



The Latvian Jewish Courier

RESTITUTION STARTED

On February 25, 2016, the Saeima passed the third and final draft of legislation providing for the return of five pre-war properties to the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia.

Under the new legislation, the municipalities that currently own these properties will be able to turn them over to the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia.

The Saeima also decided to remove the previously adopted provision of the law that prohibited alienating or pawning the land and the building of the Riga Jewish community located on 6 Skolas Street. It also dropped the condition that the building be returned to the state if the community ceases to exist.

In response, the World Jewish Restitution Organization and the Council of Jewish Organizations of Latvia issued special statements. We believe the following excerpts from these statements will interest *Courier's* readers:

WJRO 'Important First Step in Addressing Remaining Communal Property Issues' New York, Feb. 25 — The World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) welcomed legislation passed by the Latvian parliament that restitutes five formerly Jewish-owned properties to the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia.

The laws' passage comes after years of talks with the Council of Jewish Communities in Latvia, whose efforts were supported by the World Jewish Restitution Organization. The legislation, passed as a package of separate laws, now goes to the president for his signature.



The building on 6 Skolas Street after renovation.

The U.S. government, led by Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues Nicholas Dean, also played an influential role in achieving the passage of this crucial restitution law.

"We welcome the legislation, and look forward to working with the Latvian Jewish community and the Latvian government to ensure these properties are transferred and that additional steps are taken to restate the remaining communal properties," said Gideon Taylor, WJRO chair of operations.

An estimated 270 former Jewish communal properties have not yet been returned to their rightful owners or the the Jewish community.

Elie Valk, chairman of the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel, emphasized the importance of restituting additional properties, saying that it would "help the Latvian Jewish community sustain and revitalize itself as well as provide urgently needed assistance to Holocaust survivors from Latvia."

CJC The Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia welcomes the adoption of the third and final draft of this restitution legislation by the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia. The buildings and land in question were owned by Latvian Jewish community orga-

nizations until 1940. Subsequently, the properties were forcibly nationalized without compensation by totalitarian regimes, both Nazi and Soviet. After Latvia regained its independence, these properties belonged to the Latvian state.

"This is a major step in the restoration of historical and human justice, and this step should be followed by the next," said Arkady Sukharenko, chairman of the Latvian Council of Jewish Communities. "Such solutions allow us to close, finally, these tragic pages of history. Many times, speaking to a variety of audiences, I emphasized that the Latvian state is not responsible for the genocide of its Jewish citizens during World War II, as Latvia itself was occupied during this period. For many years, we clarified our position on this issue to our society, discussed it with politicians, engaged in a dialogue with the State, and now feel the satisfaction of having reached such a dignified and justified solution. On behalf of the Latvian Jews, I thank the politicians and deputies of the Saeima, which contributed to the promotion of such a decision, as well as those who gave it their vote — displaying at once their political will and human courage. I am convinced that the decision by the Saeima will strengthen our country and society and will contribute to the unity and prosperity of the Republic of Latvia."

As previously reported, a special foundation will be established by the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia that will oversee manage-

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ment and operation of the returned property. "All the money that will go to the foundation, including income from the operation of real estate, will be spent in the territory of Latvia; it will be done openly and transparently," said Sukharenko. "The main purpose of the foundation will be the preservation of cultural heritage, community museums, study and promotion of the popularization of traditions, memorial programs, caring for cem-

eteries, sacred objects, charitable programs, and the development of education, as well as support for young people."

The board of the foundation is expected to include 11 members: 6 will represent the Jewish organizations in Latvia and 5 will represent international Jewish organizations. A representative of the Latvian government will be invited to help oversee the activities of the foundation.

Some Personal Opinion

We were all waiting for news from Riga about the legislature's vote on the issue of the restitution of Jewish properties. One very interesting event that took place was a visit to the Skolas ielā 6 by Saeima deputies to discuss the process of creating the Jewish restitution fund. They met with Arkady Sukharenko, Gita Umanovska, and Dmitry Krupnikov. Saeima representatives informed their hosts that this building had been added to the list of properties being returned to Latvia's Jewish community. Ms. Umanovska explained to the deputies that the building had been used for various activities, including classes where the Latvian and English languages were taught.

After numerous visits to Riga by Mr. Nicholas Dean, the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, and after other appropriate pressures had been applied, the Latvian parliament did pass legislation that returns five formerly Jewish-owned properties to the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia.

This legislation, passed as a package of separate laws, has been sent to the president for his signature. The Saeima noted that its actions were undertaken to attempt to right, at least in part, the historical

injustice done to Jewish citizens and society during the Holocaust and during the years of Communist rule in Latvia.

Arkady Sukharenko noted that this legislation is a step toward restoration of historical and human justice and that this process must continue.

We can now begin to move on from those tragic pages of history — the Saeima members acted responsibly, honorably, and respectfully.

