



The Latvian Jewish Courier

JANUARY 27TH — HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

On January 27, 2023, the United Nations recognized International Holocaust Remembrance Day at its headquarters in New York City. Latvian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Andrejs Pildegovics, invited members of Jewish Survivors of Latvia (JSL), as well as others, to participate in and attend the ceremony. Led by JSL President David Silberman, other board members, and their spouses, we convened at the Latvian Permanent Mission to the UN and were hosted by members of the Mission staff before moving on to the UN to attend the ceremony.



The UN General Assembly on January 27, 2023. Professor Karen Frostig is at the podium, and the two screens to her sides show photographs of her grandparents, who were murdered in the Jungfernhof concentration camp near Riga

Karen Frostig, a professor at Lesley University in the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences, joined us at the embassy before her speech at the UN. Dr. Frostig is also an Affiliated Scholar at Brandeis University's Women's Studies Research Center investigating Holocaust memory and the Founding Director of the "Locker of Memory" memorial project for the victims of the concentration camp Jungfernhof in Latvia. Professor Frostig, the granddaughter of Austrian Jews who were loaded onto a cargo train and deported to the concentration camp in Latvia and eventually perished in the Holocaust, was a featured speaker at the event. At the Mission, prior to participating in a memorial meeting, Prof. Frostig and invited JSL guests discussed issues regarding the commemoration of the deported German and Austrian Jews and creating a monument at the place of their execution in a forest outside Riga.

In the General Assembly Hall, representatives of member states, Holocaust survivors, Jewish organizations from New York, and guests, including members of JSL, were greeted by Ms. Melissa Fleming, Under-Secretary-General for Global Communication. Speeches followed by UN Secretary-General

Antonio Guterres; H.E. Csaba Korosi, President of the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly; the Deputy Representative of the U.S. to the United Nations Richard M. Mills Jr.; and H.E. Gilad Erdan, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations. All spoke about the importance of documenting, remembering the horrors and lessons of the Holocaust, and combating revisionism and the continued anti-Semitism present and increasing in the world today.



JSL members at the UN commemoration meeting. From left to right: David Silberman, Charles and Gail Springfield, Rachel and Semyon Gizunterman

H.E. Gilad Erdan of Israel reminded all of the anti-Israel sentiment at the United Nations and the necessity of all member states to acknowledge this bias. He urged them to prevent the UN from continuing to hold this prejudice and instead to acknowledge the importance of Israel as a Jewish state established after the Holocaust.

From the podium, Prof. Frostig spoke about her efforts to preserve the memory of Jews from Germany and Austria deported in December 1941 to the concentration camp Jungfernhof, near Riga. For her grandparents, the camp was the final destination. Prof. Frostig told the audience about her tireless efforts to memorialize the concentration camp where her grandparents died. Their photos were on view, projected on two large screens. The speech received an emotional response from the audience. JSL newsletter, the Courier, had previously published an article about her important efforts in 2020.

The ceremony was a solemn and emotional event that reminded all of the necessity to remember what happened. Moreover, the program reminded the audience of the importance of continuing the work of Jewish organizations, particularly Jewish Survivors of Latvia, to remember our history and support the Jewish community in Latvia. We are grateful to Ambassador Andrejs Pildegovics for arranging JSL's participation and acknowledging the continued importance of our mission, as well as for the hospitality and warm reception at the Latvian Mission. Below we are publishing Prof. Frostig's speech.

By Charles Springfield and Semyon Gizunterman

PROFESSOR KAREN FROSTIG'S SPEECH AT THE UN SESSION ON JANUARY 27, 2023

I never met my grandparents, Moses Frostig and Beile Samuely Frostig. Two small passport photos were on display in our home, hanging prominently on a wall in our living room. No one ever talked about these photos. They hung in silence, an open wound.

My father, Dr. Benjamin Wolf Frostig, was a young Viennese lawyer. He was arrested by the Gestapo in an early roundup of intelligentsia. Holding an asylum visa to Mexico, my father was expelled from Vienna on June 29, 1938. He was assigned the daunting task to rescue his parents. He did not succeed.

Silenced by trauma and shame, my father died in 1971. He never spoke about his heroic journey, gaining asylum for seven Austrian Jews in Cuba, or his pain. Twenty years after his death, I found a small box in my mother's basement. The box held legal documents detailing my father's expulsion from Vienna, multiple deportations, and delayed entry into the United States. In 2004, I received a packet of letters from my cousin, written by my grandparents to my father between 1938 and 1941. Their letters tell a story of love, hope, and persecution.

I made numerous trips to Vienna and Riga to recover my family's history. Riga was especially profound. I stood on a neglected patch of land strewn with rubble. This was the unmarked site of the Jungfernhof concentration camp. This ground contained my grandparents' bodies somewhere in an

unmarked mass grave. It was a chilling moment. And it was also a moment filled with love and a yearning to be close to my grandparents, to protect them with my memory.

Since 2010, I have worked closely with the Latvian Jewish community and Latvian officials committed to Holocaust research and remembrance. We have identified information on the 3,985 German and Austrian Jews who were killed at Jungfernhof or at other nearby sites after being deported to the Jungfernhof concentration camp in occupied Latvia.

We are committed to creating a permanent memorial at Jungfernhof. I envision the memorial as a meeting ground, bringing survivors, descendants, leaders, and community members together to grieve, while considering hope grounded in memory, as a means of transforming this unremembered site into a heartfelt place of remembrance.

By Professor Karen Frostig



Professor Karen Frostig

WOMEN OF SHOAH: A MEMORIAL BASED ON A PHOTOGRAPH RESCUED IN LIEPĀJA

A monument and memorial to the women and children of the Holocaust was unveiled in Greensboro, N.C., on Yom HaShoah, Tuesday, April 18, 2023, coinciding with the commemoration of Holocaust (Shoah) Memorial Day.

The larger-than-life bronze sculpture was inspired by a photo taken of four Jewish women and a child moments before they were murdered as part of a mass execution of Jews conducted by Nazis in Liepāja, Latvia, in December 1941.

How did this and other photographs of the Liepāja massacre of Jews come to light? On the eve of World War II, more than 7,000 Jews lived in Liepāja, Latvia. The



The Women of the Shoah monument in LeBauer Park in Greensboro, North Carolina

Germans occupied Liepāja on June 29, 1941, and immediately started to imprison and murder Jews. They were assisted by armed Latvian volunteers from the "Arajs Kommandos." By the end of July, almost 1,000 Jewish men had been murdered. By November, some 3,900 Jews remained in Liepāja, mainly women and children. On December 14, Latvian policemen assembled the city's Jews and carried out a selection. Essential workers were sent back home, while the rest of the Jews were taken in trucks and sleds to dunes overlooking the Baltic Sea in Šķēde. A long ditch had been dug at the foot of the dunes. Near the ditch, the Jews were forced to take off their clothes.

