



The Latvian Jewish Courier

JSL's 2019 YIZKOR



Board member Mitchell Lieber opened the meeting

The annual meeting of JSL members was held, as it was in previous years, at the Park East Synagogue on November 17. We dedicated it to the seventy-eighth anniversary of the mass execution of more than 25,000 Jews in Rumbula, the place which has since held our eternal grief. Joseph Farber, the vice president of JSL, who led our meetings in many of the past years, was not able to attend. So, this time the meeting was led by JSL board member Mitchell Lieber. As always, our meeting began with the lighting of six candles in memory of the six million Jews killed during the Holocaust. Six JSL members, children of the organization's board members, lit the candles:

- Charles Springfield, son of late JSL President Steven Springfield,
- Shulamit Rishik, daughter of Gerta Feigin,
- Clarence Schwab, son of George Schwab,
- Ruth Minkin, daughter of Ivar Brod,
- Raphaela Neihausen, daughter of Aelita Fitingof,
- Emil Silberman, son of David Silberman.

The seventh candle was lit in memory of our brothers and sisters who died in the struggle for the independence of Israel, and as a sign of our solidarity with the state of Israel. It was lit by lawyer Alexandra Levin, which she did together with her sons Aaron and Yakov. The music for our meeting was compiled and led by the world-famous Cantor Joseph



The meeting was attended by nearly 150 people

Malovany. He preceded his performance with a story of the mentor he had while studying in Tel Aviv. Cantor Shlomo Ravitz, who, according to Malovany, was the main cantor of the famous Choral Synagogue in Riga in the late 1910s and early 1920s composed a prayer song in Riga in those years titled *Slihot from Penetration*. It was with this prayer that Cantor Malovany began his program, accompanying himself on the piano.



World-famous cantor Joseph Malovany not only regaled us with his singing, but also shared his memories of his mentor, the former main cantor of the Choral Synagogue in Riga

Afterward, Professor George Schwab read JSL President David Silberman's statement. David Silberman was in Riga to receive Latvia's highest award, the Order of the Three Stars. (See page 4 of this issue of the *Courier*). The next presenter was our honored guest speaker, Mr. Gideon Taylor, chair of Operations of the World Jewish Restitution Organization. He began his speech by commemorating those who died in the Holocaust, noting that nothing can compensate for their lives. "We are talking about restitution," he said, "as a symbolic act that is important primarily in the sense of restoring historical justice." Mr. Taylor recalled the

"Truth about the Holocaust and Stalinist Repression" meeting will take place on Wednesday, January 29, 2020, at 6:30 PM, at Bergen Community College Tech Hall (TEC-128, 400 Paramus Road, Paramus, NJ). Lolita Tomson, director of the Zhanis Lipke Museum in Riga, and Maruta Plivda, the Preili district mayor, will be participating, among others. All are welcome to attend.

JSL's 2019 YIZKOR (continued)



Gideon Taylor, Chair of operations of WJRO, shared with us the problems of obtaining restitution for seized Jewish property

2009 Terezin Restitution Conference, which was attended by the leaders of 47 countries who signed the declaration on the procedure for the return of Jewish property seized by the Nazis. U.S. President Donald Trump signed Bill 447 named "The Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today" (JUST) in May 2018. According to the bill, the U.S. State Department must report to the president this coming December on the progress signatory states, including Latvia, have made toward restitution. Mr. Taylor's address was followed by the very emotional speech of Charles Springfield (see on the page 6). After a brief report on the progress of the film "Echo of Rumbula," Mr. Lieber read out the names of Latvian Jews, and JSL members who died last year: **Gerta Feigin, Boris Rakhman, Shana Posvolsky, Ilan Maylitsev, Lazar Lekuch, Michel Fitingof, Steve Gelvan, Roza Nimerovsky, Rosalia Dumesh, and Morduch Khagi.** Cantor Malovany recited the prayers "El Mole Rachamim" and "Kaddish." Afterwards, Stanley Zir, founder of Never Again, spoke about the forthcoming English edition

of David Silberman's book, *And You Saw It*. Next, the project manager of the Riga Ghetto and Holocaust Museum in Latvia, Vita Shaldova, spoke about the activities of the Shamir Society in Riga. According to Ms. Shaldova, the Shamir Association was established in Riga in 2004 and their initial activity was in publishing. Of the dozens of publications on Jewish topics and the Holocaust in Latvia, the publication of the beautiful album

Latvia: Synagogues and Rabbis was of particular note. This was followed by educational projects for teachers and Jewish children, including holding regular trips to Israel, Yad Vashem with the Ministry of Education, and organizing concerts and exhibitions, of which the annual July 4 marches "Steps of the Living" became increasingly popular. For many years, cultural festivals have been held, and since 2011, international conferences of Holocaust museums' staff have been regularly organized with more than 100 representatives from many countries. Additionally, of course, the main brainchild of the Shamir Association was the opening of the Riga Ghetto and Holocaust Museum in Latvia in October 2010. Ms. Shaldova especially noted the many years of work it took to prepare a special project—the latest issue of the Latvian Jewish Encyclopedia—which is now scheduled for release in electronic format. Julia Tereshchenko, executive director of the Riga Ghetto Museum and a colleague of Ms. Shaldova, presented "Cultural Bridges," which was received with great interest. Nineteen posters tell the story very briefly but very expressively about the life of the Jewish community in Latvia since its inception, and especially in the last century. After Ms. Tereshchenko's presentation, many of the meeting participants examined the posters with great interest. Among them were "Jews in the building of an Independent Latvia," "Jews in Latvian Culture," "Jews in Latvian Sport," "World War II and Nazi Occupation." This presentation is also scheduled to be shown in Jewish communities in other cities in America and Europe. At the end of the official part of the program, a video presentation, called "Moses," was shown by Aelita Fitingof.

