



The Latvian Jewish Courier

JEWISH SURVIVORS OF LATVIA, INC.

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OVER AGAIN ABOUT RESTITUTION

by Yefim Shteynfeld

Some 80 years ago, one mustached gentleman had a dream, a dream to enrich his nation at any cost. And, he decided, that the shortest way to do that was by starting a process of elimination, later called the Holocaust. What an idea! Just exterminate a few million "Jude"n and take their possessions. A very simple process indeed.

We all know the result — this "noble" endeavor ended 70 years ago, mustached gentleman is no more, his cohorts had their last meal in Nuremberg. But what about that dream? What about the loot?

Well, 60 years ago, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev embarked on his very first international tour in an attempt to repair the reputation of the U.S.S.R. and to establish political and economic connections with European powers.

A few years earlier, India had gained independence and the Soviet state had helped them in every way possible. So, when Khrushchev visited England, the question: "Why are you helping India? We were there for five centuries and spent plenty of money and resources developing that country!" was inevitably asked by many.



LATVIJAS REPUBLIKAS SAEIMA

Latvijas Republikas Saeimas
2015.gada 29.janvāra

kārtējās sēdes darba kārtība 09:00

I. Prezidija ziņojumi

1. Par iesniegtajiem likumprojektiem

6. Likumprojekts **Par nekustamā īpašuma Rīgā, Ernesta Birznieka-Upīša ielā 12 nodošanu (171/Lp12)**
(Dok. Nr. 392, 392A) Balsojums: par 67, pret 9, atturas 7 Nod. kom.

Nodots komisijām: Ārlietu komisija(atbildīgā), Juridiskā komisija

7. Likumprojekts **Par nekustamā īpašuma Rīgā, Abrenes ielā 2 nodošanu (172/Lp12)**
(Dok. Nr. 393, 393A) Balsojums: par 66, pret 9, atturas 6 Nod. kom.

Ierosina nodot komisijām: Ārlietu komisija(atbildīgā), Juridiskā komisija

8. Likumprojekts **Par nekustamā īpašuma Jūrmalā, Kļavu ielā 13 nodošanu (173/Lp12)**
(Dok. Nr. 394, 394A) Balsojums: par 69, pret 10, atturas 7 Nod. kom.

Ierosina nodot komisijām: Ārlietu komisija(atbildīgā), Juridiskā komisija

10. Likumprojekts **Par nekustamā īpašuma Kandavā, Lielā ielā 31 nodošanu (175/Lp12)**
(Dok. Nr. 396, 396A) Balsojums: par 76, pret 1, atturas 7 Nod. kom.

Ierosina nodot komisijām: Ārlietu komisija(atbildīgā), Juridiskā komisija

11. Likumprojekts **Par nekustamā īpašuma Rīgā, Ludzas ielā 25 nodošanu (176/Lp12)**
(Dok. Nr. 397, 397A) Balsojums: par 68, pret 9, atturas 7 Nod. kom.

Ierosina nodot komisijām: Ārlietu komisija(atbildīgā), Juridiskā komisija

The first decision of the Latvian Saeima on the issue of restitution for five Jewish buildings.

What Khrushchev said was crucial when trying to talk about Jewish property and its return to rightful owners. His precise words: "You helped India, but you also took possession of the riches belonged to those people and to that nation. Those riches weren't yours. Therefore, one may say they were stolen or the people have been robbed of their

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DEAR FRIENDS,

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possessions. And what was stolen remains stolen, the loot is still loot, regardless of how much time has passed since the theft or robberies have taken place or what laws have been passed to ensure legality of your ownership!"

During World War II, Jews were robbed of all their possessions. Some people and countries still keep the loot. And, according to the above-mentioned moral rule that no one can argue with, whatever was taken or stolen must be returned to the owners. Simple and indisputable. Except for one hurdle: in most cases, there are no owners. Mustached gentleman knew what he was doing.

Loot-keepers are faced with a dilemma: to keep or not to keep. If they keep, they might one day be called thieves or by some other shameful name. This is not a good outcome. Everyone wants to be seen as respectable — country, society, or just as an individual — so it is better to return. On the other hand, it hurts to give it away, so maybe there are some legal ways to keep? Loot or not, but to keep ...

Well, when there is want or will, there is a way. Some countries made it simple as possible to solve this dilemma and return the loot to either legal heirs or descendants, or to current Jewish organizations, or societies in a cases when the rightful owners had been killed. The simple rule was "this is not ours, we're 'somewhat' responsible for the actions of our countrymen during that tragedy, so here it is. Take it." Other countries needed a little prompting to speed things up.