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WOMEN OF SHOAH: A MEMORIAL BASED ON A PHOTOGRAPH RESCUED IN LIEPĀJA (continued)

They were then executed in groups of 10 by units of Latvian collaborators and German policemen under the command of the SS. From December 15 to 17, between 2,700 and 2,800 Jews from Liepāja were executed, most of them women and children. Two SD (Nazi intelligence agency) officers who were present at the execution took this and other pictures. One of them was identified as Oberscharführer Carl Strott who after the war was sentenced to seven years in prison.

The photographs were discovered by David Zivtson, 28, a Latvian Jew. Heroically, he risked his life to obtain the photographs documenting crimes committed during the Holocaust.

David Zivtson and his young wife Henny were among the prisoners in the ghetto in Liepāja. The Germans used Zivtson as an electrician. One day, while he was working in a German officer's apartment, he came across photo negatives which were taken at the scene of the mass shooting of the Liepāja Jews in Šķēde. Risking his life, Zivtson took the negatives. Meyer Shtain, a photographer also employed by Germans, made a copy of the film before Zivtson returned the negatives. A copy of the negatives was sealed in an iron box and securely hidden in the stable behind an SD building.

In October 1943, when rumors began to spread about the imminent liquidation of the ghetto, David and Henny Zivtson decided to escape. With five other Jewish friends, they hid in their neighbor's basement until the end of the war, which was very difficult to do. Their brave neighbor was Robert Seduls, a wonderful Latvian and former sailor and boxer. Unfortunately, he was killed by bomb shrapnel in the attic of his house in March 1945. Despite her grief, his wife Johanna continued to take care of "her" Jewish friends until the end of the war. Robert and Johanna Seduls were awarded the honorary title of Yad Vashem's Righteous Among the Nations in 1981.

The photos, reproduced from the negatives taken by David Zivtson, were stored in the USSR archives and were used during the prosecution at the Nuremberg Trials. In 1971, Zivtson was permitted to travel to Berlin and Hannover to testify in the murder trials. David Zivtson passed away on June 18, 1983. An interview with his widow Henny was recorded in 1998 and is available through the USC Shoah Foundation.

More About the Monument: The photographs saved by David Zivtson served as the basis for the Women of the Shoah—Jewish Placemaking monument. "She Wouldn't Take Off Her Boots" was sculpted by the local artist Victoria Milstein. We see the strength and the humility of generations of Jewish women from Liepāja moments before they were murdered by Nazis in 1941. They stand in their innocence; their only crime is that they are Jews. Arm-in-arm in their last act, the five



Sculptor Victoria Milstein presents a clay model of the finished sculpture

women look straight at us today, with grace, humanity, and defiance. The older woman, asked to strip, stands in the center with her boots on as she clutches the arms of generations of women in her family. The two figures on the end of the grouping bring us physically into the sculpture, revealing the emotional narrative of their impending death. With a snap of the camera, we almost can't comprehend the innocence that we see — fear, disbelief, terror, and even hope. The youngest, with her head bent, clutches her fists, communicating the human horror of the Holocaust and reminding us of the more than 1.5 million children who were exterminated.

The Memorial site will also include a self-guided tour empowering the community to learn about the Holocaust, using public art and placemaking as an educational vehicle for social justice. As Eli Wiesel said, "the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference."



A photograph of a group of doomed women, moments before being shot to death in Skede, Liepaja

More about the monument and the life stories behind the project can be found at <https://womenoftheshoahjp.org/>

By Michael Breslav

PREFACE TO THE LATVIAN EDITION OF *ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR* BY GEORGE SCHWAB

BY DR. VAIRA VĪĶE-FREIBERGA, FORMER PRESIDENT OF LATVIA

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL LATVIAN



Dr. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga,
former President of Latvia

Editor's Note: *The Jewish Heritage of Liepāja foundation has prepared an edition of George Schwab's memoir, Odyssey of a Child Survivor, in Latvian. The foreword for this edition was written by Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, President of Latvia from 1999 to 2007. Below, we offer readers of the Courier a translation of this preface into English.*

With this translation of *Odyssey of a Child Survivor* into Latvian, the literature of Latvian memories and adventures has been enriched by one of the most unusual stories of our nation. The hero, Professor George David Schwab, takes us through the twists and turns of an unusually colorful and diverse life, distinguished by his survival, as a child and early adolescent, of the Holocaust in Latvia and the end of the war in Germany. During this time the Nazi-organized genocide murdered over a million other Jewish children throughout Europe in just a few years. Of the 8,000 Jews who lived in George Schwab's hometown of Liepāja before World War II, only a handful survived. Official statistics state that the percentage of Jewish children from Liepāja who survived was zero.

Latvia has excellent written collections about Latvian child and teen survivors of Siberia, who told how this affected the rest of their lives. We also have memories of those who spent their childhood in refugee and displaced persons camps in Germany. However, because so few survived, there is little information about the experiences of Latvian Jewish children in the Holocaust.

Dr. George Schwab's memoir begins with clever reminiscences of an idyllic childhood in Liepāja, where he grew up cherished and pampered as the youngest son in a very wealthy and educated Jewish family. They highly respected German culture, conversed in German, and as modern rational people, paid no attention to people's religion. Nonetheless, their many relatives and close family friends formed an exclusive and seemingly closed circle of elite Jewish society. Local Latvians largely had secondary roles in their lives as servants or casual acquaintances. When it was time for the intellectually gifted boy to go to Liepāja's Čakste Latvian school, had no difficulties with the Latvian language but struggled with the course of study because he found it extremely boring. Nonetheless, he has warm memories of vacations with his aunts in Riga and summer days on the beaches and in the cafes of Jūrmala. He was fascinated by Riga, a bustling metropolis compared to the much smaller Liepāja.