On a personal note:

The first step has been made. In my humble opinion, now is the right time for us to work to expand this initiative. Five properties are not much, and, as has been stated again and again, this is just the beginning.

The time is ripe to talk about certain tools that have historically proven to be very effective in helping states, societies, groups, and individuals to move in the right direction.

How about starting, without delay, to apply some extra pressure to continue the current momentum? To continue the process of righting wrongs after so many years of injustice done to our people? The return of a small portion of what was stolen corrects very little.

And, once again, the opinion expressed above is mine exclusively.

by Yefim Shteynfeld

I Survived Rumbula Reaching the Latvian Audience

The first edition of the Latvian version of *I Survived Rumbula* was published in 2014 by the Latvian Branch of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ) for educational purposes. In cooperation with the Embassy of Israel and the Ministry of Science and Education in Latvia, the book has been placed in all schools in Latvia, thus fulfilling the hope expressed by Prof. A. Ezergailis in 1985; he encouraged the translation of the survival story of Frida and set forth the idea of distributing it to schools — giving the younger generations a chance to learn the truth. In addition to school libraries, the books have reached history teachers and educators in various fields: social science, philosophy, ethics, religion, politics, and law.

The memoir reveals the horrible truth about the events that happened in our homeland during the Holocaust. Many teachers report that during the lessons they read the excerpts from the book,

engendering class discussions and drawing parallels with events today. Most often, schoolchildren are shocked by the cruelty, with many hearing this history for the first time. Older pupils often express a desire to read the entire book.

The book aroused a great interest also among Christian believers in Latvia. The tragic events as well as the courageous deeds of Adventist rescuers were discussed during a Christian Radio program. Many significant questions were raised. For example: How did these parallel worlds co-exist? For non-Jews, it was the season of Advent, the preparation for Christmas; for the Jewish people in Riga Ghetto, however, the end of November and beginning of December 1941 ushered in death and destruction. How could it be that neighbors, schoolmates, and friends suddenly turned into enemies? Can it happen today? How terrible it must have been if Frida was scared



Ilze Saulite

of the sounds of human footsteps more than of the sounds of approaching wolves and other wild animals when hiding in the forest.

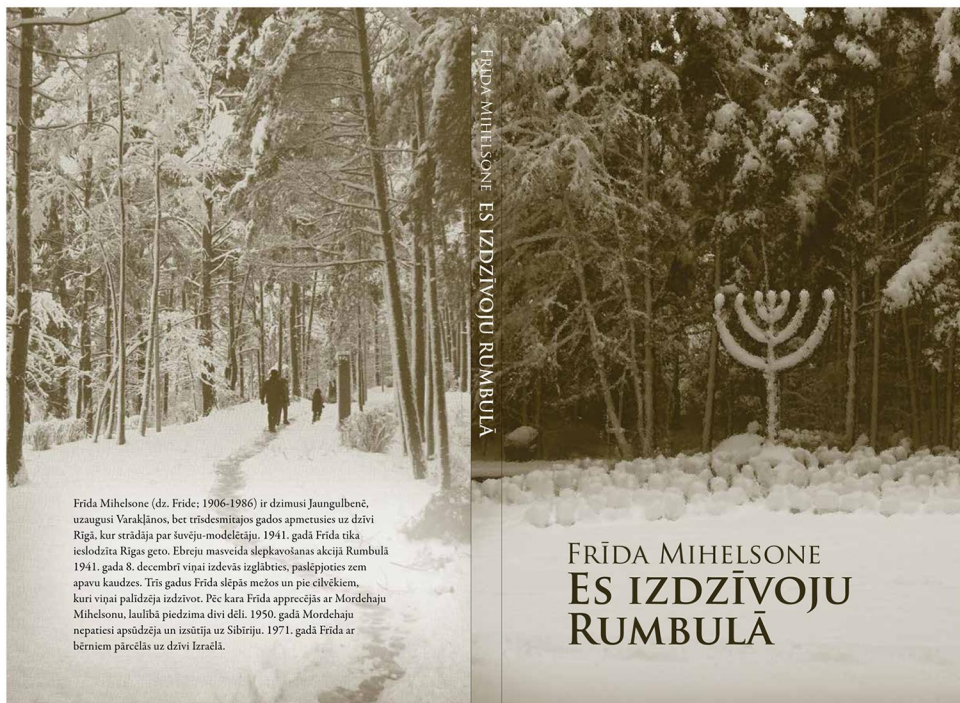
After the radio program, many people called to ask where can they get the book. So I sent them the book by post and got some remarkable responses.

Eva writes: "I was very moved by the powerful testimony of Frida. What a horror she had to go through! The story clearly reveals where the majority of our society stood at that time and shows characteristics of most Latvian inhabitants — unfortunately not the good ones."

