



The Latvian Jewish Courier

JSL's 2015 Yizkor

Every year the end of November and the beginning of December mark the time when our hearts go out to the more than 26 thousand innocent victims — Latvian Jews slaughtered by the German fascists and their Latvian collaborators in Rumbula.

On November 22, our annual Memorial was held by our JSL organization in the Park East Synagogue in memory of our

JSL's 2015 Yizkor

parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters killed in Latvia. The memorial service was opened by Gerta Feigin, a member of the JSL committee. The meeting began with the lighting of candles in memory of the six million Jews killed in the Holocaust, with one candle lit in memory of our brothers and sisters killed in the line of duty defending the state of Israel. This

thousands of years. Am Yisroel Chai.

The musical part of the meeting was led by Joseph Malovani, the Fifth Avenue Synagogue liturgical cantor and professor of liturgical music at Yeshiva University. On introducing him, Professor George Schwab emphasized Cantor Malovany's great talent and his position as the greatest contemporary cantor, with the



The candles were lit by the grandchildren of our members: **Anna** – granddaughter of Gerta Feigin, **Sara** – granddaughter of Mara Vekhnis, **Michael and Jonathan** – grandsons of Professor George Schwab, **Ilana** – granddaughter of David Silberman, **Emma** – great-granddaughter of Alexander Bergman, **Alan** – grandson of Ivar Brod.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The officers and Board of Trustees of Jewish Survivors of Latvia express their deepest gratitude for your presence and your donations at the commemoration of our annual Yizkor at the Park East Synagogue, which took place on November 22, 2015, honoring the memory of the Jews murdered in Latvia.

year, the candles were lit by the grandchildren of our members. Gerta Feigin addressed the children with these warm words: *I wish to say to you more than just thank you. By lighting the candles you assure your parents and grandparents, and all of us, that you will keep the memory of the Holocaust — the greatest tragedy in the history of the Jewish people — alive and, thereby, the rich history of our people that we can trace back*

appellation of "the synagogue Pavarotti." Before taking the stage, Cantor Malovany said: *God gave me the talent of my voice and I use it to serve him.* Cantor Malovany sang a song of the Lodz ghetto in Yiddish "Ich benk noch dem nign" (I Long for the Song). The Chief Rabbi of Park East Synagogue Arthur Shneier then gave a very impassioned speech. Since 1960, Rabbi Schneier has

continued on next page

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Gerta Feigin introduces Professor George Schwab

been one of the organizers of aid for the Jews from the former U.S.S.R. and has ensured great support for their efforts to leave that country. He related some especially interesting episodes of the Jewish movement of that time, particularly underlining the



Rabbi Arthur Schneier at the podium

work of the Latvian Jews: the construction of the Holocaust memorial at Rumbula, the place of a massacre of Jews; the "airplane story" of 1970 where the main participants were Latvian Jewish youths, and others.

The activities of the JSL in 2014–2015 were reported by David Silberman, the president of the organization. After the



Cantor Joseph Malovany sings

speech, congratulatory letters were read from Elie Valk, the chairman of the Society of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel, and from vice president of the JSL Joseph Faerber, as well as a greeting from Steven Springfield, JSL president on leave. Mitchell Lieber then gave talk and slide-show about his work on the future documentary "Rumbula's Echo."

Closing the official part of the ceremony, Cantor Malovany took the stand again. He told about his connections with Riga — his teacher was Shlomo Ravits, former cantor of a Riga synagogue and a disciple of the great Shlomo Rosovsky. Cantor Malovany also mentioned his singing in the Riga synagogue and related his appreciation for its fine acoustics — saying they were as good as Carnegie Hall. Cantor Malovany then sang with great feeling Mordehai Gebirtig's "Moishele my fraint" and then the prayers "Kaddish" and "El Mole Rachamim." The luncheon that followed was comfortable indeed. Our member, vocalist Aelita Fitingof, sang beloved Yiddish songs. Her singing was deemed by Cantor Malovany to be very beautiful and of high quality.



Vocalist Aelita Fitingof sings

In general, the attending public was very satisfied with the way the memorial meeting was conducted.

by Liuba Rakhman

DAVID SILBERMAN'S ADDRESS AT THE YIZKOR MEMORIAL SERVICE ON NOVEMBER 22, 2015

Survivors of the Holocaust,
Members of our Jewish Survivors of Latvia Organization,
Honored Guest Speaker Rabbi Arthur Schneier,
Cantor Joseph Malovany,
Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the United States, it is my privilege and honor to welcome all of you. This is the third time since 2013 that we, the younger members of the organization's Board, are conducting the Yizkor Memorial Service. The Memorial tradition dates back to the 1950s, with the founders of our organization — Max Kaufman, Steven Springfield, and other outstanding people — who miraculously survived the Holocaust in Latvia and left their indelible contribution of preserving its memory.