During the year of Russian occupation [1940-41], the

Schwab family was forced to surrender their spacious apartment to the Liepāja Communist Party, for use as its offices, and had to give up paid servants. During summer vacation in Riga with his relatives, George sees mass gatherings with red flags as Latvians march to thank the Soviet Union for welcoming them into the family of Soviet republics. Classes resume at school in Liepāja with the addition of communist slogans and George's impression is that most Latvian classmates accept this with great enthusiasm. He recalls the anxiety after Soviet deportations to Siberia on the night of June 14, 1941, when many patients of his physician father turned to him in desperation hoping for help. His brother Bubi, ten years older, bicycled to the train station to see the trains out of curiosity, though the phrase "cattle cars" is not mentioned.

Following immediately, the German occupation brings changes at a quick pace. At first, George's father cannot believe it. How can the German nation, which has achieved such a sophisticated culture, behave inhumanely, sadistically, and murderously? Later, as news arrived from sources that Latvians in small towns were murdering their Jewish neighbors and looting their belongings, his father said that he would never have believed that Latvians could lower themselves to the level of animals. When the persecution of Jews rapidly becomes more and more brutal, George's father, who has helped so many in his medical practice, experiences the indifference of Liepāja's citizens to repeated robberies of his apartment by both German soldiers and local residents. In the beginning, Jews are only moved to smaller apartments. Then they are forced into hard physical labor, made to wear yellow stars on their clothes, forbidden to walk on sidewalks, and brutally beaten regularly. Here, again, George asserts that sometimes Latvian guards were more sadistic than German soldiers.

George's mother manages to survive and protect her two sons from death amidst very difficult circumstances. Early on she was given a job as the maid of a Latvian acquaintance, a married woman who became the mistress of a high-ranking German officer. In the summer of 1942, the remaining 800 Jews of Liepāja were herded into the ghetto where they were sent to hard labor, starved, humiliated, tortured, and beaten. In the fall of 1943, the remaining ones were taken to Riga and the Mežapark's concentration camp [Kaiserwald] where some survived and others were shot and buried in the pines of Rumbula, again on the orders of the Germans but with Latvian collaborators as assistants. In Riga, both brothers are separated from their mother. Bubi tries to help his younger brother to survive, but in August 1944, Bubi himself is killed. As the Soviet army approaches, all remaining Jews are forced to board a ship, where George is miraculously reunited with his mother. Both leave the shores of Latvia, swearing never to return to this cursed land.

Tormented and starved by hard labor, the boy's journey of pain is far from over. He experiences many more painful

PREFACE TO THE LATVIAN EDITION OF *ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR* BY GEORGE SCHWAB (continued)

turns during his slavery in Germany until, finally, the German guards lay down their weapons near Lübeck and with his last strength George drags himself to a British tank and its soldiers. The immediate post-war period in allies-occupied Germany is stormy and full of colorful adventures for George until he and his mother manage to move to New York, where he stays for life.

His early years in the United States are not easy, but now an adult, George has become a decent and hard-working young man with aspirations. Year after year, his career reaches new heights and he becomes a successful and respected academic, a public personality, and an informal but talented diplomat. In his memoirs, he talks about these happy years with a subtle self-irony, free of complaints about the horrors and traumas of his childhood. Only in his mature years does he begin to participate in serious Holocaust commemoration events in the U.S., including taking special roles in a great project, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

George Schwab had sworn to never again set foot in cursed Latvia, but with the help of his friend, Per Ahlmark from Sweden, he does so. Ahlmark promises to travel there with him as moral support during George's pursuit of emotional reconciliation with his childhood. The visit is successful and after the restoration of Latvia's independence, George goes more and more often.

At the end of his presidency of Latvia, Guntis Ulmanis invited George to participate in the newly established Commission of Historians, and he faithfully and successfully continued to work with it as long as it existed.

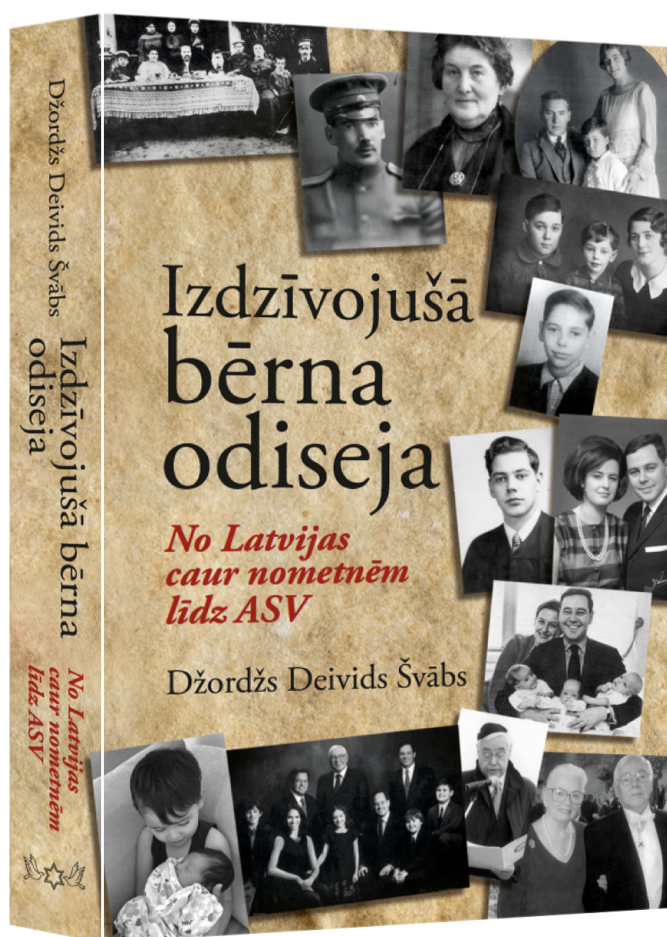
During the eight years of my presidency, George Schwab gave considerable support to my efforts to convince officials of the U.S. and other NATO countries that Latvia does not have innate and systemic antisemitism; and that Latvian collaborators in German-organized genocide against Jews committed serious crimes that have no statute of limitations under Latvian law. When I first arrived in New York for the U.N. General Assembly, I met with the leadership of the United Jewish Congress and representatives of about 30 Jewish organizations. As president

of Latvia, I was interrogated for several hours and listened to accusations. Members of our Commission of Historians and Holocaust survivors George Schwab and the late Steven Springfield sat next to me and, when necessary, supported me, refuting various prejudices, misunderstandings, and simple ignorance of the complexity of the repeated invasions and occupations of Latvia by totalitarian powers. George helped ensure that the U.S. Senate unanimously ratified Latvia's admission to NATO, with then-senator and now-U.S. President Joe Biden among those voting.