Ieva: "Thank you so much for the book I have received! I read it immediately. It is a very good book, significant historical witness but very hard. Thank G-d we can learn the truth, how everything was actually. I realized how little I knew about the horrors that the Jewish people had to endure. . . I'll share the book with my relatives. Thank you very much for the book!"

Judite: "The book gave me a food for thought. I often reflect on the events I read of in the book: about

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Frida Mihelšone (dz. Frīde; 1906-1986) ir dzimusi Jaungulbenē, uzaugusi Vārkāļnos, bet trīsdesmitajos gados apmetusies uz dzīvi Rīgā, kur strādāja par šuvēju-modelētāju. 1941. gadā Frīda tika ieslodzīta Rīgas geto. Ebreju masveida slepkavošanas akcijā Rumbulā 1941. gada 8. decembrī viņai izdevās izglāties, paslēpjoties zem apavu kaudzes. Trīs gadus Frīda slēpās mežos un pie cilvēkiem, kuri viņai palīdzēja izdzīvot. Pēc kara Frīda apprecējās ar Mordehaju Mihelšonu, laulībā piedzima divi dēli. 1950. gadā Mordehaju nepatīsi apsūdzēja un izsūtīja uz Sibīriju. 1971. gadā Frīda ar bērniem pārcēlās uz dzīvi Izraēlā.

FRIDA MIHELSONE
ES IZDZIVOJU
RUMBULĀ

the atrocities and terror that happened on our land. When I think about it, it makes me cry. Now I see the Jewish people differently, with greater respect and interest in learning their history. It is impossible to stay indifferent after reading this book. The purpose of survival of Frida Mikhelson to be a living witness in order to tell the whole truth has fully justified itself."

Betija: "When I read the book for the first time I was weeping incredibly. I had heard the term 'Holocaust' before, but this book really opened my eyes. It was terrible to find out how indifferent and cowardly were the people around — that so few were willing to help."

Eva O. "When I read the book, first I was overwhelmed by choking sorrow and later by shame. I could not understand how can it be that I have spent 40 years of my life knowing almost nothing about this shameful crime? As soon as I finished reading the book, my mind was taken over by a thought: What is my task? What could I possibly do to prevent such events from repeating themselves among human beings?"

Anita: "Thank you very much for the book! It is one of the most significant testimonies that helps us to perceive the darkest pages of our past and never allow them to repeat. The book will serve as a powerful and convincing argument in the dispute with those who try to minimize the character and the scale of the tragedy or those who even deny the Holocaust."

I can honestly say that the entire team who worked on the Latvian translation has shared the tears of compassion, sorrow, and shock. It is so painful and so hard to believe! We took a picture of the Rumbula Memorial on December 8 for the book cover to show it was a cold winter! Although we will never be able to grasp how terrible it must have been in those days to be a Jew in Riga (and elsewhere) — humiliation, fear, isolation, helplessness, death — coldness all around. I hope that the same feelings are conveyed to the reader through Frida's testimony.

The Head of the Regional Library Association, Ms. B. Eglite, who advertised *I Survived Rumbula* at cultural events all over Latvia, affirmed that the book was very well accepted by people in the regions, and there was a genuine interest in reading Frida's story.

In late 2015, the second edition was published; this allowed us to present a copy to all Latvian libraries via The National Library of Latvia. Copies have also been given to the Museum of Zanis Lipke and Museum Jews in Latvia for use in seminars with teachers and the tour guides.

We fully agree with Dr. Didzis Berzins, who said:

"This book is an essential event in the context of the social memory in Latvia. It is a historical witness that was not known in Latvia for many years, unfortunately. Or, if it was known, then only because of the publications in other languages or references in different works, for example, by Andrievs Ezergailis.

"This book gives us an opportunity to build a more accurate and compassionate perception of the Jewish Catastrophe in Latvia during the WWII, rather than by theoretical works and reasoning.

"Yet, I think that significant part of the audience as well media interest have been lost because the book has not been released for commercial purposes. And, to my mind, Latvian society knows very little about the accomplishments of the Commission of Latvian Historians for the same reason."

I am very pleased that *I Survived Rumbula* has reached the younger generation in Latvia — our future politicians, cultural workers, journalists, policy makers, and teachers. I express my deepest appreciation to all the supporters and especially to David Silberman, President of Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the U.S., for making this possible!

By Ilze Saulite
Chairperson of the Association ICEJ Latvia

RUMBULA'S ECHO DOCUMENTARY FOCUSES ON EDITING

Editor's Note: At our last annual Yizkor service on November 22, 2015, Mitchell Lieber, producer and director of *Rumbula's Echo*, informed us of the progress on this documentary about the Holocaust in Latvia. He began filming in 2009. He showed initial rough-cut excerpts at our Yizkor service in 2011. This year, he spoke about his additional filming and the archival material gathered for the documentary. Mr. Lieber's presentation follows.