Unfortunately, we have lost several active, key staff members in the past several years, among them our good friend Leo Kram (*Zichrono Le'Brachah*), who passed away; Steven Springfield, who became inactive due to health issues; and Professor Gertrude Schneider, who regrettably removed herself from our organization for other reasons.

We are deeply grateful to Professor George Schwab who helped and encouraged us to continue our organization's meaningful work. George is the wise mentor and advisor in all our plans and activities—the link that connects us to traditions and practices since the JSL's founding. We wish him many years of good health as he

continues his noble work.

As in the previous years, we have focused our activities in several areas, with the main objective being to provide purpose to our organization and sustain the memory of the Holocaust in Latvia. With the support of our devoted friend, Ivar Brod, we have succeeded in compiling a full list of our active JSL members and continue to communicate with them.

Today, we have 211 active members, although only 96 of them have paid dues for this year. We consider active members those who pay dues, receive our information (including our *Courier*), purchase our publications, and attend our annual memorial services.

In the past year, we enrolled a number of new members, mostly descendants of Holocaust survivors and became a distinct public voice of the Holocaust Survivors of Latvia residing in the United States, Canada, Australia, and South Africa.

Since the last memorial service, held on November 9, 2014, we have published three issues of the *Courier*: December 2014, March/April 2015, and the last, dated September 2015, in which we covered a wide spectrum of historical information and news concerning the Jews of Latvia. In these issues, we memorialized outstanding Jewish personalities from Latvia, including victims of the Holocaust; described their professional achievements and their contributions in forming the Independent Latvian State; and wrote of their struggles against Nazis in World War II and against the Soviet anti-Semitism and distortion of Holocaust facts, and more.

We wish to acknowledge the



essential contributions of our *Courier* staff: Yefim Shteinfeld and Ivar Brod. Their efforts have brought us our new, colorful, organized newsletter, a valuable and interesting source of information for our members. Our improved editions were certainly instrumental in attracting new members to the JSL. We thank Yefim and Ivar for their marvelous job!

We also wish to express our appreciation to Gerta Feigin for her tireless activities in organizing our memorial services and holding our regular Board meetings in her home. Thank you, Gerta, for everything!

Our organization's activities have attracted a number of creative individuals. We offer our sincere gratitude to Mitchell Lieber and his Luminescence Media Group for their impressive documentary feature film series, *Rumbula's Echo*, featured in our memorial service.

We welcome and express our appreciation to my friends, the creative, talented couple — well-known singer, Aelita Fitingof, and Jack Neihausen — for actively joining us and enhancing our annual memorial services. Thank you very much Aelita and Jack!

The next point concerns our efforts in the field of restitution, our struggle for the return of the Jewish communal properties stolen by the Nazis and, later, by the Soviets, and now held by

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the Latvian government. In the last two issues of *Courier*, we detailed the situation of restitution, the position of the Latvian government, and of Latvian Jewish organizations. We anticipate that some positive steps will soon be taken by the Latvian government: the Saeima [Parliament], the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Finance Ministry of Latvia. The first five of approximately 275 properties, identified and described in our March/April 2015 *Courier*, are currently in constructive negotiation. This is a long and troubling negotiation process, but with the assistance of the U.S. government's special representative for Holocaust affairs, we look forward to a final positive outcome. We will inform our members via the *Courier* of the progress of this process.

We continue to participate in publishing several Holocaust-related historical literary works. As mentioned in our last two issues of *Courier*, the JSL supported translation and publication of Frida Michelson's book, *I Survived Rumbula*, in Latvian for wide distribution among young Latvian readers in public schools and in libraries. The first Latvian edition was 2,000 copies, creating a high awareness in the Latvian public. We are also supporting its current second printing for its high educational value for the younger generation of Latvians.

In the past year, we successfully distributed Max Kaufmann's historical book, *Churbn Lettland*, in English and Russian. Initially published in Germany in 1947 in German, it was recently translated into English, Russian, and Latvian.

We have also been instrumental in distributing Meyer Meler's

monumental works, *The Sites to Remember* and *Jewish Cemeteries* in Latvia, and devoted a special obituary tribute in our last issue of *Courier* to him; he passed away on April 25, 2015, at age 85.