Along with his brilliant achievements in American and international diplomacy, George Schwab devoted a lot of time and money to restoring the Jewish community in Latvia, even though his extended family and his parents' large circle of friends were destroyed. George donated a library named for his late wife Eleonora Schwab, located in Riga's Jewish community building at 6 Skolas Street. As a kind of defiance of the harsh fate he endured during his early years, George created a full life and gave his sincere friendship to everyone who approached him favorably. I have the honor, along with my family, of being among George's personal friends, and this friendship continues to be especially dear to me. All three of us, George, my husband Imants, and I are companions of fate in the sense that we wandered the

world longer than Odysseus without the possibility of returning to our homeland. Regardless of whether we returned to our own "Ithaca" or stayed in the beloved environment of the hospitable land of refuge, all three of us at the end of our lives have been fortunate to be able to decide our destiny and to live freely where we like best.

Dr. Vaira Viķe-Freiberga spent part of her childhood as a Latvian refugee in Germany and then in Morocco. For many years she was a professor of psychology at Canada's University of Montreal. In October 1998, 54 years after leaving her homeland, Dr. Freiberga returned to live in Latvia. She was the country's President from 1999 to 2007.



LATVIAN JEWRY IN THE WAR OF LATVIAN INDEPENDENCE: 1918-1920



University of Latvia history professor Aivars Stranga, the author of this article

This period of Latvian history was relatively short but rich in significant events. Let's look at some numbers. The Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia estimates that approximately 10,000 Jews currently live in Latvia. When the first census in Czarist Russia was conducted in 1897, it showed Latvia's Jewish population at 142,315, or 7.4% of the total. There is no established number for the Jewish population of Latvia at the start of WWI in 1914. The only available estimate was

made by Boris Volkovich of Daugavpils, who placed it at 170,000-180,000. The center of Jewish life in Latvia at the time was not Riga, but Daugavpils (Dvinsk in Russian), with a Jewish population of nearly 55,000. It was within the Pale of Settlement. Sholom Aleichem, the father of modern Jewish literature visited the city in 1914 and was received very warmly. Additionally, roughly 33,000 Jews lived in Riga, doing so illegally because it was outside the Pale of Settlement. These Jews encountered serious problems in 1919 when a newly independent Latvia enacted its Citizenship Law.

By 1914, Jewish public life in Latvia was very active with several political parties and a budding Zionist movement. This was quite remarkable considering the state of Jewish life in the preceding period. In 1772, as the result of the first partition of Poland, the Russian Empire acquired a sizable Jewish population and subsequently enacted about 150 laws that severely restricted the rights of Jews. The first and most significant of those established the Pale of Settlement, which specified areas of the Russian Empire where Jews could legally reside. The Pale totaled about 4% of the Western Russian Empire. Another draconian restriction was the minuscule acceptance quota for Jews at the institutes of learning, with some institutes not accepting any Jews at all.

Nevertheless, the majority of Russian Jews, including Jews from Latvia, participated in the WWI war effort to support the Russian Empire. They established and financed the military hospitals in Riga and Liepaja. However, the Russian government never expressed any gratitude for this. On the contrary, the staff of the high military command led by Commander-in-Chief, His Royal Highness Prince Nikolai Nikolaevich, were openly antisemitic and accused the Jews en masse of espionage on Germany's behalf. Though the accusations were never proven in court, nonetheless, 80,000 Jews were deported from the Warsaw region in 1915. That was just the beginning. During the German advance in the summer of 1915, Russian authorities conducted what amounted to an ethnic cleansing campaign, deporting tens of thousands of Jews under the allegation of disloyalty and espionage. For instance, at least 25,000 Jews were deported

from the Courland district alone. Then there are anecdotal reports, such as in Ventspils, where all dentists were deported—all of them Jewish.

The deported Jews were first sent to Riga and then further east to destinations in Ukraine. Tens of thousands of Jews from Poland, Lithuania, and Courland were deported to Ukraine and Russia's interior to be dispersed later to various locations. This ethnic cleansing had unintended consequences for the Russian Empire because it breached the boundaries of the Pale of Settlement. For generations, Jews had dreamed of the abolition of the Pale of Settlement but never imagined that the authorities, by their own actions, would nullify its effect.

The deported Jews had the status of "evictees," not "refugees." Refugees received some assistance from the State, while evictees could rely only on themselves and their Jewish friends. An Assistance Committee was established in Riga by several prominent Jewish political figures.



Left: Professor Paul Mintz, state controller in the first government of Latvia



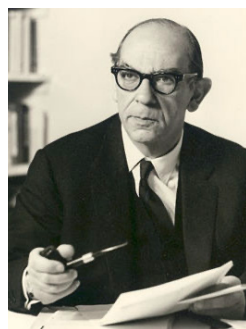
Right: Professor Vladimir Mintz, the outstanding surgeon

Their leader was Paul Mintz, a renowned jurist and professor. Unfortunately, he was later deported to Siberia by the Soviets where he perished in 1941. His brother Vladimir Mintz, also involved with the Assistance Committee, was a brilliant surgeon who in 1938 pioneered heart surgery in Latvia. Rabbi Mendel Zak arranged significant assistance to 19 rabbis evicted from Courland. He later served as the Chief Rabbi of Riga for 25 years and subsequently perished in the Holocaust.

In May 1915, Russia changed its policy: instead of mass evictions and deportations, the authorities began to take hostages as a preventive countermeasure against espionage. Paul Mintz became one of the hostages. Fortunately, there was not a single case of espionage discovered in Latvia and none of the hostages were killed.

Some Jewish refugees, like some of their Latvian neighbors, fled Latvia for fear of the Germans. Some became quite prominent in exile. It's sufficient to mention just two names: Sir Isaiah Berlin and Yury Tynyanov. Isaiah Berlin ended up in London where he became one of the world's most influential philosophers and political theorists of his time. Yury Tynyanov, the son of Dr. Tynyanov of Rezekne, became a prominent Russian writer, literary biographer, and critic. His work on Pushkin is considered one of the finest of its kind by Stanford University's Professor Lazar Fleishman.

LATVIAN JEWRY IN THE WAR OF LATVIAN INDEPENDENCE: 1918-1920 (continued)



Left: *Isaiah Berlin, President of the British Academy and prominent philosopher*



Right: *Yury Tynyanov, prominent Russian writer, a Jew born in Latvia*

It is estimated that nearly 100,000 Jews left Latvia during this period, both as evictees and as refugees. Many of them never came back. The 1925 census listed only 95,000 Jews in Latvia, which means that roughly 70-80 thousand had left forever. Never again would Latvia's Jewish population return to its previous high.