This report tells the story behind the story of how we are completing *Rumbula's Echo*. We are nearly done filming the brief pieces of documentary footage needed to fill in gaps before we begin the final edit. The transition is being made to post-production: archival materials, final story structure, editing, and music. Outreach activity also continues as the project focuses on completing the film. Here's what has been done recently.

Meeting Margers Vestermanis and Follow-up Questions



Margers Vestermanis answers questions.

In Riga this July, we filmed a brief sit-down interview with

Margers Vestermanis and a few follow-ups. Mr. Vestermanis offered much more in the interview than we expected. This included his telling how the U.S.'s December 8, 1941, entry into World War II brought hope to the few remaining post-Rumbula Riga Ghetto residents, along with beatings from their captors.

Rare NKVD/KGB Building Interiors



A hall of jail cells in Riga's NKVD / KGB building.

In footage not yet edited, Sia Hertsberg relates how she spent five months in two hospitals after liberation. Upon returning to Riga, Ms. Hertsberg was required to report to the NKVD, which accused her of being a Nazi collaborator because she was a Jew who had survived. This made us decide to show the NKVD/KGB building on the corner of Gertrudes and Brivibas streets. From May to October 2015, a special exhibit was mounted in Riga that opened the interior of the building to the public for the first time. We filmed the building's interior and

its jail cells.

Rumbula Murder Site



Filming at the site of the Rumbula killings.

In *Rumbula's Echo's* rough-cut excerpts, Steven Springfield stands at the central memorial at Rumbula, near the large menorah, and says his whole family is buried there, "... my mother, my father, and my uncle, my uncles and my aunts, about 60-70 people are right here." Then he grimaces and shakes his head. This summer we filmed special footage at Rumbula as a follow-up and amplification of Steven Springfield's words and head shake (which had been filmed years earlier). Here's the working draft of what viewers will see. After Steven Springfield shakes his head, the camera visits the six enormous mass graves, seeming to float among them. During filming at Rumbula, the 40-foot camera crane rises above the huge 14-foot menorah, ending with an aerial view of the killing site. With this added footage, viewers can begin to more deeply take in and feel Steven Springfield

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words and why he shook his head.

Music for Rumbula's Echo — Gidon Kremer Music

As we know, the world's top living classical violinist Gidon Kremer was born and raised in Latvia and his father was a Holocaust survivor. We have long wanted to get him involved in *Rumbula's Echo* and its music. After several unsuccessful attempts to locate him, I realized that the best way to get Mr. Kremer and his music into the documentary was to film a performance during one of his concerts in Riga. He quickly agreed to the filming. Late in the spring of 2015, Mr. Kremer was performing a series of concerts in Latvia with his chamber orchestra, Kremerata Baltica. We finally arranged to film the Riga concert with two cameras and high-quality digital sound recording.

More Supplementary Filming of Brief Pieces of Footage



Yiddish teacher Yakob Basner and painter Kalman Aron share a light moment at Kalman Aron's apartment.

A trip to LA in October provided an opportunity to plan time for the filming of and enabled the documentary to get footage with 92-year old Kalman Aron, an artist and survivor of the Riga

Ghetto. It also provided an opportunity to film a brief interview with Riga Ghetto survivor Yakob Basner. For five years, we had wanted to include Mr. Basner, a Yiddish teacher who answered all questions in Yiddish, in the film. Mr. Aron and Mr. Basner are friends from the Riga Ghetto. However, they live 90 minutes from each other and no longer drive. We were able to get the two survivors together for a visit and also filmed them together.

New York City Filming with Professor George Schwab



Professor George Schwab with the slate, just before filming begins.

We combined our trip to New York to present an update on the film at the annual meeting and Yizkor service of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia with filming Professor George Schwab. While we were with George Schwab, I took the opportunity to film a few follow-up questions that might be added to the edit to give viewers additional emotional touch points. I asked about how he experienced the Holocaust in Latvia as a young boy of 9½ years.

Prospects for Finishing the Film

The project's goal is to raise the funds needed to complete the



Gathering for a screening at the home where Sia Hertsberg (front, near screen) lives.

documentary by late 2016. Much of this will come from individuals. I've noted that survivor Sia Hertsberg (see photo) has been one of *Rumbula's Echo's* most important fund-raisers and outreach leaders. Over five years, she has raised more than \$14,000 in medium and small contributions from family, friends and acquaintances.

I've suggested that families interested in seeing the film completed can join Mrs. Hertsberg's efforts by hosting/co-hosting a two-hour house party to bring new potential supporters and contributions (tax-deductible) to the movie. Hosts invite friends, family, and acquaintances and serve light refreshments. *Rumbula's Echo* provides attractive invitations to mail, a speaker (often I, and sometimes a survivor), and shows compelling advance footage from the movie. As I've said, house parties can be added in most cities as well as in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, where a few are already being planned. We need many more. Those who want to help complete *Rumbula's Echo* by having a house party may call the film at 1-312-602-3302. It's a way to preserve Holocaust history.