Among them were our Baltic neighbors to the north and south. In one way or another, things were moving in the right direction. But not in Latvia. Not yet.

Let's take a look at some historical and legal issues. Before World War II, almost 100,000 Jews lived in Latvia and practically all of them were citizens. Places of worship: 136; synagogues: 72, with many other religious organizations and societies. All properties that belonged to those organizations were confiscated during Soviet rule within one year of Soviet occupation until the beginning of World War II.

After Latvia regained independence, several laws were passed that dealt with returning previously nationalized properties. Has the Jewish community used this opportunity and tried to regain Jewish properties? Yes, it has.

But, during the war years, Germans destroyed almost all Jewish religious buildings and structures. As a result, Jewish organizations were able to reclaim just a few objects and properties, including a synagogue in the Old Riga district.

The Jewish Community Council requested the return of 270 real estate holdings. A document listing these was submitted to the Saeima in 2006. At the time, there were talks about the possibility of returning properties to the Holocaust victims, and a government commission was tasked with the development of a draft of a special law designed to effect that outcome.

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Unfortunately, this proposal was voted down by the Saeima that year. For the next six years, no subsequent Latvian government included discussion of the issue and that proposal in their agendas.

Only in 2012, after Latvia joined the Terezin Declaration on Holocaust-Era Assets and after the Lithuanian government created a special fund to compensate Jewish communities for seized real estate did the Latvian political elite show some readiness to act. Prime Minister Dombrovskis requested that the justice minister create a special working group to establish a list of properties to be returned to the Jewish community. That minister, being a nationalist, refused and left his post in protest. Dombrovskis decided to not to raise the issue again.

But they were unable to completely forget or significantly postpone working on a solution to this very inconvenient problem. The restitution issue was presented at every meeting or conversation with officials from Israel and the United States. That could explain why the latest idea about restitution was born within the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). And here is another question: Is it a coincidence that the new law project was presented just three weeks after Latvia became Chair of the EU?

A little bit about the properties. At this point, the document created by the MFA contains only five (!) objects (see their photos here). And five laws, one for each property, have been proposed. So right now, instead of dealing with one proposed solution, Latvian politicians will have to deal with five. Plus, the MFA hasn't

consulted Jewish organizations; there is no defined procedure for ensuring proper return of each property; there is no explanation for why any particular property has been selected for the first round of returns (we hope there will be more); no expenses have been projected, etc.

No doubt a major reason for all delays and foot-dragging is a simple fear of voters' reaction. No surprise here because only 40% of active inhabitants support the idea of restitution. The rest of them use "excuses" such as "the state has no financial resources for this," "the restitution will create chaos within our justice system because many laws will have to be changed or newly created," or "if we return properties to Jews, then other groups such as Russians, Poles, Gypsies and even Red Cross will demand the same," etc. Then there is the idea to link restitution to Jews with the demand that Russia compensate Latvia for the years of occupation.

All of this is a simple result of the political elite doing nothing and not trying to explain calmly and reasonably to the Latvian people why it is so important and necessary to return Jewish property and what effect this will have on Latvia's contemporary history and international prestige in general.

On January 29, the Saeima decided that its two commissions, Justice and Foreign Affairs, should continue to discuss this issue.

It is impossible to have any real knowledge about what fate awaits the document developed by the MFA. It could go through all obligatory procedures in one month or it could be held up for years.



25 Ludzas Street, Riga



2 Abrenes Street, Riga



12 Birznieka-Upisha Street, Riga



13 Kliavu Street, Jurmala



31 Liela Street, Kandava

PREILI HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL PROJECTS

by David Silberman

The year was 2001 and I participated in an international gathering of Latvian Jews where a memorial to the executed Jews of Latvia and from Germany and other European countries was dedicated in Bikernieki Forest. The solemn mourning ceremony and the superb architectural concept were exceptionally moving.

The site was crossed by alleys and passages bearing names of the cities from which the victims had been deported. Burgomeisters (mayors) from towns and cities in Germany and several other European countries had delivered scrolls listing the names of deportees; these were encased in capsules and buried in the Memorial ground. Filled with emotion following the ceremony, I approached Mr. Sergej Ryzh, the architect, to express my admiration of his architectural solution and to ask if he might consider creating another memorial, of course smaller, for my own landsmen murdered in Preili.

