



The Latvian Jewish Courier

THE FOURTH OF JULY IN RIGA: MARKING THE BEGINNING OF THE HOLOCAUST IN LATVIA

July 4th, the Day of Remembrance for victims of the Jewish Genocide in Latvia, was acknowledged with a flower-laying ceremony at the Riga memorial on Gogol Street. On July 4, 1941, local Nazi henchmen burned the Great Choral Synagogue along with the people in it. These events marked the beginning of the Holocaust, when more than 70,000 local Jews and about 20,000 Jews deported to Latvia from other European countries were killed during the Nazi occupation.



Speaker of the Saeima Inara Murniece, President of Latvia Egils Levits, and Prime Minister Krisjanis Karins at the ceremony in honor of Holocaust victims as rabbi Eliyohu Krumer recites a commemorative prayer (left)

Egils Levits, the President of Latvia, attended the ceremony in honor of these Holocaust victims, as did Inara Murniece (Speaker of the Saeima), Krisjanis Karins (Prime Minister), members of the Minister's Cabinet, leadership of the Riga City Council, deputies, other government officials, foreign diplomats, NGOs, and members of the Jewish community. Participants in the event also laid flowers at the Zhanis Lipke monument in honor of all those who helped rescue Jews during the Holocaust, saluting those who risked their lives and the lives of their families to save the persecuted.

"Today is the day of remembrance of the Jewish genocide when Latvia lost many thousands of citizens of Jewish ethnicity. This was a great loss for Latvia as a whole," said President Egils Levits, laying flowers at the memorial. The President also noted that

"this was one of the most heinous crimes against humanity in history, and we remember the victims of this crime." Prime Minister Krisjanis Karins also laid flowers at the memorial by the Riga Choral Synagogue. "We bow our heads to the victims and honor those who risked their lives to save their fellow citizens. We must do everything possible to ensure that such crimes never happen again," said the Prime Minister. "We cannot bring back the lives of people who were mercilessly erased. But the memory of the Holocaust must be preserved, and it must be passed on from generation to generation so that it never happens again. There is no excuse for indifference and there is no statute of limitations that applies for crimes against humanity," said Inara Murniece, speaker of the Seimas. The 4th of July became an official commemorative day of mourning in Latvia more than a quarter of a century ago. The Supreme Council of Latvia adopted the corresponding law on October 3, 1990, when it had already announced its restoration of independence, but was de facto still a part of the USSR.



Leaders of the Latvian Council of Jewish Communities Dmitri Krupnikov, Arkady Suharenko, and David Kogan lay flowers at the monument to the saviors of the Jews in the Holocaust

This day is considered to be the beginning of the mass extermination of the Jews of Latvia by the Nazis who occupied the republic and by their local accomplices. It was on July 4th that the special forces of the Third Reich kick-started the pogroms in Riga, the direct perpetrators of which were local Nazi henchmen. In June 1941, about 93,000 Jews lived in Latvia. Repressions and massacres began immediately after the invasion of Latvia by Nazi Germany. The Jews were separated from their fellow citizens, expelled from their homes, imprisoned in ghettos, and completely destroyed in most of the populated areas of Latvia within six months.

A commemorative event takes place every year on the site

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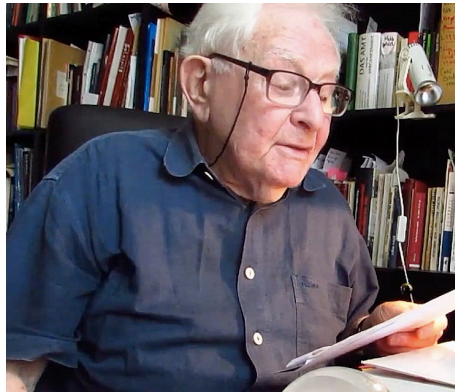
Our Memorial/Yizkor will take place on Sunday, November 21, 2021, at 12:00 Noon in Park East Synagogue, 163 East 67th Street, New York.

Guest Speaker: Andrejs Pildegovičs, Ambassador of the Republic of Latvia to the United Nations.

Guest Cantor: Joseph Malovany, Fifth Avenue Synagogue

THE FOURTH OF JULY IN RIGA (continued)

where the Great Choral Synagogue, built in 1871, was burnt on July 4, 1941, by a unit of the Latvian auxiliary police under the command of Viktor Arajš. Arajš's team, which reported to the Security Police and the German Security Service, ordered the Nazis to burn down the temple along with the people who were in it. The building was doused with gasoline and set on fire, and the Jews were not allowed to flee. On the same day, other Jewish houses of



Historian Dr. Marģers Vestermanis

worship in Riga were burned.

According to the report of Hitler's Einsatzgruppe A "firing squad," "it turned out to be much more difficult in Latvia to launch purification programs and pogroms like those attempted in Lithuania. In Riga, it became possible to launch a pogrom by making the appropriate assumptions with the Latvian auxiliary police. During the pogrom, all synagogues were burned down and about 400 Jews were killed (including those who were burned alive). Since the population decreased very quickly, it was not possible to organize further pogroms. The events in Riga were recorded on film in such a way as to prove, as much as possible, that the first unprompted executions of Jews and Communists were carried out by Latvians." Scenes of the "unprompted" massacre of the local Jewish population were shown in a Nazi propaganda newsreel in July of 1941.

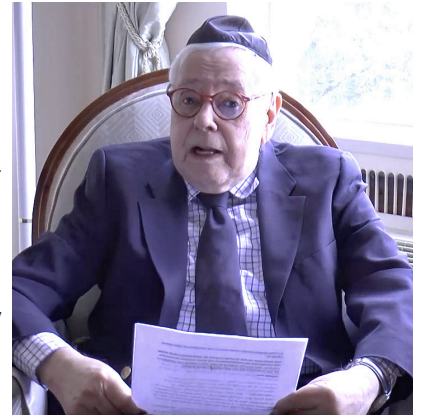
In Soviet times, the ruins of the synagogue were removed and a placard with a board of honor for production foremen

was set up on Gogol Street. In the late 1980s, excavations were carried out, and, in 1993, a memorial was erected in the form of symbolic synagogue walls. It was created with the support of the Latvian government and Jewish organizations and individuals from around the world.