*by Mitchel Lieber
Producer director of Rumbula's Echo*

NEWS FROM LATVIA

At the end of January, the meeting of the General Assembly of the European Jewish Congress was held in Brussels. Among the 42 European delegations, representatives from the Council of the Jewish Communities of Latvia, the President of the Council Arkady Sukharenko, and his deputy Dmitry Krupnikov were also in attendance. The Assembly discussed measures to ensure the security of Jewish communities. This issue became especially relevant in connection with the sharp increase in the number of Middle Eastern migrants arriving in Europe.

Latvian Center for Human Rights and the Council of the Jewish Communities of Latvia published a brochure, *Expressions of Anti-Semitism: History and Modernity*. The authors are Ilya Lensky, the director of museum "Jews in Latvia," and Dr. Didzis Bērziņš (University of Latvia). The book



deals with the history of anti-Semitism, the most common myths and prejudices, and new forms of anti-Semitism and its manifestations in the present day.

The Embassy of Latvia in Germany reported that *Adieu, Atlantis* by Valentina Freimane (translated into German) has been recognized by the jury of literary critics as one of the three outstanding memoirs of 2015. This book

was originally published in Riga with the support of the Council of the Jewish Communities of Latvia — first in Latvian in 2010 and then in English in 2012.

The Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia published a book about Jewish ritual objects prepared by Mikhail Itkin. The book reflects the current state of the world of collectors of Judaica and discusses the most popular and most commonly available items that can be found at the antique markets or in private collections.



On March 8, 2016 at the museum "Jews in Latvia," a symposium was given devoted to the Hidden Past of thousands of Hungarian Jewish women deported to Latvia in 1944. Presentations were made by H.E. Mrs. Adrien Müller, Ambassador of Hungary to Latvia, Mr. Ilija Īenskis, Director of the museum "Jews in Latvia," Dr. Margers Vestermanis, curator of the museum and witness, as well as representatives from the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Center.



Dr. Vestermanis speaks at the symposium.

In the summer of 2015, we informed our readers about the opening of the "Holocaust Commemoration in Latvia in the Course

of Time" exhibition in the museum "Jews in Latvia." In January 2016, the exhibit traveled to Tallinn. On January 28 of this year, its opening was marked by a special event organized by the Tallinn Jewish community as part of International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

On January 27, 2016, during International Holocaust Remembrance Day, a presentation of the book *Behind These Gates the Land Is Moaning: Salaspils Camp 1941-1944*, published in Latvian, was held at the Latvian War Museum. The book was released by the publishing house Lauku Avize, together with the Salaspils self-government and the Latvian Fund. Written by historians Karl Kanger, Uldis Neiburg, and Rudite Viksna, it describes the establishment of the



camp, its management and prisoners, as well as the liquidation. This enormous collection of historical sources, including documents, memoirs, and photos, allows each reader to deeply explore the events of that time.

News from Rezekne

On January 22, 2015, the famous Green Synagogue reopened after an extensive renovation.

On February 24, an educational workshop was held in the Rezekne Tourist Center, where participants were introduced to the 24 objects in the city that are tied to the Jewish cultural heritage.

On March 18, a conference on the Jewish historical aspects in Latgale was held at the Embassy of Latgale Gors in Rezekne. The conference

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Opening ceremony for the Green Synagogue in Rezekne. Lev Sukhobokov, the chairman of the Jewish Association, speaks.

addressed little-known aspects of Jewish history in Latgale, including accommodations, everyday life, and traditions — leading up to the tragic events of 20th century. The modern-day situation was also discussed. The Israeli ambassador to Latvia, Lironne Bar-sadeh spoke at the conference.

On March 16th, as in all previous years on this day, the memorial event of the Latvian legionaries took place in Latvia. In the procession of the former legionaries and their supporters toward the Freedom Monument in Riga was attended by about 1,000 people. The whole procession passed without incident. The picketing of the procession organized by the anti-fascist Committee was attended by about 30 participants, among whom was also "a hunter of Nazi war criminals," Efraim Zuroff.

In January and February 2016, the exhibition "Raoul Wallenberg: To Me There's No Other Choice" was seen at the museum "Jews in Latvia."



January 27 is designated by the UN as International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

A few members of our organization were invited to participate in the solemn session of the United Nations held that day. The session opened with the speech by Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon. Among many speakers, most unforgettable were H.E. Mr. Danny Danon, Israel's envoy to the UN, H.E. Ms. Samantha Power, U.S. envoy to the UN, and H.E. Mr. Felix Klein, Special Representative for Relations with Jewish Organizations of Federal Government of Germany. The speech by Ms. Barbara Winton, the daughter of late Sir Nicholas Winton, who became known worldwide for his role in rescuing more than 600 children in Czechoslovakia on the eve of the World War II, received special attention.