We are currently sponsoring and providing technical assistance for publishing Rachel (Raya Westerman) Mazin's Holocaust recollection book, titled *My Life Journey*.

We are waiting for the publication of Katrin Reichert's book in English, *Latvia Under German Occupation: The Latvian Participation in the Holocaust*. Our organization donated \$5,000 toward the costs of its translation and printing; this figure includes personal donations from our staff members.

Our collaboration continues with the Zhanis Lipke Memorial Museum in Kipsala, Riga; the October 2013 *Courier* reviewed the museum's opening with the presidents of Israel and Latvia in attendance. In 2014, the captivating story, brilliant architecture, and fine construction garnered the museum the Kenneth Hudson Award, named for the founder of the European Museum Forum.

We have cooperated with the Zhanis Lipke Memorial Museum from its very creation and have assisted in numerous ways. My book about Zhanis Lipke, *Like a Star in Darkness*, is in its final stage of translation and publication from the original Russian into Latvian. We expect the book to be published in 2016; it should be of special interest to Latvian scientists, researchers, and the general public in its discussion of Holocaust history in Latvia.

Finally, our activities included dedicating the Holocaust memorial

monuments within Latvia and the United States. In our last *Courier*, we reported about installing a memorial model of the pre-World War II Great Liepaja Synagogue, which was destroyed during the Holocaust.

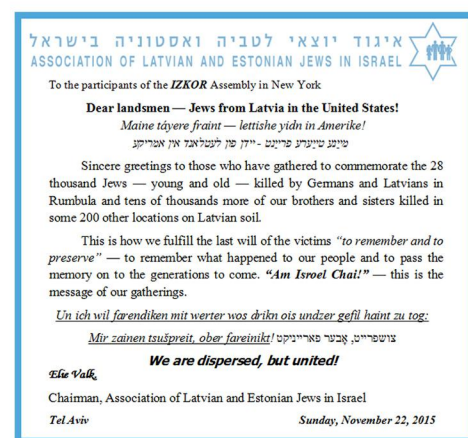
In Preili, in August 2015, a new Gateway Arch was unveiled at the entrance to the Old Jewish Cemetery in memory of the former, once-vibrant Jewish community of Preili.

Under way in Ludza, Ventspils, and in several other tragic mass shooting sites are plans for memorials with descriptions and lists of Holocaust victims.

Here in New York, we are in the final stage of arranging a memorial stone in the Sheepshead Bay Holocaust Memorial Park, Brooklyn, commemorating Jews killed in Latvia. This pursuit unites our JSL organization with numerous Holocaust survivor organizations from Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Belarus, Lithuania, and other places.

In conclusion, I wish to express my deep gratitude to all of you for attending today's annual Memorial Service, for keeping the memory of the Holocaust victims eternally alive. This is our obligation and duty.

Thank you.



Greeting from Israeli brethren

AGAIN ABOUT RESTITUTION



LATVIJAS REPUBLIKAS SAEIMA

Here we go again, ladies and gentlemen, taking a new (or fresh) look at what is happening during the endless rummaging through the mire of discussions, opinions, speeches, decisions, and non-decisions about those still-not-returned pre-war Jewish properties in Latvia.

The ruling coalition parties for many years have been doing everything in their power to postpone decisions on this matter. Despite the fact that the Green and Farmers Union and Unity have backed the proposal for restitution, the National Alliance has maintained a more “reserved” position. In January 2015, the Latvian Saeima decided to start (applause!) reviewing the proposal for return of five properties. Everything remained sluggish until Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs’s visit to the U.S. earlier this year. Then, in the middle of November 2015, Nicholas Dean, U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, arrived for the third time in Riga to discuss the issue of restitution of properties that were lost by the Latvian Jewish community during World War II and the Soviet occupation.

And — applause again — a few days after Mr. Dean’s visit, the Saeima Foreign Affairs Committee approved a bill on the restitution of the five properties for its second reading in Saeima. Of course, the National Alliance (NA) again could not refrain from attempting to put a roadblock into this process. Their representative Aleksandrs Kiršteins stated that “some properties have already been returned to the Jewish Culture Society and that issue has been resolved [in his understanding], but 15 years later

the Jewish community asks that some exceptions be made and they be given some privileges that, by the way, will result in grave disrespect toward other national groups and especially native Latvians who lost about half of them during 20th century. And who can guarantee that after several months another similar organization won’t appear demanding some ‘historically theirs’ properties? Also, the Council of Jewish Communities in Latvia has promised to create a fund similar to the one that has been created in Lithuania. According to the Vice Chairman of the Jewish Community Council Mr. Dmitry Krupnikov, ‘It will be necessary to create a special fund, one similar to the Culture Fund. The Finance Ministry shall supervise the process of disbursement of monies. During the course of ten years, the government could make deposits into this fund as a compensation for properties lost and/or non-recoverable. That money could be used for different projects and former Latvian Jews who live in other countries could participate in those projects as well, if interested.’ Therefore, NA asks not to rush with the final reading in Saeima, thus giving Jewish organizations the necessary time to create such a fund.”