* * *

Due to the ongoing quarantine measures in Latvia during the COVID pandemic, the traditional event

at the Gogol-shul memorial was not held in person. The speeches of the country's leaders, diplomats, representatives of public organizations, and former ghetto prisoners in Latvia were recorded in advance and posted on the website of the Jewish community of Latvia: jews.lv. You can find speeches there by Egil Levits (the President of Latvia), Inara Murniece (Speaker of the Seimas), Artis Pabriks (Minister of Defense), Menahem Rosensaft (Associate Executive Vice President of the World Jewish Congress), Arkady Suharenko (Chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia), ambassadors from U.S., Israel, Germany, Hungary, Austria, Greece, Elie Valk (Chairman of the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel), and Lolita Tomšone (Director of Zhanis Lipke Memorial).



Professor George Schwab

The website also contains George Schwab's and Marģers Vestermanis' speeches; these men are former prisoners of the Liepaja and Riga ghettos. We provide excerpts of them below. George Schwab, an international affairs expert and historian, stated, among other things, "The American writer William Faulkner said 'The past is never dead. Not even past.' It is in this context that I would like to mention the fact that today we commemorate those that we have loved and lost, and we celebrate those who managed to evade the greatest evil of human that has ever taken place, namely, the Holocaust." The accounts of Marģers Vestermanis, a historian and former prisoner of the Riga ghetto, about the executions of the ghetto prisoners in Rumbula were also significant: "...These atrocities were typical almost in every European country occupied by the Nazis, almost everywhere, rogues existed who were ready to help the occupation to implement the crimes. But it seems nowhere the executioner's henchmen so explicitly took pride in their bloody deeds as in our land when men—drunk and sober—again and again recollected with joy the violence they exercised. Malefactors usually try to hide their wrongdoings, but here, certain circles proudly cherished this gruesome legacy we Latvian Jews, are grateful to the reestablishing Latvia, which has dedicated a special day to commemorate our tragedy; this is the day when the flags are lowered and national leaders wholeheartedly express solidarity and compassion toward the Jewish people. This truly means a lot; nevertheless it is much too little if the murderers are still protected by the veil of anonymity. In my old man's brain, I sometimes reflect—maybe Adam and Eve would have resisted the temptation to taste the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil if they could imagine that their descendants are foolishly stubborn and arrogant enough to refuse to separate the sheep from the goats."

* * *

Other cities and towns of Latvia held events in memory of the victims of the genocide of the Jewish people.

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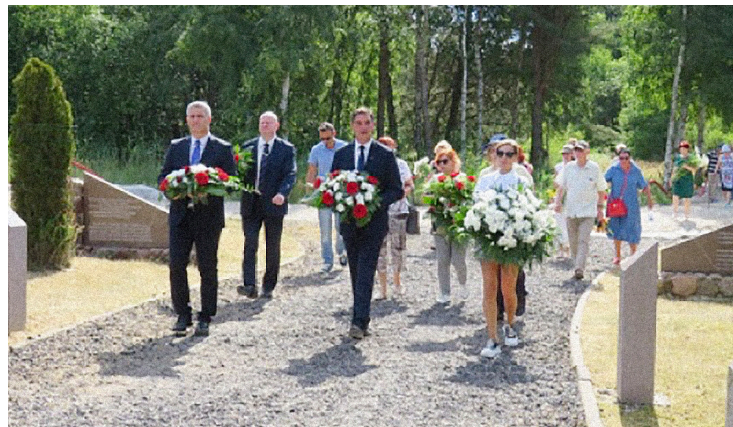
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THE FOURTH OF JULY IN RIGA (continued)



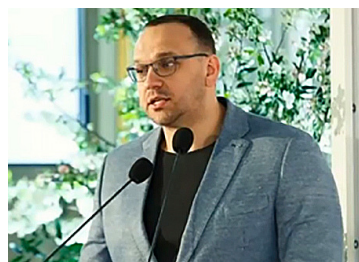
Daugavpils Jews held a memorial event at the Mezhciems memorial. Six candles were lit on a symbolic menorah made of stones at the memorial. Boris Tsipin and Samuil Glezerov recited memorial prayers. The rally ended with a minute of silence and the laying of flowers.

In Liepaja, Mayor Gunars Ansinsh, Russian Consul Dmitry Bogdanov, and Chairman of the Jewish Community Anna Petrova, along with representatives of the Jewish community, laid flowers at the memorial in Shkede, and Ilana Ivanova, the head of the open public foundation Jewish Heritage of Liepaja recalled the terrible events that took place there 80 years ago. Community member Eduard Kaplan read the Kaddish memorial prayer.



HOLOCAUST IN LATVIA: KEY POINTS

Here is the transcript of the Zoom lecture organized on March 11, 2021 by the Latvian Council of Jewish Communities.



The lecturer, Dr. Didzis Bērziņš

This is the second lecture in the series of two organized as a part of a partnership project between Claims Conference and the University of Latvia. Last week, we discussed the Holocaust: its origins, course of the events, causes, and outcomes. Today, only the word *Latvia* has been added

to the title of the lecture, but it makes the task more difficult as it typically makes the topic more personal and emotional. But we will strive for the best. I thank you for your interest and enriching discussion a week ago and look forward to the likely one today.

I have been working on this topic for about 15 years now. I should also mention that I am not a historian, but a sociologist by training. My main interest in the Holocaust thus is sociological: how we as a society come to understand this phenomenon of the Holocaust: how it is inscribed in the language we speak and in the way we act in our everyday life?

During those 15 years, I also had to learn a lot about the history of the Holocaust. And historians—although Immanuel Kant thought it was an impossible task—traditionally strive to understand the event as it actually was. Thus, today's lecture will be divided into two main parts: first, I will try to describe the events that happened here in Latvia and I will talk about the nodes in the memory of the Holocaust in Latvia. What I will call "the nodes" are connections between the language with which the Holocaust is typically or notably portrayed or discussed and the events as they are described by the historians who strive for the truth and facts.

I have stated before that my interest in the topic came from my amazement at discovering that there had been a large and culturally rich Jewish community in my hometown of Preili before World War II—of which I knew nothing about before my studies at the university. So it was a challenge I am still trying to meet, namely, to understand how such an abundant history could be destroyed and also almost cease to exist in memory. Later I learned that people of my generation and beyond commonly lacked knowledge of the Holocaust.



The announcement in the Nazi newspaper Teviija, from July 1941: "All Yids in Riga Must Register"

At the time, little interest was shown in the topic, and there was little to offer for those who were interested. After five decades under the occupation and because of the fascinating processes of memory politics (which we won't analyze today) at the beginning of the '90s, the memory infrastructure wasn't there. The memories of the genocide were in the hands of a few "saviors of the Holocaust memory" like Mārgers Vestermanis, a survivor of the Holocaust who has been working for a lifetime to save a memory of the Holocaust in Latvia.