West Point cadets sing at the UN building.

The performance of the U.S. West Point Military Academy Jewish Chapel Choir was met with great interest by those in attendance. The cadets sang the songs of the Vilna ghetto "Zog nit keynmol az du geyst dem letstn veg," "Eli-Eli," and others.

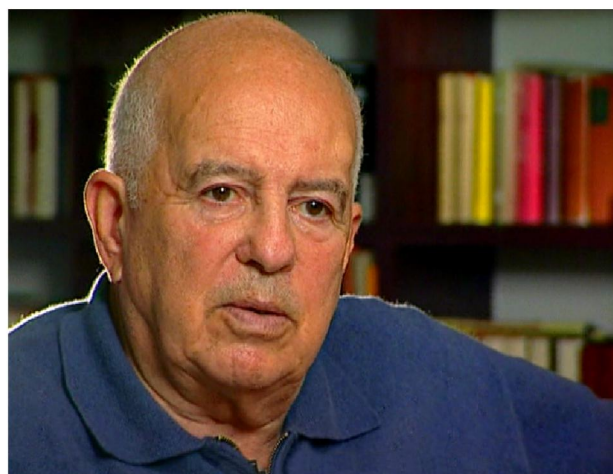
Compiled by Ivar Brod

In Memoriam ALEXANDER BERGMAN

(MAY 30, 1925 – JANUARY 12, 2016)

We are deeply saddened to report that Alexander Bergman, the former Riga Ghetto, Kaiserwald, Stutthof, and Buchenwald concentration camp prisoner and survivor, longtime president of the Latvian Ghetto and Concentration Camps Prisoners Association, passed away on January 12, 2016.

Alexander Bergman grew up in a well-known family. His father, Zhanis, was the headmaster of one of Riga's Jewish public schools, a Jewish community leader, and spoke 12 languages. Before the start of World War II, Alexander graduated from the ninth grade of the Riga Jewish school on Lazarettes street. Initially, he, along with parents and brother, were moved into the Riga Ghetto. His parents and younger brother, as well as numerous relatives, were killed by Nazis during 1941–1944. After liberation in Magdeburg in 1945, Alexander returned to Riga.



Alexander Bergman

Upon completion of his legal studies, Alexander Bergman became one of the most sought-after lawyers in Latvia. He worked in the field for more than 51 years. In the early 1990s, he became the leader of an organization representing Latvian Jews who lived in the ghettos or concentration camps. He successfully petitioned the German government for compensation for many of them. In 2004, he completed and published his memoirs of the Holocaust: *Notes of an Untermensch*. He was awarded Latvia's highest honor, the Order of the Three Stars. May his memory be blessed.



Alexander Bergman's book, *Notes of an Untermensch*, in various translated editions.

BORIS TUMARIN: ARTIST, ACTOR, DIRECTOR

In the fall of 2010 we began to compile articles about outstanding Jews native to Latvia, to be included in the Latvian Jewish Encyclopedia, planned for printing by Shamir in Riga.

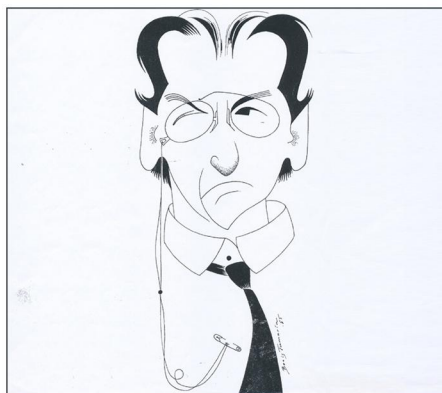
Tumarin, Boris (formerly Tumarinson, Benno) (4/4/1910, Riga – 28/1/1979, New York) — actor, director, professor. He graduated from the Berz Jewish Gymnasium in Riga. From 1929–1931, he studied at the Academy of Arts of Latvia and attended the Mikhail Chekhov Acting School in Riga. He later studied at the Berlin Academy of Arts and attended the Max Reinhardt School — one of the most prestigious acting schools at the time. Following his move to the United States in 1939, he changed his name to Boris Tumarin. He served in the U.S. army from 1943–1945; afterwards, he acted and participated in stage performances in various theaters in New York until the end of his life. He founded the Actor's Workshop, taught acting and directing at The American Theatre Wing and the Piscator's Dramatic Workshop. Beginning in 1968, he was an instructor and then became a professor at Julliard, a world-renowned music academy in New York City.