The losses hit small towns the hardest. One example is Kandava where, in 1910, 1,000 Jews resided in the beautiful town. After WWI, only 44 of them returned.

Being evictees and refugees was a tragedy but also became a breeding ground that brought some Jewish leaders to prominence. The most notable of them were Mordechai Nurock and Mordechai Dubin. Dr. Nurock was from a highly educated and cultured family of rabbis from Jelgava. He was a part of the "Mizrachi"—a religious Zionism movement. After the war, Nurock developed into a world-caliber Jewish activist. Dubin was not as cultured as Nurock. Born in Dvinsk (Daugavpils today) in 1889, he received only a traditional Jewish education. He was a "shtadlan," a man who pleaded Jewish interests with the authorities, and had no equal in this role in Latvia. When Dubin was just 15 years old he took up the plight of Jews and continued Jewish advocacy for his entire life. It was said that when Dubin was in attendance at the Hasidic prayer house "Bazar Berga," any Jew in Riga, regardless of his political position, could come and ask Dubin for help. Dubin was a founding member of "Agudas Israel", a political party that espoused a religiously-based Jewish life.

Interestingly, the archives from this period make no mention of antisemitism, which suggests that Latvians of this period were tolerant of the Jews in their midst.

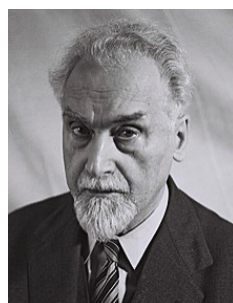
The February 1917 Russian Revolution was a very important milestone in Jewish history. It marked the end of the Czarist Empire. In March 1917, the first provisional Government of Count Lvov annulled all of the roughly 150 antisemitic laws, rules, and regulations. It is worth noting that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, in his book "Two Hundred Years Together" states, "The February Revolution was the product of Russian hands and Russian madness." He claims that many Jewish intellectuals participated, but that there are no grounds for calling it "a Jewish Revolution."

The year 1917 was a year of heightened activity for Latvian Jews, particularly in the region of Latgale and in the towns of Daugavpils, Preili, and Rezekne. At the time, Latgale was part of the Vitebsk province, but Latgalians

wished to instead unite with Latvia, with Vidzeme. They held a conference about doing so on May 9-10, 1917. However, Latgalian Jews had serious reservations about this potential unification including concerns that they could suffer economically. Also, as part of Latvia, they would lose the ability to use the Russian language commonly spoken in the Vitebsk province. An alternative conference about potential unification was organized in Rezekne on July 15, 1917, where the esteemed Dr. Grodzinsky represented Jewish interests. This conference's attendees voted against the unification of Latgale with the rest of Latvia.

The year 1917 is remembered as the year when Jews were first represented in Riga's Duma (city council). They never before had the right to vote or to be elected to the Duma due to the Czarist Law of 1892. With no time to organize elections, the members of the Duma were decided by consensus. The Duma had 88 members of which eight were Jews. This created some problems. The first problem had to do with the designation of holidays. The Duma decided that Sunday should be the common day off and that all stores and offices should be closed Sundays. The Jews saw this as an economic hardship because Saturday, the Sabbath, was a holy day of rest for them, and not being able to trade on Sundays constituted a significant loss of business. The dilemma was debated again in 1919 and 1920 and each time the Jews did not prevail. They became convinced that the prohibition of trade on Sundays was purely antisemitic. However, in Jelgava (Mitau until 1917), the Duma ruled to allow Jews to do business on Sundays.

In early September 1917, the German occupation of Riga began and by February 1918 was followed by the complete occupation of Latvia. The Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty between Soviet Russia and Germany, signed on March 3, 1918, ceded territories from Estonia to Crimea to Germany. The attitude of Jews toward the Germans was varied but Jews had not experienced any oppression in Kaiser Wilhelm II's Germany.



Left: *Rabbi Mordechai Nurock*



Right: *Rabbi Mordechai Dubin*

There were Jewish schools although instruction was in German instead of Yiddish. Yakov Movshenson was the head of the Daugavpils City Council. Rabbi Aaron Paul had a similar position in Zilupe.

The Bolshevik Revolution of October 7, 1917, changed the whole situation in Europe and had a major impact on Latvia and Latvian Jews. To quote Solzhenitsyn, "The nearer the revolution got, the more nervous the Jews became." The implication was that, in his opinion, the "Jewish Bolsheviks" were not a major part of the revolution. It was true in Latvia

LATVIAN JEWRY IN THE WAR OF LATVIAN INDEPENDENCE: 1918 -1920 (continued)



*Semen Nakhimson,
Commissar of the
Latvian Riflemen
regiment*

where the “Jewish Bolsheviks” could be counted on one hand. The best known of them was Semen Nakhimson from Liepaja. During the period of the 1905 Revolution, he established himself as a talented and promising young revolutionary while still a member of the Bund. Then he received a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Switzerland and subsequently switched his affiliation to Bolshevik. In 1917, the so-called Latvian Riflemen were looking for a Commissar for their unit and the Latvian Social Democrats appointed Nakhimson. So a Jew became a leader

of Latvians, which was quite a rare feat. Nakhimson later perished in the Russian Civil War.

Semyon Dimanstein was another prominent Bolshevik Jew, although he was from Sebez (then in Vitebsk, today in Pskov Oblast), not Latvia. Early in life, he considered becoming a rabbi but later changed his mind. He worked in a military organization in Riga, learned Latvian, and became the editor of the newspaper “Truth of the Trenches.” He was well-known as a skilled propagandist and was later summoned to Moscow to work as the head of the Jewish Section of the Commissariat of Nationalities. He became a victim of Stalin’s purges in the 1930s.

20-year-old Jacob Brahms of Liepaja was one of the Winter Palace defenders on the Provisional Government side. In Latvia in the 20s and 30s, he became closely affiliated with the great paper *Segodnia*.

Isaac Steinberg, born in Daugavpils to a well-off family in 1888, was the Commissar of Justice in Lenin’s first government for a while. A member of the Socialist Revolutionaries (SR) party, he was not a Bolshevik and is remembered for his efforts to limit the power of Felix Dzerzhinsky’s dreaded Cheka (secret police). Steinberg later emigrated from Russia.

A number of Jews returned to Latvia during the German occupation, some of them quite prominent, such as the very talented economist Benjamin Ziv.