A turning point came around the millennium. With the

HOLOCAUST IN LATVIA: KEY POINTS (continued)

strong emergence of the Western culture in its different forms, I believe at the time it was more common to recognize Oscar Schindler, celebrated in a Hollywood blockbuster rather than Žanis Lipke, a hero among us here in Latvia, a docker who selflessly and miraculously saved more than 50 Jews in Nazi-occupied Latvia. His feats now seem to be engraved in the cultural memory of Latvia as they are reflected not only in a street name and in monuments in Riga but, during the last decade, also by a wonderful museum as well as documentary and fiction movies, books, and elsewhere.

This sharp evidence of the change in the general recognition of the Holocaust was influenced by the strong emphasis on the research at the end of the '90s. Following is another example of where the Holocaust seems to have reached Latvia before the knowledge of Jewish extermination in national or regional territories. Most of us here in Latvia have some associations with the name of Anne Frank. But, just recently, people in Latvia have started to learn of Sheina Gram, a girl from Preiļi, who also wrote a diary in the days after the beginning of the Holocaust; this information is now being introduced to the public in the museum Jews in Latvia.



Memorial stone in Gostīņi at the site of the execution of fourteen Jewish children in the fall of 1941

The third and final example: the incredible story of Frida Michelson, whose life story includes survival at the notorious Rumbula killing site where 25,000 Jews were annihilated during two days by the Nazis and their collaborators. Her incredible escape was documented in Russian during the Soviet period and featured in the so-called *samizdat*. Later it was translated into English but was first published in Latvian only in 2015. So, the general information, the number of discussions, and also understanding of the Holocaust have been on the increase in the last couple of decades in Latvia.

As we move on to the aforementioned nodes between the facts and their interpretations, I would like to mention an article written in collaboration with and under the leadership of Professor Daina Eglīte of George Washington University. We wanted to understand under what circumstances and with what reasoning Latvian Jews made the decision when Nazis occupied Latvia. We made calculations, and it turned out that of those Latvian Jews who remained in Latvia after the first days of Nazi occupation around 1% survived. So, looking at these possible decisions with today's eye, it seems that escaping at

all costs had to be the obvious choice. What information did Jews have at the time, what were their options, restrictions, and expectations? This is where it gets complicated. Clearly, it is very difficult to answer this question unequivocally.



The first monument in Rumbula, established by Jewish activists in 1964

What becomes obvious that our current viewpoint won't be productive, because we should bear in mind that people had access to rather different information. More so, it is rather difficult to talk of Latvian Jews as a single, uniform group. Latvian Jews in the interwar period were as diverse as one may imagine, they were split by their cultural backgrounds (East and West from the Latvian viewpoint), areas of residence (Kurzeme, Vidzeme, Latgale), as well as language or languages they spoke (Yiddish, Hebrew, German, Russian, Latvian), and the culture.

For long it was generally accepted that the meeting at the Wannsee on January 20, 1942, was a pivotal point in the course of the Holocaust. In many respects, that meeting was the final and decisive move to systematic, industrial extermination of Jews. At the same time in Latvia, the targeted extermination of Jews began immediately with the Nazi invasion of this territory from July 1, 1941.

A half-year later at the time when Nazi leadership met at the Wannsee, the Holocaust, the killing of the Latvian Jewish community was already under way. It was cruel and unthinkable, but a reality. Out of 93,479 Jews who, according to the census, resided in Latvia in 1935, no more than a few thousand were at the time of the Wannsee conference.

We know that a lot had already happened in Latvia by the time Wannsee conference took place. We should go back at least a year earlier when the Soviet occupation and with it the terror and hardships of the Soviet occupation began on June 17, 1940. For today's topic of huge importance is the fact that Nazi occupation began just about two weeks after the event that, for obvious reasons, became a symbol of the year of merciless Soviet terror: the deportation of more than 15,400 Latvian citizens to Siberia on June 14, 1941. No doubt, that after these events a significant part of the Latvian population perceived the Nazi occupation as possibly a lesser evil.

What else needs to be taken into account is the awareness of the events at the time: the information available and in use. It is clear that at the time Nazis invaded the Latvia, sufficient information and knowledge was available about the current politics, anti-Semitic actions, repressions, construction of the first concentrations camps, and other events in Nazi-controlled Germany. Important to note: at the time of the Nazi invasion,

HOLOCAUST IN LATVIA: KEY POINTS (continued)

the Holocaust as a focused and total genocide was yet to begin, with mass executions yet to start. We know this now, at the time people couldn't know that. As cruel as the Nazi regime was after they seized power in Germany and abroad from 1933 onwards, in the first part of 1941, it still took a lot of imagining to conceive of an attempt to kill all the Jews of Europe would become a reality.



Monument at the site of the execution of Jews in Preiļi

The Holocaust's sudden, cruel, and tragic reality manifested as soon as the Nazis invaded the territories controlled by the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. A week later, the Nazis took control of Riga. Significantly, on that day, July 1, 1941, the state of Latvia existed no more, and, during the year of the Soviet occupation, a possibility of resistance was initially destroyed. This includes the destruction of what we call the elite: those who write, think, and have knowledge to impart, and to guide a nation. They were among deportees to Siberia two weeks earlier. Ruminating on these events, it becomes less of a surprise that many people in Latvia considered Nazis to be a lesser evil or even some sort of liberators.

One more important circumstance. What Latvia experienced during the Nazi occupation was, at the time, as harsh as those policies were, degrading, oppressive, repressive, and genocidal, these were decisions made at war, during the war. Latvia never experienced the systematic and structural remake according to Nazi plans. Nazis did not achieve the realization of their further middle- or long-term plans. We lived under Soviet rule for almost half a decade. However, Nazi those plans obviously included further Aryanization.

For the Nazis, ethnic Latvians were a higher category in their rankings of racial quality than were the Jews, approximately a third of people in occupied areas of Latvia were envisioned as potential Aryans. Obviously far from the ranks of a truly Aryan German. We probably can envision the possible fate for the other two-thirds—which probably would range somewhere between inevitable death to a milder or harsher condition of enslavement somewhere in the East. So, some illusions about the Nazi regime remained due to historical circumstances, especially the horrifying reign of Soviet terror in the previous years, but also because of the delayed implementation of the Nazis' plans.

The Holocaust in Latvia is characterized by three somewhat overlapping periods. The first was when the Einsatzgruppen SD and collaborators raged in the provinces (a vivid example is the actions of Mārtiņš Vagulāns in Jelgava)—July and August 1941.