Boris Tumarin as Shylock

In Riga, Tumarin had been famous as an actor and director since 1932, when he became the director of the newly established Jewish Working Theater (Jesusbaznīcas street, 3) and initiated the first theater performance

there: *Fight Against Slapdash* (“Der Kampf dem Schund”) based on the play by R. Shtemle. After the Theater was banned in 1934, he moved to the Theater of the Jewish Minority (Skolas street, 6) in Riga, where he acted for a few seasons. During these years in Riga, he worked as a theater and performance artist and directed and staged performances at the Jewish Theater Studio. The last theater work he did in Riga was his 1939 participation in a concert in honor of the 80th anniversary of Sholom Aleichem; following that, he emigrated to America. Arriving in the United States, he was faced with the need for actors and directors to speak perfect English; nevertheless, Tumarin was chosen to act in *Family* by Wolfsohn, presented at the Broadway Theater in the spring of 1943. In 1948, he produced *Blood Wedding* by Federico Garcia Lorca, acted in *New Staging* in lower Manhattan and in *The House of Bernhard Alba* (also by Lorca); he also appeared in 1951 in a Broadway production at the National Academy of the Theater.

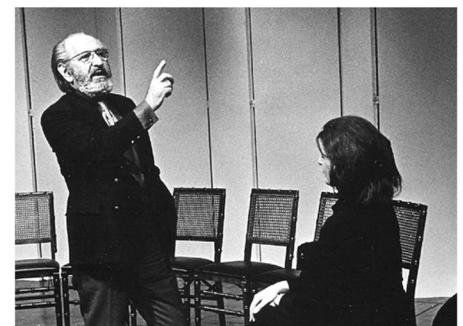


Boris Tumarin's self-caricature, 1955

He acted in a number of Broadway and Off-Broadway plays, of which the most significant were: *The Devil's Advocate* by Dore Schary; *Traveler without Luggage* by Jean Anouilh; *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Bertold Brecht; *The Man in the Glass Booth* by Robert Shaw; *Bidermann and Firebugs* by Max Frisch; *A Month in the Country* by Turgenev; *No Exit* by Jean-Paul Sartre, and others. His performance as Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* prompted critics to put him in the same acting



achievement category as Laurence Olivier, Dustin Hoffman, and Al Pacino. In 1958, he wrote and published a play based on *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Idiot* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. In that same year, he returned to directing with *The Brothers Karamazov*. He also put on *The Idiot* (1960), *The Merchant of Venice* (1962), *Desire Under the Elms* by Eugene O'Neill (1963), and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Shakespeare. While a professor of drama at Julliard with the cast of the Actors Workshop, he put on the stage *The Lower Depths* by Maxim Gorky (1972), *The Bear* by Anton Chekhov (1973), *The Kitchen* by Arnold Wesker (1976), and *Three Sisters* by Chekhov in 1973 and in 1975 in different theaters.



Boris Tumarin directing rehearsal, 1970s

As an actor and writer in 1961–1968, he participated in the creation of several movies and telefilms — the most famous of which was *Defenders*, where he played the role of Goldfarb.

The Brothers Karamazov garnered a prestigious Obie Award, as well as the Vernon Rise Award for outstanding achievement in Off-Broadway theater.

*by Ivar Brod
translated by Alan Solovey*

HERMINOCHKA

Editor's Note:

As a young girl, Ljalja Javorkovskaya developed a wonderful and warm relationship with an older lady, Herminochka (née Hermine Jacobson, born in Jelgava in 1900), forged within the framework of two Latvian Jewish families — the Javorkovskys and the Schers — in deep Russia during World War II. The friendship continued in postwar Riga. Her moving story briefly illuminates a slice of life in Soviet Russia and Ljalja's admiration and love for Herminochka, who had been married to the Chinese ambassador to Germany until his death in 1935.



Ljalja Javorkovskaya, 1970s

My parents and the Schers met in 1941 in the city of Yelabuga, in the Tatar Republic of the U.S.S.R. At the beginning of World War II, my parents evacuated (or rather fled) from Cēsis, a small Latvian town where my dad was a surgeon at a local hospital.

LIFE IN YELABUGA

The Shers also evacuated (they also had to flee) to Yelabuga, but they were from Riga. How our two families met was a bit out of the ordinary.

My dad received a call at one point about a lady, Herminochka, who was unconscious. My dad quickly diagnosed her — she had been poisoned by the carbon monoxide emanating from a

Russian stove. My dad instructed her husband Leon to carry her outside; the fresh air revived her. Thus our friendship with the Schers began; it continued throughout my parents' entire lives.

Leon and Hermine Scher, like many other evacuees, came to Yelabuga with practically no belongings. Hermine carried a little suitcase that had some pink silk pajamas in it. She was wearing a light suit and had only a raincoat for warm clothes.

The temperatures in Yelabuga fell to -40°C in the winter. Hermine walked in this cold in her raincoat, lining it with newspapers for warmth. Seeing her in her coat one time, a passerby asked her, "Is the rain coming soon?" This was a joke. There was no rain expected, of course.

Leon's brother Herman and his wife and son Avi had also been evacuated to Yelabuga; Avi (Avushka) was immediately drafted into the Red Army and killed in one of the first battles—he was 18 or 19 years old. Herman's wife then left her mentally ill husband, who was taken in by Hermine and Leon. Soon enough, Leon was also drafted into the Red Army.