On November 11, 1918, Germany signed the Compiègne Armistice with the Allies (also known as the Entente) bringing WW1 to an end. Almost immediately, on November 17, 1918, Latvian democratic parties agreed to form an Interim Parliament (Tautas padome, in Latvian). The next day, November 18, 1918, it proclaimed the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Latvia.

The Bund was the first party to join the Parliament and they, together with the Jewish Socialist Party, presented demands. Some demands were seen as unreasonable and unacceptable

to the other parties. One example was a demand to recognize Yiddish as an official language and to allow the use of Yiddish in court. Parliament ruled that the use of Latvian, German, and Russian languages was sufficient.

At the same time, Jews started playing a more prominent role in local legislatures. Dr. Isaak Joffe was appointed head of the Sanitation Department in Riga’s Duma. Liepaja’s Duma was chosen by election and Jews were able to assemble their own bloc headed by Aaron Nurock, brother of Mordechai Nurock.

The Bolsheviks did not accept the establishment of an independent, democratic Latvia. They proclaimed the Soviet Republic of Latvia on December 18, 1918, and a couple of days later their Provisional Government, headed by Pyotr Stuchka, arrived in Valka from Moscow. The Civil War ensued.

Jews were far from complicit in collaboration with the Soviets. There were only 36 Jewish Bolsheviks out of 80,000 Jews in Latvia at that time. There were 8,000 Bolsheviks in all of Latvia so 36 Jews were just 0.4% and none worked in the dreaded Cheka, the secret police responsible for the Red Terror (political repressions and executions). Similarly, there were no Jews appointed to positions in the Soviet administration, as Benjamin Ziv pointed out in his later book. In his opinion, antisemitism in Latvia started and evolved from Stuchka’s time. Ziv also asserts that the Red Terror was harsher than average on the Jews. However, an analysis of the archives shows that the main thrust of it was against Germans, in particular, the local German “Baltic Baron” nobility. The only positive from that time is that the Jews cannot be accused of collaborating with the Stuchka regime.

With no standing army, Democratic Latvia had only volunteer units composed of three ethnic groups. The Baltic Landwehr was mostly German and had 147 Jews from Courland who spoke German. The White Russian units, under A. Liven and K. Didorov, had only 10 Jews between them. The Latvian units had practically no Jews. This ragtag “army” proved capable of fighting the Soviets. On May 22, 1919, the combined forces of the Baltic Landwehr and the White Russian units liberated Riga from Stuchka and his Reds. The Baltic Landwehr ferreted out and persecuted the perpetrators of the Red Terror using their own White Terror, which caused the deaths of approximately 1,000 people. In the process, they established that Jews had no part in the Red Terror.

The German unit didn’t want to stop at Riga. They wanted to extend their dominance over the entire Baltic region and marched north. The northern part of Latvia was controlled jointly by the Estonian Army and the Northern Latvian Army, which included a significant number of Jews from Rujiena, Valmiera, and Cesis. So, there were Jews on both sides of this conflict. Subsequently, the Germans lost the decisive battle of Cesis and were forced to withdraw.

The Latvian Army was established on July 10, 1919. In addition to Jews who were conscripted, some Jews joined as volunteers. There was even talk of forming a separate Jewish battalion but this never came to pass.



*Isaac Steinberg,
the Minister of
Justice in the first
government of
Soviet Russia*

LATVIAN JEWRY IN THE WAR OF LATVIAN INDEPENDENCE: 1918 -1920 (continued)

In the same month of July 1919, a new Latvian government, the second one, was formed under Ulmanis. Paul Mintz, a highly respected Jewish figure, was appointed to the post of Government Controller.

In August 1919, the new citizenship law was enacted. It stated that only legal Latvian residents as of August 1, 1914, were eligible to become citizens. Not all Latvian Jews met these criteria.

The law was amended several times with the final amendment in 1927. Eventually, more than 95% of Latvian Jews were granted citizenship.

A key part of public life in Latvia during this period was played by the newspaper *Segodnya*, published by Jacob Brahms and Dr. Boris Poliakov. It became one of the most notable Russian-language newspapers for Russian expatriates. An almanac dedicated to this paper was published by Boris Ravdin and Professor Lazar Fleishman at Stanford University in the 1990s.

In 1919 the School of Higher Education (since 1922, the University of Latvia) was established. As soon as it opened



Jacob Brahms, editor of Segodnya, the famous Riga daily newspaper

many young Jews enrolled as students. However, the first Head of School, Paul Leinsh (the future first President of the Latvian Academy of Sciences in Soviet Latvia), was disturbed that the percentage of Jewish students far exceeded the percentage of Jews in Latvia. To address this without establishing a quota system, he adopted oral and written entrance exams, both in Latvian. Many Jewish students from Latgale couldn't pass these exams. The newspaper *Today* aptly called it "the quota system's belch."

One may wonder, what role had the Jewish Community played during these turbulent times? First of all, one must consider that the synagogue, "the shul" was the only official representative of the Jews in Czarist Russia. After the February Revolution, there were some feeble attempts to organize a Jewish community but the first successful one was organized in Riga in May 1920. Its leaders were chosen by election and Mordechai Dubin led it for 19 years.

Jews were quite active in the struggle for Latvian independence. Professor Eric Jacobson counted at least 2,000 Jewish fighters in the Latvian Army alone. In 1928, Jewish veterans of the War of Independence published an almanac, titled "Association of the Jews, the Liberators" ("Ebreju-atbrivotaju biedriba" in Latvian).

By Professor Aivars Stranga

Translated from Russian by Leon Pukshansky

Prepared for publication by Mitchell Lieber

NEWS FROM LATVIA



On June 1st, 2023, a general meeting of the Riga Jewish community was held, in which 43 delegates took part. The chairman of the community, Arkady Suharenko, spoke about the work that has been done so far, as well as future plans. The priority activities of the Riga Jewish community will continue to focus on support for low-

income people, advancement of education, and preservation and promotion of Jewish cultural heritage.

The head of the social center Hesed Sabina Grace reported on the activities of the center—1,500 people across 23 Latvian cities receive help here: people who survived Nazism, pensioners, and people with disabilities, as well as low-income families with children. The center runs several programs, including home care, healthy lifestyle, assistance in crisis situations, and also organizes interest groups, classes, and lectures.

Inna Lapidus-Kinbere, JCC Riga Community Center Director, introduced the work of the organization. The center organizes various educational and cultural programs – celebration of Jewish holidays, master classes, lectures on wide range of topics, as well as concerts, excursions, and seminars, along with other events, in which about 3,000 people annually take part.