In most provinces, Jews were completely exterminated in two months, about 30,000 people perished during that short period. They were arrested by the local groups of collaborators, then killed in the nearby territories either by the special groups from Germany, Latvian collaborator units like the infamous Arājs Kommando, or by the local collaborators themselves. The killings were mainly done by the Arājs Kommando, but the local population participated everywhere and in every aspect: from killings to the theft of belongings of the dead.

During this period in Latvian provinces, every Jew was arrested, collected in groups, and killed in the forest outside the town or city. Groups comprised of families in the smaller towns to hundreds of people in the bigger cities. There were areas where Jews didn't reside during that period, there were places where a few Jewish families lived among other Latvians, in some towns Jews comprised a significant minority—diverse minority comprising one-tenth of the population of Riga. But there were also towns (typically in Latgale, in the former Vitebsk Governance under the Russian Empire, which included the pale of settlement where, although they lived under conditions of discrimination, throughout history Jews had been allowed to settle and live).

In some of those places, Jews made up a quarter, a third, or even half of the population; my hometown Preiļi was one. In all of those places the Jews were annihilated, all of them, in a similar manner. The Holocaust in Latvia took place under the guidance and leadership of the Germans. No doubt it was a Nazi plan, but the victims typically saw Latvians as their repressors and killers. And many Jewish victims not only saw Latvians as their factual oppressors and killers, they also saw the rage in many of those people. They were far from the majority of Latvians, the majority looked on in a combination of disbelief, animosity, fear, shame, disinterest, and disgust.

There were only a few individuals who were able to act according to the highest principle of six stages of moral reasoning developed by Lawrence Kohlberg. Namely, when "moral reasoning is based on abstract reasoning using universal ethical principles and include a commitment to disobey unjust laws." Under such type of moral reasoning, according to Immanuel Kant, decisions are made in an absolute way, under universal principles, guided by the morality that is universal and supersedes that of a group or society. As witnessed during the Holocaust, only a few—a tiny minority—were capable of that. But, still, there were some, and we should not forget that.

The second period is the period of ghettoization. When the Jews of the Latvian provinces were annihilated, much of the Jewish population was still residing in the three biggest cities: Riga, Daugavpils, and Liepāja. During the months of August to October, there was an ongoing debate among the Nazis about the course of further action in what they had framed as the "Jewish Question." On the one hand, the civil administration held a position that the Jews should be used economically as a slave-like labor force; on the other, the leaders of so-called power structures—the killing squads—suggested killing Jews as soon as possible.

**By Dr. sc. comm. Didzis Bērziņš,
Leading researcher of the Institute
of Philosophy and Sociology at L.U.
To be concluded in the next issue**

PROFESSOR GEORGE SCHWAB'S MEMOIRS HAVE BEEN RELEASED

Odyssey of a Child Survivor: From Latvia through the Camps to the United States is the much-anticipated book by George David Schwab, one of the founders of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia. It was published earlier this year, receiving rave reviews.

As I glance at my 11-year-old grandson Bez peacefully sleeping in his bed in New Jersey, I cannot help but think about the horrors that the 11-year-old George Schwab endured during World War II and the Holocaust in Latvia. How could such a young child survive, persevere, and maintain hope?

As someone who was born in Latvia in the 1950s in the seemingly peaceful period following the war, reading this book was a life-changing experience. Honestly, I simply could not put this book down. Emotions were overflowing, taking over me in the most unexplainable ways. From joy to sadness, from wonder to heartache. Many times I had to hold back tears. The affection with which George Schwab endearingly calls his parents "papinka and maminka" was reminiscent of what I called my own parents—"papulenska and mamulenska." This book must be read by everyone who holds dear the memory of departed loved ones on whose shoulders we stand today. For me, personally, it has become my quest to pass the torch of our shared Jewish history from generation to generation. These stories must be taught in schools so that such crimes against humanity never repeat themselves.

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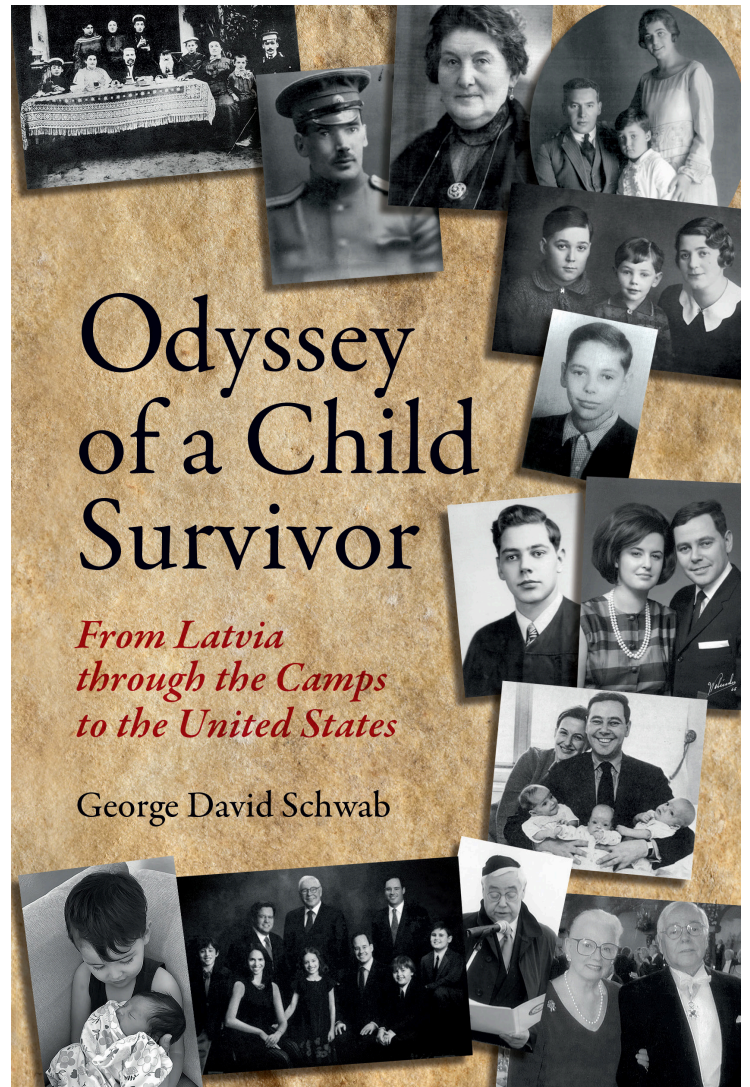
The following is a description from Amazon, where the book is available for purchase:

George David Schwab's life began as a sheltered child leading a charmed and comfortable life in the 1930s. He vividly recreates his childhood in pre-war Latvia, providing detailed memories of an extended, accomplished, and adventurous family of aunts, uncles, and cousins, alongside delightful descriptions of outings, with a child's view of joyful cafés, tennis clubs, and swimming in the bracing waters of the Baltic Sea.