By Bronya Shif, translated by Eva Minkin

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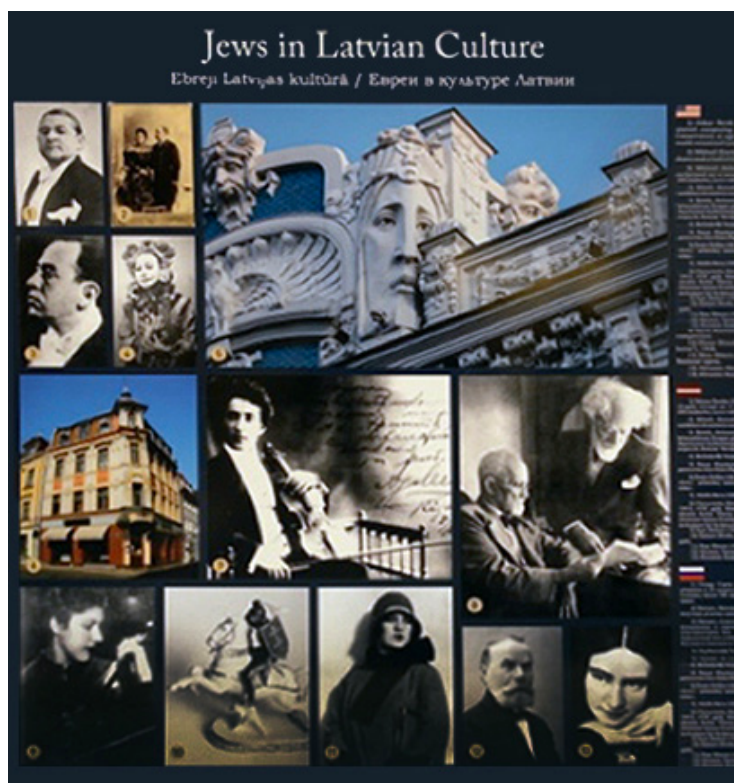
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"Jews in Latvian Culture"—one of nineteen posters made for the "Cultural Bridges" presentation

LATVIA HONORS THE MEMORY OF JEWS MURDERED ON NOVEMBER 30 AND DECEMBER 8, 1941 IN RUMBULA



At the ceremony in Rumbula

Seventy-eight years ago, during the Nazi occupation, 25,000 Latvian Jews were killed in the Rumbula Forest. On Friday, November 29, 2019, the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia held a remembrance meeting in Rumbula for the largest mass murder in Latvian history. Representatives of the Embassy of Israel, deputies of the Saeima, public figures, politicians, and ordinary Riga residents came to honor the memory of the thousands of victims of the Nazis. The ceremony was attended by the new U.S. Ambassador to Latvia, John Carwile, as well as ambassadors from other nations.

Minister of Defense Artis Pabriks addressed the audience with an emotional speech. He regretted that, during the Second World War, Latvia was not able to protect all of its inhabitants. He also promised that "from now on, the state will protect them all."

Students of the Shimon Dubnov Riga Jewish School read poetry and lit candles. Vice Speaker of the Saeima Dagmara

Beitnere-Le Galla, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia Dmitry Krupnikov, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Israel Adi Ophir Maoz addressed the audience. The memorial prayer was delivered by the Rabbi of the Riga Synagogue Eliyohu Krumer. The Director of the Jews in Latvia Museum Ilya Lensky conducted the ceremony.

On November 30 at the Freedom Monument in Riga, for the fourth year in a row, a mourning ceremony was held in memory of the seventy-eighth anniversary of the largest massacre of civilians in the history of Latvia – inhabitants of the Riga Ghetto. The day before in a radio address, Lolita Tomsons, the event's organizer, coordinator of the civil initiative "Rumbula-78. We Remember. It Hurts Us." and director of the Zhanis Lipke Memorial, appealed to people to participate in this action.

"These people were neighbors, classmates, fellow students of our grandparents, they were part of Latvia, they fought for the independence of Latvia. We are responsible for maintaining the memory of these people who were part of Latvia. Living here, they have done a lot with their labor for the development of a young state, celebrating its centenary this year," she said.

At the ceremony, thousands of candles were lit in memory of the victims of the Holocaust. President Egils Levits of Latvia also arrived to pay tribute to the memory of thousands of exterminated Jews. "There must be a place in our historical memory for this event so that we can draw conclusions for ourselves today," he said.

For the third year in a row, the citizens of Rujiena came to their city's Freedom Monument to honor the memory of the dead. In Cesis, the first commemorative event was held on November 30. There, in addition to local residents, representatives of the embassies of Israel and Germany were in attendance, along with the Chairman of the Cesis Regional Council Janis Rozenbergs, and the Director of the Jews in Latvia Museum Ilya Lensky.

