Series E: General Alphabetical Files. 1960-1992
Box 86, Folder 9, NBC "Holocaust" - Canada, 1978.
Holocaust was shown in Toronto by CHCH TV, an independent station, and many more Canadians saw the show on broadcasts picked up from American NBC affiliates. The series received substantial shares of the television-watching populace during its four night run beginning on April 16, 1978. It averaged 53.5% of that audience, going from 46% on the first night to 53%, then 55% and finally, to 60%.

In Toronto, at least, it was also possible to pick up the show on two other channels, 2 and 8.

There were some right-wing efforts mounted against the show, but they did not amount to very much: a Toronto group demanded that tapes of the program be seized and destroyed, and one dozen picketers marched in front of the CHCH TV studio in Toronto. And there were other indications of a German-Canadian response to the show that was less unison.

But the show did have larger problems of distribution in Canada. Neither of the two Canadian networks aired the series, it was not shown in the Vancouver area. Still, a television poll released by A.C. Nielsen Co. of Canada, indicated that some 2.5 million Canadians did see the series.

The program received a mixed critical reception in Canada, as it did in many other nations, and this lukewarm critical reception extended to the Canadian Jewish press as well as the secular press.

The Toronto Globe and Mail ran several articles on the series. The day before the first installment was broadcast, Blaik Kirby wrote that it was made by "Jews with excellent TV qualifications," which the reviewer still felt was "weak drama."

On April 19th, the same newspaper ran a smaller story entitled "Holocaust is a Lesson," by the same author. Kirby still thought it was poor drama, but admitted that it "is having a major effect." The effect he perceived was that it was "raising old angers, enmities, and quite likely fears. Some
Germans are complaining that it is close to hate literature." He worried "about the possibility... that the film's makers might be yielding to the temptation to cater to Jewish feelings," and asked, "does it inspire a new hatred for today's Germans, Poles and Ukranians? I hope not... Even if Holocaust does inspire hatred--for some people, little excuse is needed--would that justify suppressing it? No, As unpleasant as it is, it appears to be a factually true though fictionally treated story of what happened."

The author does finally clear up the essay by recognizing that there are "millions... who may never learn about it any other way." Despite his closing warning--the classic quote, "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance," Kirby was the only reviewer in a major newspaper who veered close to calling for the suppression of the series through his device of defending the show against such a proposition.

The Globe and Mail did not, however, restrict its critical voice on the topic to one reviewer. Three days after the series ended, it provided space for an article by W. Gunther Plaut, a Senior Scholar at Holy Blossom Temple, who saw far more virtue in the series. "Holocaust;" the article was titled, "it had to be told!" In an implicit reaction to Kirby, he wrote, "There are fundamentally different kinds of viewers and reviewers: those who were there and those who were not. And then, there are Jews and non-Jews. I am a Jew, and I was there, at least for part of it."

"My own reaction was mixed," he told his readers. "The series was in many ways successful. Though on the whole poor drama, it was starkly real in a trivializing medium."

"Artistically, it left much to be desired." But "Historically," he felt, it was "largely accurate," and therefore was "an important and antidote to recent attempts to rewrite history and declare the murder of millions a Zionist fabrication."
was the Canadian Jewish News, which called the program "Flawed but impressive."

The Jewish news report corroborated the impression left by Kirby's apparent defense of the series against unacknowledged German-Canadian complaints about Holocaust.

"German groups throughout North America complained that the program dabbled in propaganda, incited hate and inter-ethnic conflict. However," wrote the newspaper, "by any conventional standards, Holocaust was neither propagandistic nor hateful, but an honest attempt to convey the horror of an event that swept the continent. Facts are facts... That some Germans are unable to face facts, to admit what happened, is a tragedy in itself."

Despite an occasional "aura of unbelievability" which the Jewish News found around segments of the story, it felt that "Holocaust was valuable and...

Despite the implication of Kirby's writings, there was little evidence of a major controversy over the show. Many watched it and, we are given to believe, more than a few may have resented it, but Holocaust generated little press controversy and no indication that it had truly stirred many souls. Even those groups who may have disliked it still could only muster... twelve persons to picket the showing of Holocaust.