The 1940s brought World War II and the Soviet occupation of Latvia, followed by the Nazis. George relays his family's terror and grief when his father, a well-known gastroenterologist, who was the first to introduce insulin to Latvia, is murdered by the Nazis. George, his mother (a professional cellist), and his older brother are shipped with other Latvian Jews to German concentration and work camps in cattle cars. George gives an intimate view of his experiences: separation, death, despair, cold, and hunger—with only one constant: terror.

Reunited with his mother at the end of the war, they immigrate to the United States of America where relatives welcome them with open arms. Reestablishing their lives in a new country, George attends high school, lifeguards at Coney Island, develops a deepening awareness of Jewish culture and what it means to be Jewish, becomes involved with the Stern Gang, and begins his studies at City College of New York.

Academic intrigue and politics swirl around his graduate studies at Columbia, culminating in the rejection of his Ph.D. thesis on the controversial German constitutional lawyer and political and legal theorist Carl Schmitt. Ultimately, George triumphs academically with his second dissertation on neutral



countries and nuclear weapons.

Marriage, fatherhood (triplet boys!), family life, career, and an association with Hans Morgenthau and the National Committee on American Foreign Policy fill the years. In the early 1980s, after the death of Morgenthau, George takes over the intellectual leadership of the National Committee. He recounts the Committee's influence and involvement with many diplomatic initiatives, including the brokering of peace in Northern Ireland.

Finally, after many years, George capitulates to Elie Wiesel's insistence that it is his duty to write his memoirs. *Odyssey of a Child Survivor: From Latvia through the Camps to the United States* is George David Schwab's moving testimony to the Holocaust and the story of rebuilding his life after the horrors he endured.

* * *

This book is a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the power of perseverance. Even more impressive, it's the story of a man who was able to rebuild his life with joy, humor, and warmth in a new country and who was not left embittered by his past. This elegant memoir will leave you inspired and full of hope for what's possible when one does not give up.

By Aelita Fitingof

JACOB DAVIS: TAILOR, INVENTOR OF JEANS

In the fall of 2010 we began to compile articles about outstanding Jews from Latvia to be included in the Latvian Jewish Encyclopedia, planned for publishing by the Shamir society in Riga. The following is an article prepared for the aforementioned volume.



*Jacob Davis,
inventor of blue jeans*

Davis, Jacob, (born Jacob Youphes; 1832-1908) was born and raised in Riga, where he worked as a tailor. In 1854, he immigrated to America and, upon arrival in New York, changed his name from Youphes to Davis, which he believed to be more American. In pursuit of the American Dream he tried many jobs in different ends of America and Canada: mining gold in British Columbia, working in a brewery, and owning a tobacco shop. In

1869, he opened his own tailoring business in Reno, Nevada, where he produced coverings for vehicles, awnings, body coverings for horses, and, later, work clothes, utilizing the tough fabric used by Levi Strauss and Co. in San Francisco.

One day, a woman placed an order for strong trousers for her very heavy husband who always carried tools in his pockets. To deliver on this special order, Davis got canvas and, while tailoring it, found that thread alone did not always adequately hold the pockets onto work pants. He decided to use copper rivets on the pockets, which were usually used for horse coverings, thus increasing the material's durability. By the end of 1870, Davis had sewn the first pair of jeans (also known as dungarees, also known as Levi's). Davis sold the trousers for \$3.00; in the next month he made four more pairs, then 10 pairs in February. Very soon he understood that he must obtain a patent. He wrote a letter to the supplier of fabric, which was owned by Levi Strauss and Co., asking him to pay for the patent application (\$68.00), and in return he could be credited as co-creator on the patent. Levi Strauss not only immediately agreed, but also invited Davis to organize a factory within the company to sew the jeans; up until that time Strauss had only supplied the fabric. In April of 1873, Davis and his family arrived in San Francisco and began manufacture; on May 20, 1873, the Patent Office issued patent № 139121 on a new fabric and a new method of making clothes under the names of Davis and Levi Strauss and Co. Davis remained with Strauss for the rest of his career, eventually taking over shirt production lines as well as pants, and he continued to



supervise the Levi Strauss factory until his death in 1908.

The Strauss's bought the highly sought after fabric from the Amoskeag Mill in New Hampshire. For its production, cheap cotton was delivered from the South. However, researchers have found that the production process for this fabric was invented in France in the city of Nimes—hence the name Serge de Nimes, or “denim.” The origin of the term “jeans” (previously called riveted “waist overalls”) is unclear. However, there is a theory that traces the origin of the term to the Italian city of Genoa, where the Serge de Nimes was painted in its well-known blue. When the blue fabric was being exported from Genoa, the shipment boxes were labeled with the word “Genes,” later transformed into the English word, “jeans.”

By 1890, the company began to number its products, and, since then, the number 501, which corresponded to the pants with rivets, has been recognized as one of the most popular references in the world. The name “Levi's” was not made up by the company; it emerged as the convenient name that consumers used to refer to the product. The company immediately

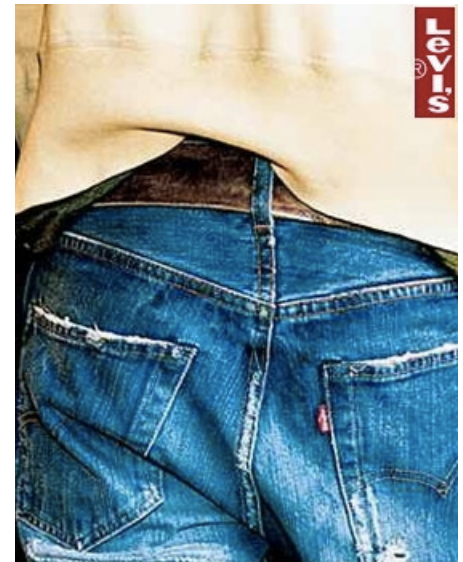
registered this name as the trademark. Accordingly, the name of the real founder, Jacob Davis, has been forgotten over the years, particularly after the loss of archives during the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. This injustice was eliminated in 1992 by the diligence of professional archivists and historians who were invited by the company to process the remaining records and hundred-year-old materials in order to write the authentic history of jeans.