By Bronya Shif, translated by Eva Minkin



At the Freedom Monument in Riga on the evening of November 30. Margers Westermanis, the oldest of the former ghetto prisoners, can be seen in the left corner

JSL ANNUAL BOARD REPORT FOR 2019



Professor George Schwab reads the JSL board report prepared by David Silberman

Fellow Holocaust Survivors,
Members of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the U.S.,
Honored Guest Speaker Gideon Taylor,
Cantor Joseph Malovany,
Honored Guests,

Since I am in Latvia today about to receive Latvia's highest honor, The Order of the Three Stars, I have asked Professor Schwab, a founder of our organization, to read my remarks about the year that has passed.

I am honored to receive the award and pained that I cannot be with you. The Order is presented to an individual for meritorious service to Latvia. In my case, I assume, I am being honored for the leadership role I have played and continue to play in commemorating Jews who have played a material role in furthering Latvia's standing in the world, the terribly sorry years of the Holocaust, and fostering the rebirth of the Jewish community in Latvia, the United States, and elsewhere.

On behalf of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the United States, it is my privilege and honor to welcome you to our annual gathering to commemorate the tragedy that befell the Jews in Latvia and beyond.

In regard to this year's Memorial meeting, I would like to remind you that today, in 2019, is the thirty-fifth anniversary of our organization's establishment in 1984 by Max Kaufman, Steven Springfield, and Professors Howard Adelson, George Schwab, Gertrude Schneider, and Leo Kram. Without their devotion to commemorating the dismal years of the Holocaust, our organization would not be as vibrant as it now is.

Unfortunately, we have lost a good number of members as the years passed. Thanks in large measure to some of the younger people—descendants—who have joined our ranks, we still count some 200 members. In this context, I wish to welcome aboard Semyon Gizunterman, Yefim Shteynfeld, and Aelita Fitinghof with her partner Jack Nelhausen. For the very informative twelve-page *The Latvian Jewish Courier*, which appears between 3 and 4 times annually and is also

available on the Internet, I wish to thank our Secretary of the Board and Editor of the *Courier* Dr. Ivar Brod, and the just-mentioned Semyon Gizunterman and Yefim Shteynfeld. Keeping members informed about current events about Jewish life in Latvia, in Israel, the United States and elsewhere is far from easy. This brings me to the next topic: restitution of communal Jewish properties, a subject often discussed in the pages of the *Courier*.

Latvia is the only country in Europe that has not yet fully addressed this issue. Communal Jewish property claims in other countries once occupied by the Nazis and Communists have been resolved satisfactorily. Yet, of approximately 200 communal properties in Latvia, only five have been restored—despite material pressure from the United States, the European Union, and world Jewish organizations. Why? A recent meeting in New York with the newly elected president of Latvia, Egils Levits, determined that his role in the matter is only nominal. According to him, the decision rests with the Latvian parliament (the Saeima). Hence, pressure within Latvia from the United States, the European Union, Israel, and world Jewish organizations must continue.

A subject close to us all is the rise of anti-Semitism, an age-old mental disease that has not yet fully been cured. We thought that this disease was largely gone following the Holocaust. Unfortunately, as we all know, it has made a comeback in much of Europe, and, also to an extent, in the United States. The task of the civilized world, and especially of Jews everywhere, is to mobilize to once and for all cure this illness.

Signs of this disease have not escaped Latvia. The endeavor to rehabilitate Herbert Cukurs, for example, is illustrative. This much-celebrated pre-World War II legendary pilot and friend of Jews embraced the Nazi cause during the war and turned into a notorious killer of Jews. These rehabilitation efforts in Latvia for his achievements as a pilot came to naught following outcries by, among others, the Jewish community in Latvia, in Israel, the Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the United States and elsewhere, including Latvians in their homeland. After being closed for the past year, the case recognizing Cukurs as guilty of crimes against humanity was re-opened by the Latvian Prosecutor's office in October. However, this is only the first step.

Furthermore, our organization also commends the Latvian government and people for the initiative taken by Lolita Tomson, director of the Zhanis Lipke Museum and the historian Kasper Zellis for organizing (four years ago) a national ceremony at the Freedom Monument in Riga at which candles were lit in memory of Jews killed at Rumbula and elsewhere in November and December 1941. In 2018, Latvia's then President Vejonis lit the Memorial Candle.

Mourning ceremonies are held annually all over Latvia where Jews were murdered with senior Latvian officials in attendance. Last July 4, for example, then President Vejonis, Speaker of the Saeima Inara Murniece, Prime Minister Krishjanis Karis and other Latvian dignitaries and diplomats

CONGRATULATIONS!

On November 18, President of Latvia Egils Levits, handed our JSL President, David Silberman, Latvia's highest award—The Order of Three Stars. In his report for our annual ceremony, which was read in his absence, David modestly attributed this award to his work in maintaining JSL and its activities among Latvian Jews in the USA. However, this is only a small part of the merit of his award. We know that since the early 1960s, David was one of the leading Human Rights activists fighting for the legitimate rights of Jews to immigrate to Israel from former Soviet Union. He became a long time Refusnik and together with his family was under constant KGB surveillance and harassment.