Worthy endeavor, don’t you think? And precisely in synch with a mindset of many inhabitants of Latvia.

Plus, by reading articles in various media from that part of the world, one can deduce that people believe that someone in the U.S. snaps their fingers and the Saeima acts accordingly. Cynical, isn’t it? Well, maybe.

But you know, I’m also a little bit of a cynic. When we were children, we were sometimes slapped on wrist for misbehaving. Nowadays, I can’t stop myself from repeating that dreadful word “loot.” I certainly



believe that keeping loot is a significantly more serious infraction than mere misbehaving and requires consequences much more serious than a simple slap on the wrist. And I also cannot forget about that ancient rule of management that dictates a use of a certain hand tool and a vegetable.

So let’s put two and two together. For some time now, the “cynics” over there have been enjoying the part of the vegetable by keeping the loot. And the time is ripe for them to experience certain consequences when someone starts using that hand tool.

The result justifies the means. And I don’t mind whatsoever if they experience those unpleasant consequences when Mr. Dean arrives in Riga and the Saeima moves in the right direction. I’m gleefully ready to applaud when that unmistakably pleasant sound of the snap of American fingers travels across the pond and is clearly heard by those for whom it is meant.

At the end of November 2015, the new president of Latvia, Raimonds Vējonis, participated in a solemn meeting at Rumbula where he, unlike his predecessors, publicly admitted that the terrible actions during the Nazi occupation of Latvia were aided, in part, by the participation of Latvian collaborators. He also mentioned the process of restitution of Jewish properties and said (again!) that it is a move in the right direction.

All the right words. And they’re moving, and moving, and . . .

At least he sounded like a man who *understands*.

Of course, the opinion expressed herein is my own. **by Yefim Shteinfeld**

NEWS FROM LATVIA



Mourning ceremony at the Rumbula Memorial. President of Latvia, Raimonds Vējonis, speaks.

On November 29, the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia organized a mourning ceremony at the Rumbula Memorial. The highest-ranking officials of the Republic of Latvia — President Raimonds Vējonis, the Speaker of the Saeima, Ināra Mūrniece, and Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs — took part. President Vējonis emphasized in his address that victims deserve not only our prayers but also our efforts to prevent war and any other crime. We are acutely aware of this here at Rumbula, the site of a monstrous crime. We are in a place where people were betrayed and slaughtered. This was an act instigated by occupying powers. Our state had been destroyed. Regrettably, there were those amongst us who turned to evil. What they did is deplorable and must be condemned. The speakers included: Speaker of Saeima Ināra Mūrniece; Minister for Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkēvičs; Ambassador of Israel Lironne Bar Sadeh; former prisoner of Riga ghetto, historian

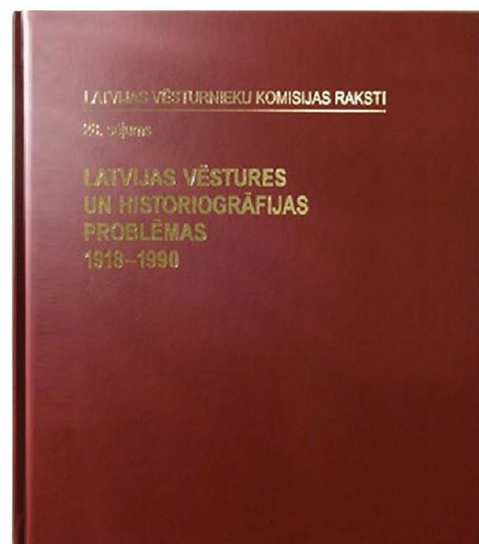
Margers Vestermanis; and vice-chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities Benjamin Kajem.