Today, no item of clothing is more quintessentially American than blue jeans and at least half of Americans prefer them as their daily casual wear.

**By Ivar Brod
Translated by Alan Solovey**



The label patched on above the right back pocket of every pair of Levi's 501 jeans



An advertisement for Levi's classic jeans

CONTRIBUTION OF LATVIAN JEWS TO THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

The Jewish community of Liepaja (Libau) is small in numbers nowadays but active. Among its activities are regular meetings through Zoom. On April 22, the guest speaker of the meeting was the Chairman of the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel, Ambassador Elie Valk. He spoke about the Jews from Latvia who contributed to creation and development of the State of Israel. Among several scores of the attendees of the Zoom session were individuals from Latvia and many others corners of the world: United States, Germany, and, of course, Israel.



Two books about the prominent Latvian Jews in the state of Israel

Ambassador Valk's presentation was based on the introduction of the book *From Latvia to the Mediterranean* (Parts 1 and 2), published by his Association. Both describe prominent Jews from Latvia whose contributions are known to many Israelis, but few are aware that they came from Latvia. Each biography is published in English, Hebrew, and Latvian. These persons (29 in Part 1 and 40 in Part 2) contributed in many different fields: intelligence, military, science, culture, religion, sports, and more. Amb. Valk selected specific individuals and provided details of their remarkable biographies—choosing mainly those who

came to Palestine from Libau or were born there. Among them were Aharon Yariv—military intelligence master and politician; Gabriel and Maxim Shamir—graphic artists who designed the coat of arms of the State of Israel; Moshe Arens, who eventually served three times as Minister of Defense and once as Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as Israeli Ambassador to the U.S.; Shaul Avigur—founder of the Israeli Intelligence Community; legendary Isser Harel—founder of internal security agency, the Shin Bet, and later a head of the Mossad. Also mentioned in the presentation were the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Abraham Kook (Kuk), thinker, Kabbalist, and Torah scholar; M. Lavry—composer and conductor; E. Lurie—painter and stage and scenic designer; E. Fromchenko—the founder of the sweets factory Laima in Latvia and the Elite chocolate and sweets factory in Palestine after emigration.

The second book brings the stories of such Libauers like Harry Hurwitz—journalist and community leader, diplomat and adviser to Menachem Begin; Wolfi Traub—outstanding scientist, who was part of group that decoded the structure of DNA; Shlomo Nitzan—writer, translator and editor. Also personalities like Nehemiah Argov—who fought in the Haganah Defense Force and was one of most trusted assistants to Ben-Gurion; Gershon Rivlin—an expert on the history of the Jewish military forces and a publisher; Avram Shaanan—judge and military court prosecutor, diplomat, multifaceted intellectual.

Both books contain exceptional and remarkable information about distinguished individuals, whose names are familiar to the most of our readers, and supplied with unique and meticulously selected photographs. Part 2 is dedicated to the memory of those who started the Association in 1947.

The books can be ordered by sending the payment of \$10 for book 1 and \$14 for book 2 (including postage) to the JSL's address indicated on page 2 of this issue of the *Courier*.

THE QUEEN OF YIDDISH CABARET – AELITA

JSL board member, Aelita Fitingof Neihausen, is a second-generation Holocaust survivor who has dedicated her life on stage to preserving Jewish history and traditions. She emphasizes the importance of passing the torch from generation to generation—"if we forget the past, we have no future."

Aelita is a tireless supporter of Holocaust survivors and, throughout her career, has raised more than \$7.5 million for the State of Israel. She works with Holocaust survivors primarily in the U.S., Canada, and Latvia, but also in Israel. On June 30, 2021, she was a guest on the Israeli radio program on **104.5FM**, extending her support to the nonprofit organization Yad Ezer L'Haver in Haifa—a home for more than 80 Holocaust survivors living below the poverty line. Yad Ezer L'Haver was founded 18 years ago with the mission of enabling survivors in need of assistance to live in a family-home environment, including all meals. Today the center is trying to build an elevator to support the mobility of its residents and the radio interview served as



Aelita sings

THE QUEEN OF YIDDISH CABARET — AELITA (continued)



Aelita's grandparents, killed in the Riga Ghetto

a fundraising appeal. The radio interview concluded with the moving song “Moses” that Aelita presented to Israel on its 70th birthday (written by Israeli-Latvian composer Hirsch Zilber—a joint project of Israel, Canada, and the US).

As a token of appreciation, Yad Ezer L’Haver promised to include a memorial to Aelita Fitingof’s 40 family members who

were brutally killed in the Holocaust in Latvia, including her deaf and mute grandparents Moses and Luba Fitingof. Honoring memories of the Holocaust has become family tradition—Aelita’s daughter Raphaela Neihausen made the 2017 Oscar-nominated documentary *Joe’s Violin* about 94-year-old Holocaust survivor Joseph Feingold.

During the pandemic, Aelita also gave online concerts for Holocaust survivors living in the Greater New York area and Florida. Her latest production “Songs from the Heart” takes one on a family journey spanning three continents, intertwining timeless Yiddish songs, American pop “à la Yiddish,” and Broadway favorites. It was featured as part of the great Yiddish actor Avi Hoffman’s “Yiddishkayt Initiative” Purim festival, after which it was posted to YouTube and viewed all over the world. Aelita is a recording artist with 8 albums, sung in 16 languages. Aelita is recognized among the “100 Golden Voices of History” by EuroNews.

To learn more about Aelita, you can visit aelitamusic.com.

By Bronya Shif

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE



President of the Russian Jewish Congress Yuri Kanner

On June 17, the Embassy of the Republic of Latvia in Russia, together with the Russian Jewish Congress (RJC), held an online ceremony in honor of the Latvian Righteous Among the Nations. This title was awarded by the Israeli Yad Vashem to 138 residents of Latvia. The meeting was opened by Yuri Kanner, President of the Russian Jewish Congress. The participants at the meeting were greeted by the Ambassador of the

Republic of Latvia to Russia Maris Riekstins and the Ambassador of Israel to the Russian Federation Alex Ben Zvi. The main addresses were delivered by Ilya Lensky—Director of the Jews in Latvia Museum, Maris Gailis—founder of the Zhanis Lipke Memorial and Ilana Ivanova—Director of the Liepaja Jewish Heritage Foundation, daughter of Liepaja ghetto inmates saved by the Latvian Righteous Among the Nations honorees Robert and Johanna Sedols.