David was one of the organizers and participants of the famous hunger strike that was held at the Reception Hall of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Council of the USSR in Moscow, March 1971. This pivotal event among others led to the eventual collapse of the Iron Curtain. We remember that it was David Silberman who meticulously collected information and later published books about Righteous Gentile Zhanis Lipke who saved many Jews during the Holocaust and the memoirs of Holocaust survivors Ella



*President of Latvia Egils Levits presents
The Order of Three Stars to David Silberman*

Medalje, Frida Michelson and many others. We remember that 15 years ago, he personally erected a memorial to the victims of Holocaust in his hometown of Preili.

All this allows us to distinguish David as the undoubted leader among the members of our organization. We sincerely congratulate our friend David on receiving a high award of the State of Latvia. **M A Z E L T O V !**

JSL ANNUAL BOARD REPORT FOR 2019 (continued)

participated in commemorating the 300 Latvian Jews who were brutally burned in Riga's Choral Synagogue during the war.

Summarizing the positive changes taking place in Latvia, I now quote remarks made by Latvia's Representative to the UN, Ambassador Andrejs Pildegovics, at last year's Memorial Service: "[We] reflected on the tragedy of the Riga Ghetto and mass killing of Latvia citizens of Jewish background and European Jews in Rumbula. These are pages we do not want to be repeated in the future, these are very dark somber pages in Latvia's history. Of course, we will take all lessons from that immense tragedy."

Returning to our activities, I wish to stress the importance of cooperating with other organizations that share our views. Despite some friction between the Jewish Community Council headed by Arkady Suharenko and the Riga Ghetto and Latvia Holocaust Museum headed by Rabbi Menachem Barkahan, we cooperate with both institutions. We also cooperate with the Museum of Jews in Latvia founded by Margers Vestermanis and currently headed by Ilya Lensky. We are also in close touch with the Janis Lipke Memorial Museum, the Liepaja Jewish Community, Daugavpils, Preili Dome and Preili Township Museum, the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel as well as with our sister organizations in the United States—including, among others, Lithuania, Russia, Belarus, and the Holocaust Museums in Washington and New York.

Moreover, I am convinced that opening channels of communication between Latvian Diaspora Jews and Latvian dignitaries has immensely contributed to the lessening of tensions between Latvians and Jews in Latvia and the

Diaspora. We in New York established contact with former president of Latvia Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga and guest speakers at our Memorial Services. In addition to Ambassador Pildegovics, we also hosted former Prime Minister Maris Gailis.

I would also like to call your attention to some of the publications that have recently been made available with our help: a new English translation of Max Kaufman's classic *Churban Lettland: The Destruction of the Jews in Latvia*, published by Shamir in Riga, Cilvekglabejis Zhanis Lipke (Human Savior Zhanis Lipke) published by the Lipke Museum. This widely in-demand book dealing with Lipke and his associates in rescuing more than 50 Jews is now being translated into Russian and English. A film titled *Father Night*, based on their exploits, is widely shown in Latvia. Now in preparation are the proceedings of the conference held in Riga in 2018 titled, "New Directions in Holocaust Research in Latvia"—a project sponsored by the United States Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Further, we all are looking forward to the publication of Professor Schwab's memoirs, titled *Odyssey of a Child Survivor: From Latvia Through the Camps to the United States*.

In conclusion, I wish to express my deep gratitude to all of you for participating in today's Memorial Service commemorating the Latvian Jews killed during the Holocaust.

I wish you many years of good health, productive lives, and much happiness. Please enjoy Thanksgiving.

Thank you,

David Silberman

CHARLES SPRINGFIELD'S SPEECH AT OUR MEETING ON NOVEMBER 17TH



Charles Springfield's speech garnered the audience's attention

I am solemn but grateful to be here with you. My wife, Gail and I were unable to attend last year.

I got a call from Joe Faerber this week. Sadly, medical issues are preventing him from being here. He and I, along with Dad, my uncle Peter and brother Stewart, made numerous trips to Latvia with many of the founders of JSL and had numerous wonderful experiences. Joe has been a leader as VP of JSL and as a representative of the Second Generation, a stalwart organizer carrying forth the work of the founding members.

I was saddened to learn about the passing of Liuba Rakhman and Gerta Feigin, members who were part of my life for the last 40 years. I was so used to seeing them several times a year that I felt melancholy as I came through the door knowing they were not here. Happily, we now have two new members who have taken on the charge as the cycle moves forward.

I remember fondly the many trips to Riga watching the work done by our members—like Jack Ratz, Leo Kram, Joe Faerber.

I remember as a child, Max Kaufmann coming into my father's shop in Jackson Heights and lecturing him for hours about what had to be done to remember the tragedy that befell the Latvian Jewish Community and to provide support for those remaining. I watched my father return multiple times with Gerta Feigin, Professor Adelson, Peter Springfield, Professor George Schwab among other, first helping to provide funds for senior nutrition and community kitchens and then senior annual vacation programs, so all would be able to look forward to spending

two weeks at the shore. I watched Professor Schwab, the Secretary of State for JSL, negotiate steps to be taken with President Viķe-Freiberga, working with the Latvian government as well as the U.S. State Department and the European Union, pushing for changes in the historical record and school curriculum to tell the true story of the depravity that occurred during the war.

