

Obituary

Sybil Halpern Milton
1941–2000

Sybil Halpern Milton, a former president of the Conference Group of Central European History (CGCEH) and a longtime member of its executive board, died on October 16, 2000 (just ten days after her 59th birthday), following a three-month battle against lymphoma in the Intensive Care Unit at the National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland.

Born in New York City in 1941, Sybil attended the High School for Music and Art, and Barnard College, and received her graduate training in German history at Stanford and Munich. Thereafter she spent her entire career as a public historian. Her first experience as a historian in the public arena came in the 1960s, when she worked as researcher and editor for the *Kommission für Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien*. In those years, she began to acquire her knowledge of archives and archival sources, knowledge she would later refine in her various public positions. Along those lines, her first publications were her *Bibliography of Czechoslovak History* for the Stanford Libraries (1965); her collaboration in the archival source catalogue *Deutsche Zeitungen seit 1700* (1974); and her various articles on archival collections of the German labor movement, these pieces appearing in the *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz* (1971–75).

Quite naturally, in 1974 Sybil accepted the position as director of archives at the Leo Baeck Institute (LBI) in New York, where she organized, modernized, and expanded the LBI's large German Jewish collection of manuscripts, photos, and art works. During her eight-year tenure at the LBI, the number of annual visitors to the archives rose tenfold. There she refined her managerial style. She trained and supported those who worked for her; she never micromanaged her staff but always expected and received their best work. She treated all visitors equally, and always gave her time to educate and advise all researchers. After her death, hundreds of letters arrived from former colleagues and researchers, testifying to her generosity and influence.

Sybil's association with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum began in 1985, long before it opened its doors to the public. For twelve years, she served the museum as consultant, research curator, and finally senior resident histori-

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an. Her meticulous attention to detail and her total commitment to historical truth helped shape the museum's permanent exhibit and its research institute. She initiated and supervised numerous museum projects, conferences, and publications. For example, the educational posters she helped to create won widespread recognition, including the National Endowment for the Arts Presidential Federal Design Award. Her influence was not confined to the museum; she provided services and advice to various congressional committees and other federal agencies.

Sybil's interests were not confined to the written record of German and Austrian history; she also studied art and photography as part of the historical record. She coauthored the classic *Art of the Holocaust* (1981), which won the National Jewish Book Award in Visual Arts. She served as consultant and curator of ten exhibits; the eleventh on "Art from the Archives of Auschwitz" is scheduled to open 2001 or 2002 at the Block Museum of Northwestern University. On photographs, she published nine articles between 1984 and 1999. She served as guest coeditor of "Photography and the Holocaust," a special issue of *History of Photography* (1999), and at the time of her death was working on a book on photography of the Holocaust as historical evidence.

Although her official duties occupied her fully, Sybil never abandoned her own scholarly work. She edited and translated Lili Hahn's *White Flags of Surrender* (1974), *The Stroop Report* (1985), and *Innocence and Persecution: The Art of Jewish Children in Nazi Germany, 1936–1941* (1989); she coedited *The Holocaust: Ideology, Bureaucracy, and Genocide* (1980), and *Genocide: Critical Issues of the Holocaust* (1983). She also coedited the *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* (1984–90) and the twenty-six-volume documentary series *Archives of the Holocaust* (1990–95). In addition, she published seventy-eight articles, chapters, and notes on a large variety of topics; several more were in press at the time of her death. These covered not only art and photography, but also numerous other topics. They included pathbreaking contributions, including "The Expulsion of the Polish Jews from Germany 1938" (1984), "Women and the Holocaust: The Case of German and German-Jewish Women" (1984), "Non-Jewish Children in the Camps" (1988), "The Context of the Holocaust" (1990), "Locating the Victim: An Overview of Census-taking, Tabulation Technology, and Persecution in Nazi Germany" (1994), "Vorstufe zur Vernichtung: Die Zigeunerlager nach 1933" (1995), "Die Bedeutung von Fotodokumenten als Quelle zur Erforschung der NS-Konzentrationslager" (1995), and "Sinti and Roma in Twentieth-Century Austria and Germany" (2000).

Throughout her career, and especially in the years that she operated as an independent consultant after leaving the LBI and the Holocaust Museum, Sybil served as an archival or special projects consultant to numerous institutions and agencies, including the Torts Division of the Department of Justice, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Agudath Israel, the Goethe

Institute, and the Shoah Foundation Berlin. At the same time, she was active in a large number of professional societies, including the American Historical Association (and its CGCEH), German Studies Association, Society of American Archivists, International Archival Council, Gypsy Lore Society, American Association of Museums, and International Council on Museums. She also served on the International Advisory Council of the Topography of Terror, the Wannsee Villa Memorial, and the Mauthausen Memorial. In 1990 she was elected a member of the New York Academy of Sciences.

In recent years, Sybil turned her scholarly attention to the question of gold and other assets stolen during the Nazi era. In 1997 the Government of Switzerland appointed her Vice President of the Independent Experts Commission, Switzerland—World War Two. She directed the American research team, and supervised with other commission members the various reports on gold transactions, refugees, “Lösegelderpressung,” as well as the report on Sinti and Roma, a document that went to press at the time of her death.

Sybil undertook every task with energy and enthusiasm. Her untimely death at an early age disrupted her career of service to her colleagues, her profession, and the scholarly community.

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