Ilya Lensky made the point that the meeting is taking place just three days after another tragic date, the 80th anniversary of the deportation on June 14, 1941. He recalled that the Latvian rescuers of Jews had to act in conditions of frenzied Nazi propaganda, which persistently maintained that everything that happened in 1940-41—terror, arrests, murders, deportation—everything, they said, was carried out by Jews. Lensky also cited important statistics—work of the former prisoner of the Riga ghetto and

founder of the Jews in Latvia Museum, Marģers Vestermanis:

- Total saviors of Jews in Latvia: **658**
- Jews rescued by them: **638**, of which **338** survived
- The number of Latvian Righteous Among the Nations: **138 (recognized by Yad Vashem)**

Maris Gailis told the most interesting story of the creation of the Zhanis Lipke Memorial on the island of Kipsala in Riga; the memorial was opened in 2014, the presidents of Israel and Latvia Shimon Peres and Andris Berzins participating. The construction of the Memorial educational center is currently being planned.

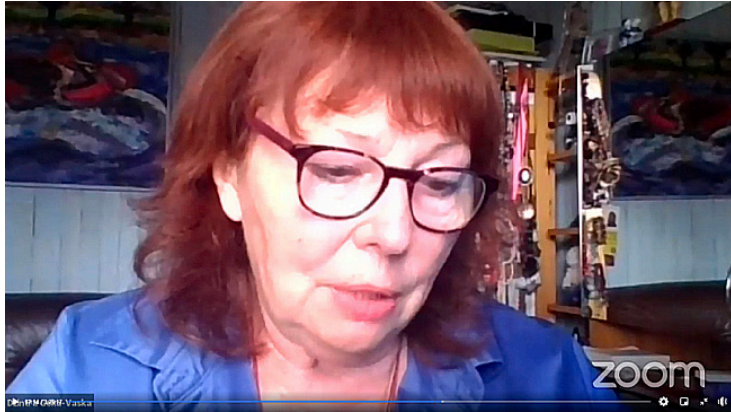
Ilana Ivanova spoke about the family of the Righteous in Liepaja, Robert and Johanna Sedols, who rescued 11 Jews, hiding them for 19 months.



Flowers by the tree at Yad Vashem in honor of Zhanis and Johanna Lipke

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)

June 14 marked the 80th anniversary of the first mass deportation in 1941, when the Soviet regime expelled 15,424 Latvian citizens. Most of the deported were Latvians, the second largest group were Jews, among the deported were also Russians, Germans, Poles, Belarusians, and others. Deported Jews numbered 1,789 people, including 350 children—1.9% of all Jews living in Latvia.



Dzintra Geka-Vaskis—researcher of deportations from Latvia to Siberia

On June 14, in memory of the victims of deportation, an event was held simultaneously throughout Latvia, during which at 11:00 a.m. each local government began to read out the names of the inhabitants of their region who were expelled in 1941. Readings from each local government were broadcast online, where a digital card was also available, where the name, age, and address of the deportees were listed.

In memory of the deported, the Jews in Latvia Museum held an online event on June 10, in which the organizers—Ilya Lensky, the Director of the Museum, and Dzintra Geka-Vaskis, Director and author of *Shalom, Siberia* (published with the support of the Uniting History Fund)—discussed the following issues with the active participation of the audience:

- What was the attitude of the Soviet regime toward Jews in the first year of the occupation?
- What was the fate of the deported Jews?
- How did the repressed Jews perceive the deportation at that time and how is it remembered today?

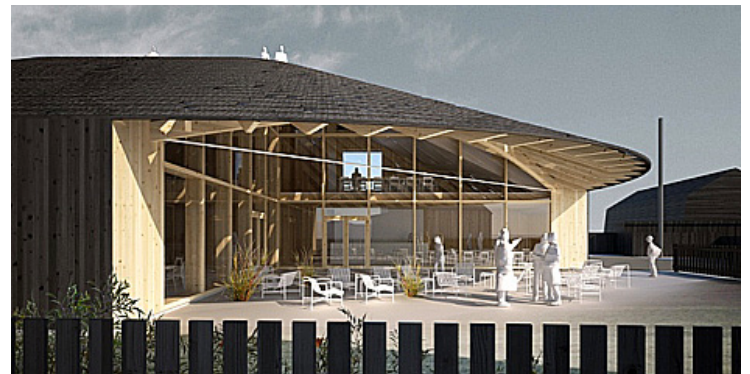
To commemorate the 80th anniversary of the tragedy of the Riga ghetto, the Max Goldin Jewish Cultural Heritage Society published the second edition of the *Riga Ghetto Songs* CD. The songs of the ghetto are evidence of the triumph of the spirit of the Jewish people, which could not be broken by the Nazis. These songs are not only a historical document, but also a phenomenon of great artistic value. Some of the songs written in the ghettos and camps were collected and published in 1947 by Johanna Spektor, a former prisoner of the Liepaja ghetto, who later became a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, as described in detail in the previous issue of the *Courier*. As part of this project, we remember Johanna Spektor and her associates—professor of the Latvian Conservatory Mendel Bash, the elders of the Riga synagogue Abram Kit,



The Riga Ghetto Songs CD

Rakhmiel Freidman, Zelik Antokol. One of the songs presented in this CD—“Without Motherland”—can be heard in the famous film by V. Molchanov, *Melodies of the Riga Ghetto*.

In May, the Zhanis Lipke Memorial and the Uniting History Fund announced the completion of fundraising for the purchase of land for the Zhanis Lipke Memorial “House of Bravery” educational center.



A model of what the “House of Bravery” will look like

Thanks to 273 donations, it was possible to raise 350,000 euros for the purchase of land and an additional 80,000 euros, which will be used to design the center. The story of the Latvian Righteous One of the Nations interested many people, often not connected with Latvia or not going deep into the study of the Holocaust. This has become another confirmation of the fact that humanity and humanness are universal values.

Significant donations for the purchase of the site were made by the founder of the Uniting History Fund Mikhail Zeligman, Russian businessman Pyotr Aven, as well as Latvian businessmen Kirov Lipman and Juris Savitskis.

The Riga Jewish community provided its platform for fundraising Tolam and thanks to this, not only prominent businessmen, but also ordinary donors could contribute – the minimum donation amount was set at 1 euro. The Uniting History Fund has doubled every amount donated through the Tolam platform.