I was there when the memorials at Rumbula and Bikernieki were dedicated, replacing the overgrown grass trying to hide the truth. I visited, as well, the solemn memorial at the site of the burning of the Choral Synagogue with worshippers inside.

The work of JSL has been critical to document the truth of what happened to our ancestors and help our brethren reestablish the community in Latvia.

I am frequently saddened when I come to this memorial around Thanksgiving and realize how many family members and friends I never had a chance to meet or know.



Steven Springfield at the memorial stone in Rumbula

It is important that I, as my father's son, and a member of the Latvian Jewish Community, continue to support it and redouble my efforts to continue to improve the situation for the Jewish Community in Latvia.

So, thank you all for being here. It makes me smile as I remember how much my father loved this organization. When I talk to many of you, I see a sparkle in your eyes as you remember Steven. So, thank you all again. I look forward to continuing to support JSL. I wish you all health and happiness.

Shalom.

Charles L. Springfield, M.D.



These photographs show nearly everyone that Charles Springfield mentioned in his speech. In the left photograph, from L to R: Leo Kram, Jack Ratz, Liuba Rakhman, and Professor George Schwab. In the right photograph, from L to R: Michael Dumesh, Steven Springfield, Joseph Faerber, Esq., and Professor Howard Adelson

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE



U.S. Ambassador to Latvia John L. Carwile

The new ambassador of the United States of America to Latvia presented his credentials to President Egils Levits at Rīga Castle on November 5, 2019. Ambassador John L. Carwile said he intends to raise “difficult and complicated issues,” including the fight against money laundering and corruption, as well as the restitution of the property of the Jewish community.

Carwile’s statement, delivered at a hearing of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, read: “I will press the Latvian government to develop, enact, and implement reforms addressing critical corruption and money laundering threats that persist in the country. And I will support efforts to address Holocaust-era legacies, such as Jewish communal property restitution.”

As previously reported, in mid-July, Nancy Bikoff-Pettit completed her assignment as the U.S. ambassador to Latvia.



Minister of Defense of Latvia Artis Pabriks at a rally in the town of More

On September 27, 2019, the Minister of Defense of Latvia, Artis Pabriks, participated in commemorative events near the town of More, honoring the soldiers of the Latvian Legion Waffen SS who died in WWII battles.

“We will honor the memory of the fallen legionnaires; we will not allow anyone to discredit the memory of them. Legionnaires are the pride of the Latvian people and the state,” the minister said.

The press release of the Ministry of Defense containing this statement was published on the same day, although it was changed a few days later. In a letter on October 7 to the Latvian Ambassador to Israel, the Wiesenthal Center protested the statement made by Minister Pabriks.

The head of the Wiesenthal Center, Efraim Zuroff, said: “Given the fact that the legion fought for the victory of the

Third Reich, and those who served in it were active participants in the mass killings of Latvian Jews, as well as German and Austrian Jews deported to Latvia, such comments by the representative of the government, which is a full member of the European Union and NATO, are unacceptable, not to mention the fact that they are deeply offensive.”

Latvian historians were surprised by the minister’s statement. The famous historian of the University of Latvia Kaspar Zellis commented on the words of the Minister: “As far as the Latvian state is concerned, the Latvian legionnaires... they did not contribute anything. Pabriks’ statement is more like what the National Association would say.”

On November 18, President Egils Levits of Latvia awarded the Order of Three Stars for outstanding service to the state to:

- Dr. Aivars Stranga—a historian, an author of books and many articles about life and problems of Jews in Latvia, professor at the University of Latvia’s Faculty of History and Philosophy and an academician in Latvia’s Academy of Sciences.

- David Silberman—a writer, researcher, and historian of the Holocaust and Jewish cultural heritage.

- Dr. Eriks Jekabsons—a historian, a professor at the University of Latvia’s Faculty of History and Philosophy, an academician in Latvia’s Academy of Sciences, and author of the book *Forgotten Jewish Soldiers in the Latvian Army in 1918-1940*.

Congratulations!



The Order of Three Stars

On December 4, the Azkara in memory of the Jews killed during the Holocaust in Latvia and Estonia took place in Israel in the branch of Yad va-Shem in Givatayim. Approximately 400 members of our sister organization, the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel, gathered for the meeting. Elie Valk, the chairman of the Association, reported their many important activities in the last year. You can find details of that event on the Facebook page *Latvian & Estonian Jews in Israel*.



During the Yizkor at the Azkara in Israel, the Association of Jews from Latvia and Estonia

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)

A meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) in Europe was held in Warsaw on September 24, 2019. A roundtable session during the meeting focused on the problems with the implementation of the Terezin Declaration, including compensation for Jewish property in Latvia. The report, "The Heritage of WWII in the Baltic States," which highlighted the problem of Latvia's non-compliance with the provisions of the Terezin Declaration, was presented by European, Russian, and Israeli experts.

In his speech, Mr. Chernov, head of the Jewish Culture Support and Development Fund, said the provisions of the Terezin Declaration must certainly be implemented in Latvia. Mr. Dyuko, head of the Historical Memory Foundation, specializing in the crimes of Baltic collaborators, recommended that the provisions of the Terezin Declaration in Latvia should also be applied to others who suffered under Nazi collaborators, such as Belarusians.