On September 7, 2015, Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs met the new Ambassador of the United States of America to Latvia, Nancy Bikoff Pettit. The Foreign Minister congratulated the Ambassador on her appointment, emphasizing the significance of strategic partnership with the United States of America for Latvia and expressing appreciation for cooperation in security policy, business, and trade. The U.S. Ambassador emphasized that the bilateral relations between Latvia and the U.S. must be deepened and developed. The Ambassador also outlined the main priorities such as cooperation on security policy and economy, including the reduction of Latvia's energy dependency, the fight against corruption, and questions related to restitution of Jewish property.

On November 12, the Ambassador of the United States in Latvia, Nancy Bikoff Pettit, visited the museum "Jews in Latvia." The museum director, Ilya Lensky, gave Ambassador Pettit a tour of the museum's exhibits and briefly described the history of the museum.



On November 10, the 28th volume of *Proceedings of Latvian Commission of Historians* was published. This volume offers two articles on Latvian Jewish history: Ineta Lipša writes on attitudes of courts toward the Riga Jews in the first months of Nazi occupation; Olga Miheloviča writes on Jewish national movement in the 1980s.



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On November 12–13, the U.S. State Department’s Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, Nicholas Dean, made an official visit to Latvia to discuss the ongoing process of restitution of Holocaust-era Jewish communal and religious properties. He met with government officials, members of Parliament, and the Latvian Jewish community. This was the Special Envoy’s third visit to Latvia.

On November 4, U.S. Ambassador Nancy Bikoff Pettit met with the Riga-born dancer, choreographer and actor Mikhail Baryshnikov after the show *Brodskis/Barišņikovs* at the New Riga Theatre on November 3. The Ambassador was incredibly impressed and said the show was an experience of a lifetime. The Ambassador was especially moved as she had also seen Joseph Brodsky give his famous commencement address at the University of Michigan in 1988.



Svētdien 6.decembrī plkst. 14.00

Žana Lipkes memoriālā
Mazā Balasta daubī 8

MAKSA GOLDINA BIEDRĪBAS
«EBREJU KULTŪRAS MANTOJUMS» PROJEKTS

KONCERTS
RĪGAS GETO DZIESMAS

EVĪJA HILMANE soprāns	VLADS ŠULMANS baritons
JURIJS SAVKINS vijole	JURIJS KASPERIS klavieres
JEKATERINA PAVLOVA klavieres	

Programmā: fragmenti no A. Maskata operas „Valentīna”, J. Spektora, M. Goldina, A. Goldfadena, A. Olsanecka, E. Vaitekra (E. Whitacre) dziesmas.

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A concert was given on December 6 at the Zhanis Lipke Memorial featuring “Songs of Riga Ghetto.” The concert was organized by the Max Goldin Jewish Culture Heritage Society. The performance included pieces from the A. Maskat opera, *Valentina*, as well as songs by M. Goldin, A. Goldfaden, A. Olshanetski, and others. Singers and musicians E. Hilmane, V. Shulman, Yu. Savkin, Yu. Kaspers, and E. Pavlova participated. They performed songs that the late Peter Springfield, a member of our organization, mentioned in his memoirs of life in the Riga ghetto: *We sang and even danced, making the most of life, despite or because of the shadow of death that hung over us at all times... We wanted to forget all our troubles and woes.*

Compiled by Ivar Brod

MY LIFE JOURNEY

The Story of Rachel (Raya Weeberman) Mazin

JSL sponsored the publishing of the English translation of the memoirs of Raya Mazin, **MY LIFE JOURNEY**. The book is available by mail.

Please write a check for \$15 (includes shipping and handling) made payable to the Jewish Survivors of Latvia, Inc., and mail to the address listed on page 2 of this issue.

M. VESTERMANIS: 90 YEAR JUBILEE

On September 18, 2015, Latvia celebrated the 90th birthday of the former prisoner of the Riga ghetto, historian and public figure, Margers Vestermanis. On this day, his many admirers, colleagues, friends, relatives and loved ones gathered in the Small Hall of the University of Latvia to mark the occasion.