The design concept of the future educational center was developed by the MADE architectural bureau. The center of the House of Bravery will be a multifunctional hall for lectures, conferences, and performances. The project includes several class-

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)

rooms, exhibition rooms, a terrace, and a cafe. The design work for the House of Bravery is soon to begin, followed by another fundraising campaign, this time for the construction of the center.

It is our great pleasure to congratulate our dear friend and long-term colleague, Karīna Barkane-Vincāne, Deputy Director of the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia, who has successfully defended her Ph.D. thesis, "Jewish religious life in Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, 1944-1989," and has been awarded Doctor of History degree. Barkane's thesis is a very important contribution to Latvian Jewish history research, it extensively uses a spectrum of sources and touches upon many previously obscure and under-researched episodes.



Karīna Barkane-Vincāne, Deputy Director of the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia, defending her Ph.D. thesis

The thesis focuses on the challenge that secularization and assimilation posed to the preservation of Jewish religious identity under the Soviet regime. It explores how Jewish religious congregations functioned in the post-war period. Specifically, it examines the registration process of congregations, their efforts in reclaiming synagogue buildings, and their role in the maintenance of Jewish cemeteries; it also looks at the administrative and spiritual leaders of the congregations.

We congratulate Ms. Karina Barkane and wish to have a small portion of her thesis published as an article in one of the Jewish media sources that are available to the Jewish members of Latvian community and abroad.



The artist Boris Lurie

In mid-June, an art exhibition of works by the former prisoner of the Riga ghetto Boris Lurie (1924-2008), who was deported

to Germany at the end of the war and later moved to the United States where he became a famous avant-garde artist, finally opened at the Zhanis Lipke Memorial. The introductory part of the exhibition is a series of works, "Personal Drawing," created immediately after the war and illustrating the experiences of the artist and his family during the Holocaust. A significant place in the exhibition is given to video installations that reflect the artist's memories of his visit to Riga in 1975.

Like many Holocaust survivors, Lurie was tormented by guilt about the dead. "We didn't like the dead. It was as if they



One of Boris Lurie's artworks about the Holocaust

left us with an unpaid bill for surviving. Those dead Jews pointing their fingers of blame and beckoning us to join them... Who am I?... my heart is bleeding, my home in far-away Rumbula...."

In July, Ms. Ruta Elvikis, Deputy Chief of Mission to the U.S. Embassy in Riga, visited the Zhanis Lipke Memorial and went to see an exhibition of works by Boris Lurie.

The exhibition was organized with the support of the U.S. Embassy and the Boris Lurie Art Foundation.

The Yorik Theater in Rezekne prepared a musical documentary performance, *My Neighbor Is a Jew*. The performance presents pictures of the life of the Jewish community in Latgale over the years, talks about traditions, culture, and historical events during the time. The performances will take place in Russian and Latvian at ten different locations in the Green Synagogue Quarter. After each performance, audience members will have the opportunity to communicate with the members of the creative team, asking them questions. The creators of the play are led by the composer J. Nimanis and the director M. Eikhe. The choir of the Rezekne Music School, the Rezekne wind orchestra, as well as members of the city's youth creative teams take part in the performance.



Advertisement for the Yorik Theater's performance of *My Neighbor is a Jew in Rezekne*

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)



Yitzhak Herzog

On June 2, the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, elected 60-year-old Yitzhak Herzog as the 11th president of the country; his immediately previous position was as the head of the Jewish agency Sokhnut. Earlier, Herzog had held ministerial positions in several Israeli governments; in 2003-2018, he was a member of the Knesset, in 2013, he was head of the center-left Labor Party and challenged Netanyahu's opponent in the parliamentary elections. The Jews of Latvia are proud that Herzog's family roots were put down in Latvian soil—his grandmother, Sarah, was born and raised in Riga.

This year, the highest state awards, according to the decree of the President of Latvia Egils Levits, in honor of the 31st anniversary of the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia (May 4), will be awarded to 118 persons who served the country and the people. Among the honorees are important people of the Jewish community: Professor Elina Vasilieva (Daugavpils, author of *Ebreju teksts latviešu literatūrā*) received the Cross of Recognition III degree, Lolita Tomšone (Director of the Zhanis Lipke Memorial) was awarded Cross of Recognition IV degree, and Maris Gailis (Chairman of the Board of the Zanis Lipke Memorial) was awarded the Order of Three Stars III degree.

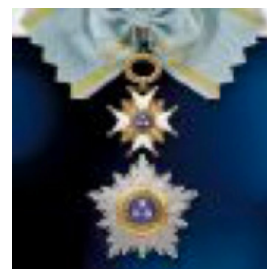


From left to right: Professor Elina Vasilieva, Lolita Tomšone, and Maris Gailis

The JSL Council heartily congratulates the honorees. The award ceremony will be held after the end of the pandemic.



Left:
The Cross of Recognition



Right:
The Order of Three Stars



LATVIJAS REPUBLIKAS SAEIMA

In the last days of June, an appeal by the deputy of the Saeima Aldis Gobzems (the Law and Order Party) appeared on Latvian social networks for people who do not want to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to attach a yellow six-pointed star to their clothing. This action is meant to demonstrate that these people are in the same situation as the Jews were under the Nazi regime—branded and expelled from society. Gobzems accompanied the post with a photo of himself with a yellow star attached to his clothes.

The Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia made a statement on this issue, noting that it considers the actions of Gobzems and his supporters to be immoral and deeply offensive to the victims of the Nazi terror, their relatives, and all residents of Latvia trying to preserve the memory of the tragedy of the Holocaust, especially considering that these posts were made on the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Holocaust in Latvia.

Everyone has the right to voice their opinion on the pandemic and vaccination. However, we urge everyone not to use unethical, thoughtless, and cheap ploys to divide society, disrespecting the memory of the Latvian citizens who died in the Holocaust and other tragedies of the 20th century.

Representatives of several parliamentary factions appealed to the Saeima Commission on Mandates, Ethics, and Statements in connection with the appeal of Deputy Gobzems. The Saeimas Commission removed Gobzems from one of the sessions for violation of four articles of deputy ethics.

Compiled by Ivar Brod
Translated by Mariya Taukule

Dear JSL members and friends,

Your membership fee and donations are vital sources of funds for our organization, including publication of the Courier and organizing meetings. These publications keep you informed of our various activities and events in Latvia.

In the future, the Courier will be sent only to those who have paid their membership dues. Annual dues are \$25.00.

Please make out your checks to the order of JSL and mail them to:
c/o David Silberman, 64-14 137th Street, Flushing, NY 11367