The toughest part of life in Yelabuga now began for Hermine. She had to learn how to: safely use a Russian stove, fetch water from an ice-hole, and survive in general. Hermine didn't have to survive independently for long — Leon became ill while on active duty and was sent to a hospital to recover. Once discharged, Leon was assigned to work at a POW camp located in Yelabuga. Now Hermine



Hermine, 1934

had Leon nearby and there was a steady ration of food.

Leon spoke excellent German, thus he worked as a translator at the POW camp. This camp's inmates included a German general and other men of high rank. Living conditions were remarkable: the prisoners had their orderlies, they didn't work as laborers and were allowed to choose what they wanted to do.

The POWs got significantly better food than did the rest of the population, with pastries baked for them — while the people of the U.S.S.R. were starving.

Leon worked at the POW camp throughout the entire war and even after the war. He was discharged only after the POWs were sent home to Germany.

MY FIRST CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF HERMINE AND LEON

Our family life was closely connected to the Schers. Among my first childhood memories of Yelabuga: I am sitting in an infant

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HERMINOCHKA

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chair in front of the window and saying to my mom, "Mom, the Schers are coming!" These were my first words. Our families frequently spent time together. In the evenings, they played cards. The game was called kunken—very popular in the Baltic States. Our families had their own mail carrier — the Shers' dog, Johnny. He carried notes tucked into his collar. Johnny really loved coming to visit us. We would feed him; it was a hungry time. For me, Johnny's coming was such fun. We played with him often and lay around on the floor. He was pretty much my only toy. For the rest of my life, I retained a love for dogs.

In October of 1944, the Red Army liberated Riga and my mom was required to return. My mom left me in the care of Herminochka — Aunt Hermine. My mom was gone for about a month. I still recall Aunt Hermine singing me a lullaby every evening: "Sleep little child, my perfect one". Exhausted, Hermine would start to fall asleep, but I would finish the song. Much later, I found out that this was a lullaby to the words of Lermontov. When my mom returned, I didn't want to go back with her and would hide in Aunt Hermine's skirts. I got even more attached to Herminochka and Leon. Our family stayed in Yelabuga until August of 1946. Hermine and Leon returned to Riga two years later. They took with them Leon's completely helpless brother, Herman. Thus, our combined lives in Riga began.

THE RETURN TO RIGA AND OUR CONTINUED LIFE IN RIGA

The Schers didn't have an easy time once in to Riga — they had neither shelter nor jobs. Soon after

their arrival to Riga, Herman died. At first, the Schers were assigned at a small room in a huge apartment where five other families lived. The larger part of the room was taken up by the bed. They were very lucky to have been allotted some living space, however. Leon, an architect by profession, then started working at a construction site. For a very short time Herminochka worked at a small enterprise that manufactured buttons. Herminochka was a wonderful homemaker, with little money, she managed to prepare good meals every day. Everything at the house was in exemplary order.



Hermine and her husband, Leon, 1957

Later, the Schers moved to an apartment that housed only one other family, a Doctor Remigolsky. Leon transferred to a job in the construction department at a candy factory where the pay was a little better. They still had to live very frugally; Herminochka's diligence and care permitted them to continue living without any harm. The Schers dreamed of having their own apartment. After a few years, Leon transferred to a job at the largest building at the institution, but this had almost no effect on his salary. An opportunity came up to get on a waiting list for an apartment — the only obstacle was that money was required for the down

payment of the apartment. The Schers didn't have the funds. Hermine's nephew, George Schwab, came through with the down payment, thus Leon and Herminochka's dream came true. They moved to their new apartment. Leon retired soon thereafter and they lived peacefully, with few health problems. Then, tragedy struck — Leon experienced problems with cerebral circulation in 1984 and died after a few days. Herminochka outlived him for two years and died from cancer of the pancreas in 1986.

From the end of the 1940s to the middle of the 1980s, almost 40 years, our family lived close to the Schers. We got together often and celebrated all the holidays and birthdays together. During the tougher days, we came to each other's aid. In the beginning, the Schers helped my mom raise me; later on, my husband and I were able to help the Schers. Our families became very close — our relationship was very warm and familial all these years.

MY MEMORIES OF LIFE IN RIGA CLOSE TO THE SCHERS

My first memories in Riga of the Schers are tied to their first apartment on Dzirnavu Street — that small dark room in the huge apartment. My mom, who taught English, worked a lot — always had two or three jobs. Hermine and Leon took care of me; I called them Aunt Hermine and Uncle Leon. Aunt Hermine taught me proper manners: how to behave at the table, eat politely, and much more. These were of great benefit to me all my life.

*by Elena (Ljalja) Javorkovskaya
Translated by Eva Minkin
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