OSCE representatives noted the destructive role of the current Latvian authorities, primarily members of the government coalition of representatives of the National Alliance in torpedoing the solution to the issue of compensation for the loss of Jewish property.



The Mover (Latvian: *Tēvs Nakts*), a movie about Zhanis Lipke and the Holocaust in Latvia, has been submitted by the Latvian National Cinema Center for an Academy Award Oscar nomination in the Best Foreign Film category. However, in December, the Academy did not include *The Mover / Tēvs Nakts* in the shortlist. Accordingly, this film will not participate further in the Oscar race.

Meanwhile, the movie premiered in Tel Aviv on October 15, where 68 relatives of the Jews rescued by Zhanis Lipke were present. The film received a standing ovation from those in the audience. At the Haifa Film Festival, *The Mover* was recognized as the best foreign film.

"At last, the film about Zhanis Lipke came to the land where the children and grandchildren of the Latvian Jews rescued by him and his wife Johanna live. The fact that the film touched them can be understood, but the jury at the Haifa Film Festival is much more demanding. We hope that the recognition of this movie in Israel will attract a wider audience that only knows Lat-

via in the context of the tragic story of Rumbula," commented Lolita Tomsone, director of the Zhanis Lipke Memorial in Riga.

According to experts, the award in Haifa may give the film a slight advantage at other festivals.



Latvian Ambassador to Israel Elita Gavele and Boris Smolyansky, son of the first of the Jews saved by Zhanis Lipke, after the award ceremony at the Haifa festival

The exhibition "Alexandra Beltsova (1892-1981)," organized with the support of Rietumu Bank, is currently on view through January 12, 2020, in the main building of the Latvian National Museum of Art. This is the largest retrospective of her work. Beltsova was born in Russia and arrived in Riga in 1919 where she lived for the remainder of her life. Her creativity has become an integral part of the history of art in Latvia, where she is known as one of the first artists of Latvian modernism.



Artist Alexandra Beltsova

Alexandra Beltsova lived a long life. Her art reflected not only her own experiences but also many events of the twentieth century. Most of the artist's creative lega-



Beltsova's studies for her painting, Massacre, from the series "The Riga Ghetto", 1941-1942

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)

cy is in the form of drawings in notebooks and sketchbooks. Beltsova often noted impressions of what she saw, creating sketches for future compositions. It is this part of the exhibit, primarily due to its uniqueness, that will likely be of most interest to the readers of the *Courier*.

While it was allowed, Alexandra Beltsova visited the Riga ghetto in the tragic months in the autumn of 1941. She was not Jewish, but had family friends who were in the ghetto. Alexandra brought them food and took note of the tragic images in the ghetto. Later, she produced drawings from memory. She recorded images of Jews being escorted from the ghetto; Jews clearing snow from the roads; a woman mourning a loved one, bending over the coffin; the faces and expressions of the residents. The work of Alexandra Beltsova is one of the most important pieces of evidence of what happened in the Riga ghetto, whose inhabitants were murdered in the fall of 1941.

It should be noted that some of Beltsova's drawings about the Riga ghetto were previously shown at the Zhanis Lipke Museum in October 2017 and at the Riga Ghetto and Holocaust Museum in Latvia in July 2019.



Studies for Beltsova's painting, Crying Woman with Children, circa 1942



Composer Boris Reznik

The award was presented on Monday, November 18 during a Riga City Council celebratory session called in honor of

The Riga City Council "Rigan of the Year 2019" award and certificate were given to the composer Boris Reznik for the creation of his legendary composition "The Baltics Are Waking Up" ("Atmostas Baltija"), his contribution toward musical development and the promotion of an international recognition for Riga.

the 101 anniversary of independence for the Republic of Latvia.

"Boris Reznik's audio piece was and remains a hymn to an event which united so many and different people in song and in the hope for a free country. The Baltic Way was a unique and powerful event—a singing revolution. Today, in Latvia and in Rīga, we lack such personalities and events that can truly unite people regardless of native language, culture, religion, or social status," said Riga City Mayor Oļegs Burovs.

The Riga City Council certificates were also presented to Hermanis Brauns Foundation Director Inna Davidova, and director and screenplay writer Dāvis Sīmanis.

The city council award is open to those over 18 of any ethnicity who have promoted the international recognition of Rīga with their work, thereby attracting attention to the Latvian capital.

The "Rigan of the Year" title was previously awarded to opera singer Elīna Garanča, maestro Raimonds Pauls, director Alvis Hermanis, Zaiga and Māris Gailis, and several others.

Mariss Jansons, one of today's most respected conductors passed away on November 30 at his home in St. Petersburg. He was 76 years old.

Mariss Ivars Georgs Jansons was born in Riga in 1943 to the conductor Arvids Jansons and the opera singer Iraida Jansone. Iraida (née Ida Blumenfeld), being Jewish, was forced to give birth to her son in the shelter in which she was hiding during the Nazi occupation. Her father and brother died in the Riga Ghetto.

Mariss moved to what was then Leningrad in 1956 with his parents, where his father was a conductor at the Leningrad Philharmonic. Mariss studied violin, piano, and conducting at the Leningrad Conservatory. From 1973 he conducted several orchestras in Europe and the United States, with stints as assistant conductor at the Leningrad Philharmonic, as well as the Oslo Philharmonic, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.