The celebration began with the reading of the congratulatory message from the President of Latvia, Rajmonds Vējonis, who noted the great contributions of the patriarch of Latvian historiography to the study of the Holocaust in Latvia and in perpetuating the memory of its victims. Many people in Latvia, not just the Jews, know Margers Vestermanis — historian, an honorary doctor of the Latvian Academy of Science, the founder and curator of the museum Jews in Latvia, a member of the commission of historians in the Office of the President of Latvia, and holder of the Order of the Three Stars and the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

In his speech, Arkadij Suharenko, the Chairman of the Council of the Latvian Jewish Communities, emphasized the deepest respect he and his colleagues have for Mr. Vestermanis for his contributions to the revival of the Jewish community and his tremendous work in the preservation of history and the restoration of truth and justice. “When there are people such as you, dear Margers,” he said, “we know that we have something that can be continued. As you

know, we have a building on the street neighboring the synagogue where we plan to relocate the Jews in Latvia museum. We will definitely need your assistance with that.” The Foreign Ministry’s State Secretary Andrejs Pildegovics congratulated Mr. Vestermanis on behalf of Ministry, saying: “Your birthday, Mr. Vestermanis, is also an occasion for all of Latvia to celebrate. We are proud of you; we are proud of your humanity and your far-sightedness.” The ambassadors of Austria, Hungary, Germany, and Israel were in attendance. Representatives of the Center of the Judaic Studies at University of Latvia, Institute of Latvian History, and Latvian Occupation Museum — Aivars Stranga, Guntis Zemitis, Gunars Nagels, and Valters Nollendorfs — congratulated Mr. Vestermanis on behalf of Latvian historians. Gabriella Parasha, a representative of the Society of Former Prisoners of Ghettos and Concentration Camps, gave a very touching speech. She said, “Your name is known to each Jewish family in Latvia. I thank you on their behalf for all that you have done.” When Margers Vestermanis spoke, he began by saying that he and his wife Hava will send all the flowers from the celebration to the Rumbula cemetery. In his speech,



M. Vestermanis speaking at his jubilee.



Margers Vestermanis

he thanked all those who helped him survive after his escape from the camp.

It is not possible to name everyone who congratulated Mr. Vestermanis. Below is the letter that we sent to him on behalf of our organization.

Dear Margers,

The Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the United States extends its deeply felt congratulations on your 90th birthday. On this occasion, we also wish to honor your scholarly achievements as they relate to the dreadful past of the Jews in Latvia during the years 1941 through 1945.

But your writings are only part of it. We also marvel at the museum that you have created in Riga wherein you trace the Jewish presence in Latvia since time immemorial. The photos and their captions give all who see them an excellent overview of the contributions of Latvian Jews to the history of the country and to the rich history of the Jews in the world.

With warmest regards and love from us all.

The Board of JSL in the U.S.

ISAAK BERZ: PUBLIC FIGURE, TEACHER, ENGINEER

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.

Berz, Isaak-Abram (December 20, 1886, Riga – May 26, 1970, Riga), a teacher, an engineer, a public figure who grew up in Riga in a well-provided for, intelligent Jewish family. After graduating from commercial school in Riga, he studied from 1907 to 1914 at Petrograd Polytechnical Institute, from which he graduated with honors. Upon graduation, he was awarded the degree of metallurgical engineer of the first rank; his newly minted degree qualified him to become a member of the teaching staff. At the engineering plant in Petrograd, he worked as an engineer, then as the production director — concurrently teaching mathematics and mechanics at an evening school for adults. At the end of 1918, he moved with his family to Riga, which at that time was the capital of independent Latvia. Until the summer of 1919, he taught mathematics at the city Jewish school in Riga. During this period, Berz, an active figure in the Latvian Bund since the early 1900s, participated in organizing the Jewish secular education in the country and was the chairman of the Jewish school commission. In the fall of 1919, he became the first director and the math teacher at the First City Jewish Gymnasium.

This was one of the few state Yiddish gymnasiums in the world. At the same time in 1919, he became a member (from Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party and Bund) of the National Council of Latvia; from 1920–1922, he was the deputy of the Constituent Assembly where he worked in the commission on culture. He participated in the preparation of the law on education, which guaranteed ethnic minorities the right to study in their own languages at the public schools. Between 1922 and 1934, Berz was the deputy of the Riga City Council.



I. Berz's deputy of Satversme ID, 1920.

The Gymnasium soon became one of the most prestigious schools in Riga; for many years, it was informally called Berz's Gymnasium. However, after the overturn of the government on May 15, 1934, when the Bund was forbidden, Berz was dismissed from his position of director of the Gymnasium. He then organized a construction company and worked there.

After the Soviet army's invasion and the accession of Latvia into the U.S.S.R., Berz and his wife were arrested on June 14, 1941. Following "standard" protocol, he was accused of anti-Soviet activity and sent to Siberia. Shortly after settling with his family in Siberia, he was again arrested — in September 1942, he was sentenced to eight years in labor camps. Final release from the so-called "special settlement" came



Isaak Berz in the late 1930s.

on May 3, 1956 — long after the original sentence had expired. He was rehabilitated and received permission to return to Riga with his wife. In the following years, Berz met many times with his son, Professor Lipman Bers, a prominent American mathematician. Lipman Bers traveled from the United States to Moscow for these meetings, although officially he was coming to participate in activities of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.