Karina Brikmane, Principal of the Dubnov Riga Jewish Sec-

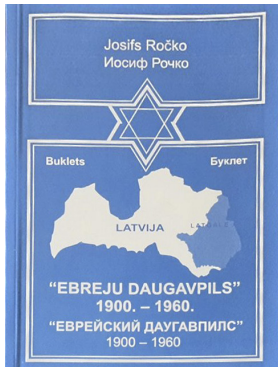
ondary School, said that the number of applicants to the school significantly exceeds capacity due to limited space. Arkady Suharenko, who spoke immediately after, informed that negotiations had already begun on the expansion of the school building.

Elina Kaminska, head of the Motek Kindergarten, and Marina Geht, Deputy Director of the Jews in Latvia Museum, also spoke about their work. M. Geht specifically spoke about the plans to relocate the museum into a new building on Alksnaya Street that is currently under construction.

At the general meeting, the 8-member community board was elected: the chairman of the community Arkady Suharenko and his deputies Dmitry Krupnikov and Benjamin Kajem, as well as members of the board David Lipkin, Renat Lokomet, and the executive director of the community Gita Umanovska were re-elected. Two new board members were elected—Sabina Grace and Vladimir Fogel.

In January 2023, in Daugavpils, thanks to the efforts of the tireless local historian, founder, and director of the Jews in Daugavpils and Latgale Museum, Joseph Rochko, the booklet *Jewish Daugavpils, 1900 – 1960* was published. But this is just the beginning; the second part, dedicated to the period from 1960 to the present day, is being prepared for publication at a later date. This richly illustrated booklet, containing more than

NEWS FROM LATVIA



Jewish Daugavpils
booklet

150 photographs, was published in Latvian and Russian. It tells the story of the once flourishing Jewish community of Daugavpils. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Jewish community represented almost half of the city's population (more than 50 thousand people before World War I). Unfortunately for many reasons, especially the tragic events of World War II, the community was drastically reduced to just about 100 people by 2020.

In February, the Bikernieki Memorial to the victims of the Holocaust was desecrated twice by vandals, on February 22 and 27. Photographs posted on social media show that the symbolic gate leading to the place of execution of Jews was marked with the Latin letter Z, which has become a symbol of Russian aggression against Ukraine, as well as the inscription *Russia* written in Russian.



The vandalized gate of the Bikernieki Memorial

The Riga State Police Station at Teika initiated a criminal case against the offense based on the use of and glorifying symbols of military aggression and war crimes in a public place. According to the law adopted by the Latvian Parliament on March 31, 2022, criminal liability may be imposed for the use of these symbols in public.

After the incidents, municipal workers removed the inscriptions. Additionally, Riga City Hall announced that the police would step up patrols at the memorial, and surveillance cameras will also be installed.

As previously reported, in July of last year, there was a criminal trial based on the desecration of the Holocaust Memorial in Bikernieki Forest. At that time, footage appeared on social networks, indicating that the letters SS were painted on one of the fragments of the memorial.

On March 21, *Wasn't There, Don't Know, Don't Remember* premiered in the renovated Riga Circus building. The play, about the trial of the Latvian Nazi collaborator Viktors Arajs, was staged by the Kvadrifrons theater troupe. The play is based on histori-

cal documents and court records. Arajs, who was guilty of killing tens of thousands of Jews, has become the symbol of the Holocaust in Latvia. Many members of his "team" were executed or sentenced to long prison terms. After the war, Arajs hid from justice for decades until he was found and arrested in 1975. His trial in Hamburg lasted more than two years—from July 1977 to December 1979. During many of the court proceedings, testimony was heard from Jewish, Latvian, and German witnesses from across the world, including Israel, the U.S.A., Australia, as well as Germany and Latvia. Arajs was sentenced to life imprisonment for organizing and participating in the murders of thousands of Jews. He served his time in Kassel prison, where he died of a heart attack on January 21, 1988. In 2020, under the editorship of the historian Uldis Neiburg, the material from those court hearings was published for the first time.

The playwright Karlis Verdins and Director Paula Plavniece sought to encourage the audience to think about the proportionality of a crime of this scale and the punishment of the criminal, and about the responsibility of the society in which such processes take place.

The Jews in Latvia Museum and the Zhanis Lipke Memorial were among those that took part in the organization of the performance.

In Latvia, March 16 marks the annual celebration of the day-of remembrance of the Latvian SS Legion.



Near the Freedom Monument, a row of demonstrators marches in memory of the Latvian SS legionnaires

On this day, a service was held in St. John's Church in Riga, and then several hundred people marched and laid flowers at the Freedom Monument in memory of the Latvian legionnaires who fought in World War II.



Viktors Arajs, as he appeared before the court in Hamburg

NEWS FROM LATVIA (continued)

The proceedings were monitored by police, although the scale of their involvement has decreased in recent years. According to official reports, the number of participants in the procession, which included Saeima deputies from the National Association, was also significantly fewer than in previous years.

The event was reported to have gone smoothly with no major incidents.

The Mark Rothko Art Center in Daugavpils celebrated its tenth anniversary with concerts, exhibitions, and the opening of a new exposition of works by the world-famous American artist of Jewish-Latvian origin, the master of abstract expressionism, after whom the center is named. Over the past years, visitors to the art center had the opportunity to see not only seventeen original works by Mark Rothko (worth millions of dollars) but also to visit dozens of individual and group exhibitions of artists from Latvia and abroad organized annually by the center.



Kate Rothko-Prizel (in the center) presented two of Mark Rothko's original drawings to the art center

Visitors were also able to participate in international symposiums. An extensive program celebrating the anniversary of the art center ran from April 22 through April 28. On April 23, anniversary events were held in Riga: an exhibition of the project *Rothko, Made in Latvia* opened at the Dailes Theatre. On April 28, the original paintings by Mark Rothko were once again on display in the art center itself. Last spring, because of the war unleashed by Russia in Ukraine, the artist's heirs took the paintings, worried for their safety. Now, however, the heirs have decided that the originals can be exhibited again in Daugavpils. In the afternoon of the 28, a round table discussion took place, "The Rothko Center on the Threshold of the Decade: Opportunities and Challenges." And in the evening, the solemn opening of a new exposition of Mark Rothko's originals took place. Here, the head of the art center, Maris Chachka, proudly stated that this summer the art center is expecting its millionth visitor. The final event of the celebrations was a surprise—the artist's daughter Kate Rothko-Prizel, who came to the center's anniversary, presented the center with two drawings by her father.