As a Principal Guest Conductor, he was a regular at the London Philharmonic Orchestra and was also a guest conductor with the London Symphony Orchestra. In recent years his conducting of the traditional New Year concert in Vienna was particularly memorable.

Mariss Jansons had been awarded the Class II Three Star Order and the Star of the Royal Norwegian Order. He was an Honorary Member of the British Royal Academy of Music (1999) and Honorary Member of the Vienna Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde (2001).



Compiled by Ivar Brod
Translated by Mariya Taukule

MARK ROTHKO: ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONIST

In the fall of 2010 we began to compile articles about outstanding native Latvian Jews in the U.S. 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.

Mark Rothko (né Markus Rothkowitz) (1903, Dvinsk – 1970, New York) was an American artist and a leading representative of abstract expressionism.

The fourth child of a pharmacist and a housewife, Rothko grew up in a the well-read family that spoke both Yiddish and Russian. At the age of five, Mark entered cheder. In the fall of 1913, Mark, along with his sister and mother, arrived in the United States to join his father and older siblings, who had previously settled in Portland, Oregon. A few months after the family reunited, Mark's father died, and the family was left destitute. To help out, Mark started selling newspapers and delivering groceries. However, he was able to enroll in school and later graduated at the top of his class from Lincoln High School. His efforts earned him a scholarship to Yale University. Yet, due to financial difficulties, Mark dropped out in his third year only to return 46 years later to receive an honorary doctorate degree.

During his early years, Mark was deeply interested in politics and social issues. At the age of 17, he became actively involved with the local Jewish society.



Rothko's painting, Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea, 1944

entered the New School of Design in New York, where among his teachers was one of the founders of "abstract surrealism," Arshile Gorky. Later, he studied briefly with Max Weber, who helped introduce cubism to the United States. During these



Mark Rothko in 1959

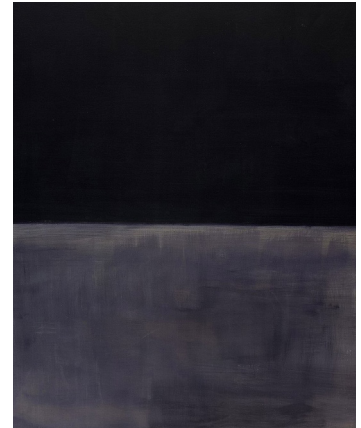
years, Rothko began to see art as an instrument of emotional and religious expression.

After visiting his family in Portland, Rothko returned to New York and plunged into the turbulent atmosphere of artistic life in the big city. Starting in 1929 and continuing for more than 20 years, he taught art to children at the Brooklyn Jewish Center. That same year he also began teaching painting and sculpting at the Central Academy, where he worked until 1952. There, Rothko was introduced to the artistic style of Milton Avery and his followers, whose remarkable use of color and simplified forms strongly influenced him.

From 1936 to 1938, Rothko worked for the WPA, a federal work-relief program created to overcome the impact of the Great Depression, which employed artists and architects to restore and renovate public buildings. During these same years, he worked on an unfinished book from which only some of the author's conclusions were known.

Rothko believed that there are many similarities between children's drawings and the works of abstractionists. "We begin with color," the artist wrote, believing that the modernist, as a child and a man of primitive culture, should in an ideal work express the inner sense of self without the intervention of reason. Rothko began to use colorful fields in his watercolor works and urban landscapes, and in his opinion, it was then that the interpretation of subject and form required no thought. He repeatedly said that the reaction of the audience is the only value that brings satisfaction to the artist.

Over the years, Rothko created many completely different paintings. He tried to respond to the atmosphere of despair



Untitled (Black on Gray), 1969-1970, Guggenheim Museum, New York



Rothko had a number of strict requirements: the hall in which his works were exhibited should be one that cannot be passed through, with no work by other artists nearby. Lighting must be scarce, and his works must hang 30 cm from the floor in thin frames. The viewer must be at a distance of 40 cm from the work. If all this was observed, then the viewer would appear to be inside the painting.

MARK ROTHKO: ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONIST (continued)

that prevailed during the Great Depression. His creative works are both a protest against the anti-Semitism he faced at Yale and the horrors of the Holocaust. In the 1930s and 1940s, war was raging in Europe. Using just color, Rothko was not only able to evoke both shock and hope in his audience but more often pain, fear, and a sense of loneliness. He believed that art is a material manifestation of an artist's view of the world. In 1965, he wrote, "The audience who shed tears at my paintings experience the same religious feelings that I experienced in creating them." It was during this period that he developed his



Orange, Red, Yellow, 1961, sold in 2012 for \$86.9 million

cycle of 14 paintings for the chapel of the Ecumenical Church in Houston, Texas. Many critics consider these works the most significant in Rothko's career. Today, the chapel, open to people of all faiths, has become not just a legacy of the artist but also a place associated with the idea of universal equality.

Mark Rothko is one of the most famous and influential American artists from the second half of the

twentieth century and a key figure of postwar abstract expressionism. His works have long been among the most expensive paintings. In 2012, his painting Orange, Red, Yellow sold for U.S. \$86.9 million, becoming the most expensive piece of post-war art ever sold at auction. Recently, in November 2019, Sotheby's, the centuries-old British art broker, sold a painting Blue over Red by Mark Rothko for U.S. \$26.4 million.