I. Berz with his son Lipman, 1960.

Berz dreamed of immigrating to Israel, but died suddenly in the spring of 1970, shortly before he was to immigrate with his daughter's family, with whom he lived during his last years.

*by Ivar Brod
translated by Alan Solovey*

THE LIEPAJA JEWISH HERITAGE FOUNDATION

The Foundation's Objectives

The Liepaja Jewish Heritage Foundation ("the Foundation") is a nongovernmental organization established in 2004.

In September 2004, Jewish Survivors of Latvia, George Schwab (born in Liepaja, Vice-President of The Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the US) and Steven Springfield (President of The Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the US); patrons Selwyn and Raymond Haas (UK), Sergej Zaharjin and Ilya Segal (Latvia), and Ilana Ivanova, daughter of Liepaja Survivors David and Henne Zivcon, established an organization to support a project to commemorate the thousands of Jews of Liepaja (previously known as Libau) who were victims of the Holocaust.

The motivation for creating such a structure commemorating the Jewish heritage of Liepaja is explained in a quotation from Simon Wiesenthal:

Survival is a privilege which entails obligations. I am forever asking myself what I can do for those who have not survived.

This question of what the survivors and their descendants can do for those who did not survive is constantly in our hearts and minds and encouraged the founders to put effort into the preservation of

Liepaja's Jewish heritage — to commemorate the past and keep its memory alive today for the sake of future generations. Therefore, this major project, the "**Memorial to the Jews of Liepaja — Victims of the Holocaust 1941–1945**" was built on the killing field sand dunes of Shkede and dedicated on June 4, 2005, in the presence of the Israeli Ambassador to Latvia; government representatives of Germany, the United Kingdom, and Poland; survivors of the Holocaust and former Libau residents and their descendants.



Part of the Holocaust memorial

Present Activities

As memories of the period when the Jewish Community lived and thrived in Liepaja/Libau recede, assembling and evoking memories of the Community's heritage in the city become more and more difficult. For this reason, the Foundation's aims have expanded into research on, collection and preservation of, and dissemination of materials about and memories of Liepaja's rich Jewish past.

In recent years, the Foundation has carried out research into the destruction of the Jewish Community of Liepaja during the Holocaust. With financial assistance from the Foundation, the book *Extermination of Jews in Latvia* was published by Shamir. This volume includes a chapter relating the tragedy of Liepaja Jews written by the descendants of Liepaja survivors, Rita Bogdanova and Ilana Ivanova (Zivcon), as well as by researchers from Liepaja, Rosalia Sukhar and Eduard Kaplan.

The Foundation also assists with genealogical research and the collection of documents and reminiscences of Jewish families in pre-war Liepaja. It organizes tours for Liepaja Jewish descendants. Every year, the Foundation organizes Liepaja Jewish Heritage Limud for Jewish families as well as offering seminars with special lectures and workshops covering topics of Jewish heritage.

The Foundation maintains contact with descendants of Liepaja Jews from all over the world. Reunions of Liepaja Jewry have provided an ongoing source of information about the prewar Jewish Community in Liepaja as well

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THE LIEPAJA JEWISH HERITAGE FOUNDATION

continued from last page

as the Holocaust; we fervently hope that this will be passed down from generation to generation.

The Foundation has paid, and continues to pay, special attention to the condition and maintenance of the Jewish Cemetery and other Jewish memorial sites.

2014 Reunion of Liepaja Jewry

In July 2014, a Reunion of Liepaja Jewry was organized to commemorate:

- 10 years since the Open Public "Liepaja Jewish Heritage" Foundation was established.
- 25 years since the rebirth of the Liepaja Jewish Community.
- 215 years since the founding of the Liepaja Jewish Community.

Between July 7 and 10, 2014, 50 participants, survivors, and their descendants from 14 countries took part in the World Reunion of Liepaja Jewry.

To commemorate these important anniversaries, the Foundation carried out the following special projects:

- The Alley of the Righteous among the Nations was landscaped in Shkede (Šķēde) and dedicated on July 9, 2014, in the presence of the Israeli Ambassador to Latvia, representatives of the diplomatic corps in Latvia, state institutions and the President

of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia.