There were numerous congratulations addressed to the

art center, including from the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, and from U.S. Ambassador to Latvia Christopher Robinson. Many entrepreneurs, cultural workers, and artists from different countries took part in the celebratory events.

This April, two JSL members, Emil and Gabriel (Gershon) Silberman, traveled to Latvia to create an unusual art installation at the Riga Ghetto and Holocaust Museum. The event coincided with Yom HaShoah on April 18, 2023. The theme of the installation dealt with causes of genocide, and the propagation of hate and war. It also drew references to our time and numerous conflicts taking place today. This installation aims to understand the events that have led to major human catastrophes, such as the Holocaust, Stalinist repressions, Mao's cultural revolution, and countless other episodes in human history, including the most recent "Special Operation" by Russia.



Emil and Gabriel Silberman at the installation they created

The installation was erected in a storage room of the museum and consisted of arrangements of soldiers marching through the room while saluting their leader (or an "Idol"). Remnants of normal life including children's toys, woman's shoes, musical instruments and delicate china dishes were being smashed and scattered under their feet. A large portrait of their ideological leader was placed on the wall as if overseeing and commanding the parade of destruction. The Idol and his armies were purposely made out of used cardboard, which is associated with trash suggesting that those forces did come originally from trash and shall return to trash. A light projector was placed on the floor to illuminate the figures and create mystical shadows on the wall, which together with ceiling beams created a terrifying rhythm of the march which engulfed the entire space. Completing the installation was a ten-foot banner with a poem written by Emil Silberman in Hebrew on the subject of hate, remembrance of the Holocaust, and the triumph of life.

The idea for this installation was envisioned by Gabriel and its artistic implementation was developed by Emil who has extensive experience in sculpture and Installation Art. The opening reception was well attended. It also received coverage on National Radio and on an internet journal.

Compiled by Ivar Brod
Translated by Mariya Taukule

EDWARD ANDERS: CHEMIST, RESEARCHER, WRITER

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.

Anders (born Alperovitch), Edward (June 21, 1926, Liepāja) is a chemist, researcher on the age and origin of meteorites, and emeritus professor of chemistry at the University of Chicago. After retiring from the university in 1991, he became a prominent researcher, speaker, and writer on issues related to the Holocaust in Latvia.

Anders was born into a German-speaking Jewish merchant family. In 1940, the Soviet Union occupied Latvia, and in 1941, Latvia was invaded by Nazi Germany. Edward Anders' father and 24 of his relatives were among the many Liepāja Jews murdered by the Nazis in the first months of the occupation. However, before his arrest, his father managed to prepare and submit documents to the authorities proving that his wife was not a Jew, but an Aryan foundling in her family. As a result, Edward and his mother evaded Nazi annihilation and were able to flee Latvia at the end of the war.

Anders settled in Germany, where he attended the University of Munich from 1946 to 1949. In the summer of 1948, Anders was an eyewitness at the Nuremberg High Command Trial, where he provided evidence of German soldiers carrying out lootings and shooting Jewish civilians in Liepāja in 1941.

In 1949, Anders arrived in New York City, where he changed his last name and earned a Ph.D. in chemistry from Columbia University in 1954.



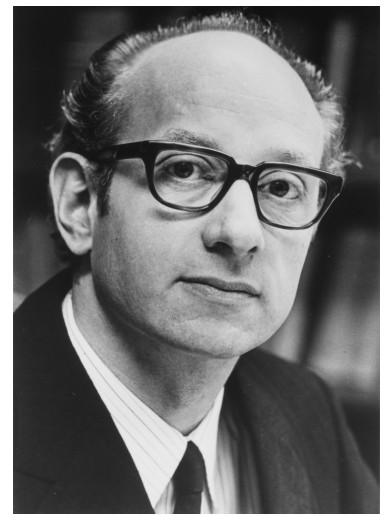
Anders and his colleagues examine a meteorite

Anders continued his scientific career in the chemistry department at the University of Chicago. He arrived there as an assistant professor in 1955, earned tenure a few years later and won a prize from the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1959 for his work on meteorites and asteroids. He became a professor in 1973. Throughout the years from 1960 until 1993, Anders often taught at universities in Switzerland and Italy as a visiting professor.

His major areas of research included the origins, ages, and

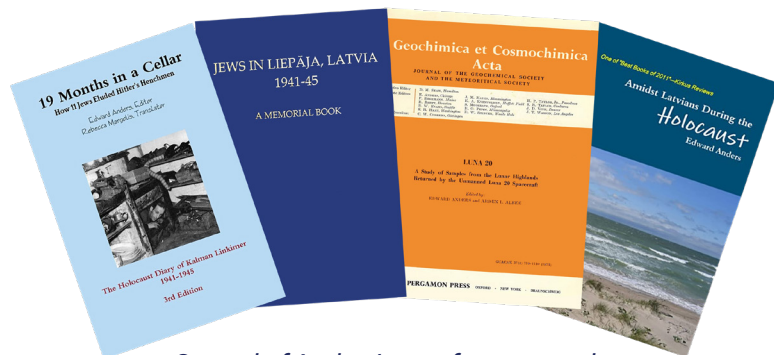
existence of pre-solar grains in meteorites, the abundance of chemical elements in the solar system, and mass extinctions in Earth's history. In the 1970s, he was one of the 142 principal investigators who studied lunar samples brought back to Earth from the Apollo program, for which he received the NASA Exceptional Scientific Achievement Medal in 1973.

In 1974, Britain's Royal Astronomical Society named him an honorary foreign member, or associate. He also was elected to the U.S. National Academy of Sciences in 1974 and has received approximately a dozen other professional honors.



Anders and his colleagues at the laboratory in Chicago

In the 1980s, Anders and colleagues published evidence of catastrophic fires caused by a giant meteorite crash in the Gulf of Mexico 65 million years ago in *Science and Nature*.



Several of Anders' most famous works

Since 1996, Anders has engaged in Holocaust-related research. On his initiative and under his editorship, Columbia University published *The History of Latvian Jews* (translated from Russian) in 2002. Anders made a significant contribution to the study of the history of Latvian Jews with his research on the fates of each of the 7,140 Jews who lived in Liepāja on June 14, 1941 (the day of deportation), which he carried out jointly with Riga historian Juris Dombrovsky. This research was published in 2001 in a unique historical work called *Jews in Liepāja, Latvia, 1941-1945*.

By Ivar Brod

Translated by Aviva Solovey