The artist's hometown also preserves his memory. In 2003, a monument was built on the banks of the Daugava river, dedicated to his work. In 2013, the Mark Rothko Art Center, whose exhibitions constantly present his original work, was opened. It is the only place in Eastern Europe where you can find the original works of Mark Rothko.



A monument dedicated to Mark Rothko, created by Romuald Gibovsky in 2003, stands on the banks of the Daugava River

By Iosif Rochko (Daugavpils)
Translated by Alan Solovey

RIGA'S VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION EZRA HELPING PEOPLE IN NEED

In one of the previous issues of the *Courier* (December 2017), we introduced various programs available to the members of the Jewish community in Latvia through the social center "Hesed-Latvia." These programs are aimed at improving the quality of life of the elderly. Despite the existing services through "Hesed-Latvia" and various governmental organizations, there are people in unusual circumstances or even emergency situations who need immediate help. In such cases, there is another organization helping Jewish people in Riga. This organization is EZRA—which means "Help" in Hebrew. Ezra is also the name of the religious leader of the Jews who in fourth century B.C. returned from exile in Babylon, and reconstituted the Jewish community in Jerusalem based on the Torah.

The Riga organization was organized in 2006 and consists of a team of local Jewish volunteers led by their devoted leader Aron Gelfand. In their spare time, they help people without any benefits or compensation. The most active participants among them are: Kristina Morite, Daniel Davidov, Niamana Sukhanova, Borukh Dergachev. EZRA's goal is to provide direct and immediate assistance to low-income people when they face serious life problems. EZRA started working with 10 people who needed assistance.



Aron Gelfand in the EZRA facility

This is how the volunteers characterized them: "These were the people who prayed next to us. When you see and interact with people on a daily basis you learn more about their life. And life is tough. There are situations when people simply don't know who they should ask for help, so they remain one-on-one with their troubles. Over time we realized that there are many more such people than we could imagine."

Now, EZRA provides help to about 70 people in need. Of course, there are other Jewish and government organizations that also help people in similar circumstances, but EZRA is able to help them on a personal level. Life can be very complicated,

RIGA'S VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION EZRA HELPING PEOPLE IN NEED (continued)

and not all people who need help (both psychologically and financially) can find it in the existing programs.

Below is the short list of programs that are run by this remarkable group. EZRA enthusiasts:

- help elderly people when they need to communicate with different government agencies, social services, or medical organizations. Due to their age, it is difficult for them to understand what they need to do and how. In such situations, EZRA provides informational help, as well as practical support. These situations include obtaining state benefits or disability status and supplying equipment for disabled people.
- provide delivery of hot meals to 10-12 people daily from a small kosher kitchen they organized where they prepare hot lunches on a permanent basis for people with disabilities who for various reasons cannot cook for themselves. These are people in need due to sickness, rehabilitation after the surgeries, etc. It is helpful when people have relatives or close friends who can help. Otherwise, illness and loneliness often lead to depression and despair. In such cases, EZRA quickly provides comprehensive support including nursing and medical care until a person has recovered.

organizational activities are medical assistance at a patient's home, help with hospitalization, and rehabilitation after surgeries.

- organize funerals in accordance with Jewish tradition when somebody from EZRA's wards leaves this world. Since the inception of the organization, EZRA has helped with about 50 Jewish funerals. Volunteers also take care of the graves of their wards.



Niamana Sukhanova cares for the grave of EZRA's deceased ward, Ilya Trunin

EZRA says it is a team of volunteers. "Returning to the Jewish tradition after the collapse of the Soviet Union, we couldn't stay indifferent seeing other Jews suffering. Jews who prayed with us, Jews who didn't, or Jews who didn't pray at all, still needed help."

In the past, EZRA functioned with donations from people who saw and understood what EZRA does. These donors trusted the organization would use their money to benefit people in need. However, in the current difficult economic situation, EZRA is only able to collect about half of the necessary funds. As a result, they have reduced their programs to a minimum and their future existence is in question. EZRA appreciates all the help they can get.

As our readers can see, EZRA volunteers in Riga provide unparalleled activity aimed at helping Jewish people in Riga when they find themselves in a desperate or critical situation.

P.S. For those persons or organizations who would like to provide financial support to EZRA, donations can be made via their website: <https://ezrariga.lv/en/>

By Semyon Gizunterman



Volunteer Borukh teaches his wards about Jewish customs

- created a mini guesthouse. EZRA faced a dilemma for the first time in 2008—one of their wards couldn't live independently anymore due to his physical and mental condition. At that time, sending him to live in one of the government institutions would have been a death sentence. As a result, EZRA came up with an idea to create a Jewish mini guesthouse, where elderly people could live in dignity. Currently three people live in EZRA's guesthouse. They have constant care and receive all necessary assistance. EZRA's mini guesthouse is not a commercial enterprise. It became a place that can provide a short-term solution and shelter to the needy in a difficult life situation.
- provide medication for more than 30 people who couldn't afford it otherwise. In some cases, EZRA also helps to cover the hospitalization cost, which sometimes requires expensive surgeries, including oncological ones. Other examples of EZRA's



A Purim celebration in the EZRA center