure visas for Adolf and his wife in November of 1941 but Pearl Harbor was bombed two weeks later, ending any chance of visas and immigration for Moses, Julius, and Julius's wife. Tragically, these three were murdered in concentra-

tion camps during the war.

The exact count on Stern's list is unknown. He credited himself of having brought about 125 immigrants to America. Another source credits Stern with saving the lives of nearly 170 German Jews while others claim that it could be anywhere from 175-200. Herman felt as though his coming to America was "just an accident," but that he and Adeline had a "responsibility to make it possible for other people to continue to live and have an opportunity to enjoy this great country of ours, which was so good to us." Regardless of exact numbers, his efforts to save Jews from Nazi Germany was incredibly heroic.

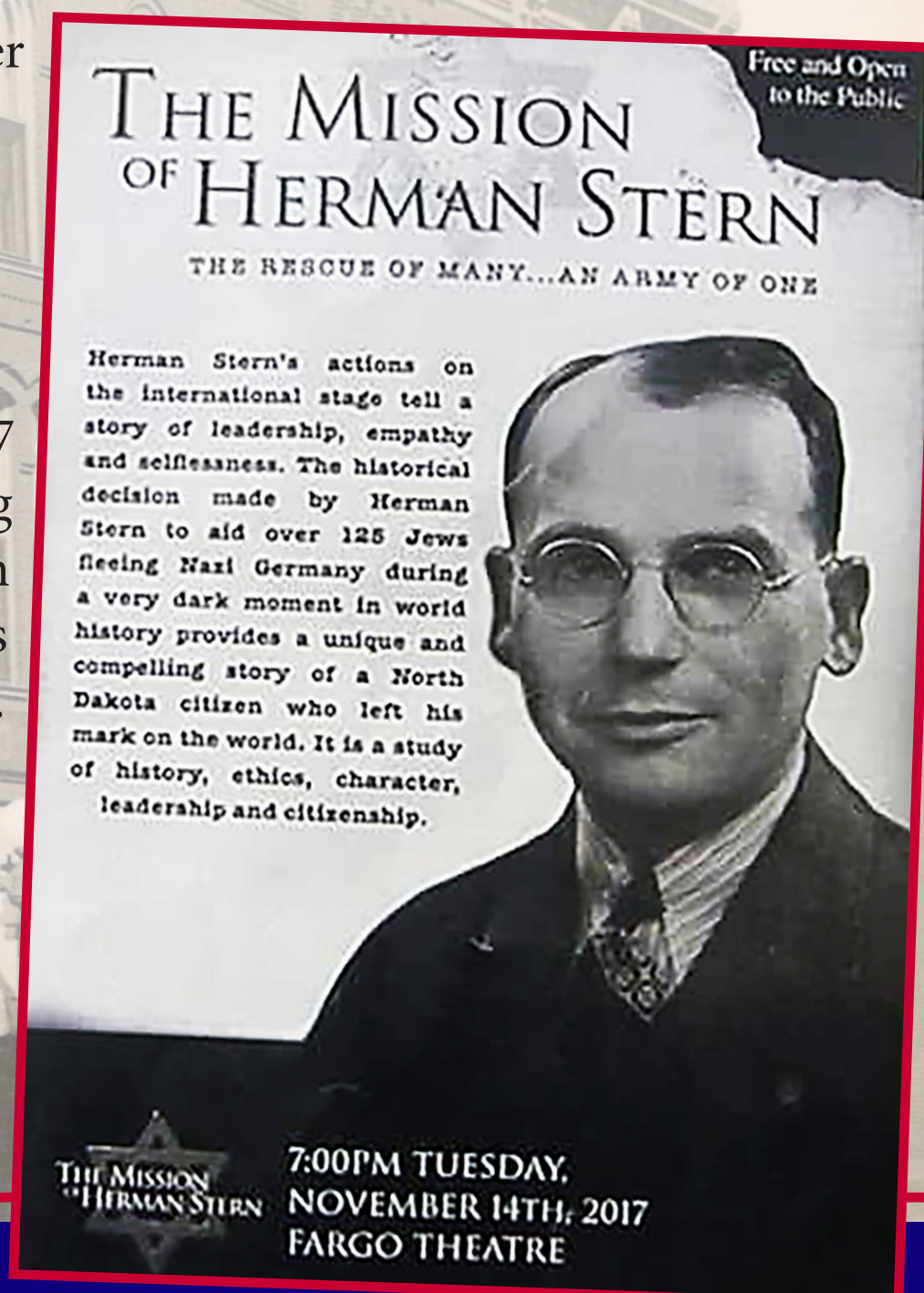
(Above) Valley City businessman Herman Stern created economic and personal opportunities for his community here and in his homeland of Germany.

(Far left) On March 18, 1994, The Grand Forks Herald had a full page write up on Herman Stern at the same time the film "Schindler's List" was nominated for an Academy Award.

(Left) For his many achievements and contributions to the state, Stern was posthumously presented the Theodore Roosevelt Rough Rider Award in 2014 by North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple. The award now resides in the Barnes County Museum in Valley City.

(Above) A flyer from 2017 advertises the first showing of a documentary on Herman Stern by the Video Arts Studio of Fargo, ND.

The background photo shows the original Straus Clothing store in the Kindred Hotel of Valley City.



Want more information?

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