The Alley of the Righteous

- On July 8, 2014, a model of the Liepaja Great Choral Synagogue on a memorial plinth was dedicated at Kurshu Street 11/13 where the synagogue was located before World War II.



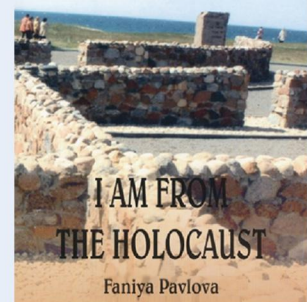
Opening of the model of the Great Choral Synagogue on July 8, 2014

- A series of talks was given on July 8, 2014, with presentations by Prof. George Schwab, Prof. Leo Dribin, Dr. Gregory Smirin, and genealogist Rita Bogdanova; they presented papers on Liepaja's Jewish heritage.

One unforgettable and unexpected moment occurred when Ethel Davis from Australia was presenting her book *Latvia's Haunting Secrets*. A pre-war photograph of a group of young men was projected on the screen much to the astonishment of Ruth Bushoff (née Papiermeister)

who exclaimed that one of the young men in the photograph was her father. This unexpected coincidence opened a new page not only in the history of those families but also in the history of the Liepaja Jewish Community. Prof. L. Dribin immediately provided some background to the picture.

- The memoirs of concentration camp survivor Fanny Pavlova (née Genton) entitled *I'm from the Holocaust* in Latvian and English, published in Latvian and English by the Foundation, was also presented at the conference.



F. Pavlova's book

- Major improvements were carried out to the Jewish Cemetery (including a special information board and signposts by sector) as well as renovation of old gravestones. This renovation project is a continuous work in progress. More and more descendants of Libauers visit the town of their ancestors, search for grave locations, and support restoration.

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Visiting restored graves in the Jewish Cemetery

Liepaja Jewish Community

Throughout the years, the Foundation has supported, and continues to support, both financially and practically, the Liepaja Jewish Community, which has its own elected Board of Officials, in its social, educational, and cultural projects and programs.

Future Objectives and Projects

1. Publications: To promote Liepaja's prewar Jewish Community, the Foundation supports translations and publications such as:

- Latvian and Russian translation of and publication of the book, *A Town Named Libau*, with the inclusion of photographs of prewar Liepaja.
- Latvian and Russian translation of and publication of a chapter of *La mort des Juifs* (The Death of the Jews) by the French historian Nadine Fresco — a book analyzing photographs of the extermination of Libau Jews in December 1941.

2. Every year increasing numbers of descendants of Liepaja Jews visit Liepaja either to start to or continue to research the history of their family before World War II. The Foundation offers support to these visiting

THE LIEPAJA JEWISH HERITAGE FOUNDATION

continued from last page

guests, providing them with information available here in Liepaja and assisting them with research in the Latvian State Historical Archives in Riga.

It is known that immigration through Libau developed from 1880 onwards with the construction of a modern harbor in 1868 and after the Russian railway network had been laid down (for example, the Kovno-Libau line). The total number of emigrants up to 1914 remains unclear, although it was perhaps as high as 500,000. This would imply that millions of descendants of these emigrants live abroad today, mainly in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, South Africa, and even Argentina. Emigrants originated mostly from the western region of the czarist empire and included a high proportion of Jews. (One visitor to the Liepaja Jewish Heritage Foundation proposed organizing a cruise ship from New York to Liepaja to encourage descendants of families that once immigrated to the United States to visit Liepaja. He even checked to see if the port of Liepaja is deep enough to host such large ships!).

3. The Foundation appreciates visits by any descendants of Liepaja Jews, not least because they provide new information for the rich tapestry that is the history

of Jewish Liepaja, as well as extending ties with former compatriots and their descendants.

4. Annual visits by our founders and major donors, the Haas family and George Schwab and Sheila Johnson Robbins are of special importance to the Foundation. Meeting with Foundation Board members and other founders allows participants to analyze annually what has been achieved and establish priorities for the future.



The Foundation's meeting is presided by Professor G. Schwab and I. Ivanova

They always visit the Liepaja Jewish Community, meet its members, and participate in discussions and a second seder on Shabbath. In 2015, George Schwab met with another Liepaja survivor, Fanni Pavlova (née Genton) — reminiscing and recalling many special memories.

On behalf of the Liepaja Jewish Heritage Foundation, individuals and their families are invited to visit and discover the small but beautiful city of Liepaja and help to contribute more pieces to the rich tapestry of Jewish Liepaja.

by Ilana Ivanova, Director
www.liepajajewishheritage.lv