Surrounded by many high-ranking officials, visitors, and foreign guests, Ryzh nevertheless handed me his business card and agreed to meet with me the next day at his office in Riga. There I told him of my intense involvement in Latvian Holocaust history and provided him with my writings — Holocaust survivors' testimonies and descriptions of the Preili Holocaust. Within a couple of days, we would arrange

a group trip to Preili.

Joining us were my friend and Preili native, Shmuel Latvinsky, and my old, good friend, Carolina Taitz, to act as translator. Carolina was a member of our American delegation, a former prisoner of the Rumbula ghetto, and a survivor of the Rumbula massacre in December 1941. On this, my first visit to Preili in more than 50 years, we met the mayor of Preili Dome (township), Janis Eglitis, and chief architect Valerijs Sturis. After a brief ride through the town, we arrived at the Jewish cemetery, behind which was a fence and the site of the terrible executions.

I believe that the Preili administration was quite bewildered by our unexpected arrival and our proposal to erect a memorial to the Jewish victims in a town with practically no remaining Jewish inhabitants — not to mention our interest in the Jewish presence of more than 60 years ago.

The suspicious, negative attitude of the local population of the once-flourishing Jewish community had been stereotypically entrenched by the Nazi Goebbels's propaganda and the Soviet anti-Zionist lies and anti-Semitic silencing of the truth of the Holocaust. I particularly sensed this attitude when we visited the Preili Township Museum. Nevertheless, we accomplished our purpose and returned to the township administration office, completed an application, and received permission from the Preili Dome to erect a memorial, provided that we would cover all costs of design and construction.

This was actually a dubious



Preili Holocaust Memorial at time of dedication on August 8, 2004.

victory for me, as I had not the slightest idea of the memorial's design, its cost, and construction — not to mention the source of funding. However, I was determined to fulfill this dream and, upon returning to New York, I was ready to tackle the project.

Sergej Ryzh and I communicated frequently, spending long hours on the basic design concept. I explained the need to follow our tradition concerning Jewish cemeteries, since we had to erect a Holocaust memorial where former Jewish Preili residents had previously constructed a memorial as they could. That had been during the Soviet era, in the 1950s, when the Communist Party permitted a tombstone inscription in Russian and Yiddish, following strict anti-Semitic, censored guidelines.

We included in our original design planning the ancient Jewish rule not to excavate or relocate existing graves. Therefore, all new memorial tombstones would be placed on special cantilever structures supported by reinforced foundations outside the existing mass burial place. On the central tombstone of black marble, we decided to engrave a phrase from Sheina Gram's diary in the original Yiddish. Sheina Gram was Preili's Anne Frank. She had continued to write in her diary until August 8,

continued on next page

1941, the day that she and her family were executed. We also agreed to collect as many names as possible of the Preili Jews and bury the scrolled list in a capsule similar to the Bikernieki Memorial's concept. Such were the general ideas to be implemented in the Preili Memorial complex.

Ryzh began to investigate the site, preparing the geological survey and working on the general composition of the Memorial.

Shmuel Latvinsky began researching the names of the murdered Preili Jews, obtaining information from various sources.

We worked tirelessly on this mission for three years, collected information, and prepared an accurate description of the events that took place in Preili based on eyewitness testimonies of Holocaust survivors, including the sole survivor, Mordukh Khagi, who had been saved by a Preili nobleman, the Polish Vladislav Vushkan.

Ryzh prepared the design at his own expense, receiving approval for the Preili Holocaust Memorial complex, which would be constructed in two stages. The first would be the Holocaust Memorial Monument; the second — complete restoration and renovation of the Jewish cemetery and its conversion to a Preili Jewish Memorial Park in memory of the former, distinguished Jewish community.

Although we had gotten the green light from the Preili Dome and obtained approval from the Latvian architectural authorities, we still had no real outside financial assistance. At that point, I realized that I'd have to rely on

my own resourcefulness and fund the project myself. I gave Ryzh permission to start the construction and guaranteed him the financing. He voluntarily and without salary took on the obligation of supervising construction, and thus we cooperated. He regularly sent me accounts of work performed and I paid the bills. This forced me to intensify my professional work as consultant engineer for the next three years until the Memorial's construction was completed.

Finally, on August 8, 2004, on the 63rd anniversary of the execution of Preili Jews in 1941, the Memorial honoring the memory of Preili Jews was unveiled.

As we neared the date, I wrote a special article, "Remember the Holocaust Victims," for the local Latvian newspaper, Preili Novada. The article announced the dedication of the Preili Holocaust Memorial; I was hoping to attract many Preili residents to the Memorial's opening event.

Present at the ceremony were numerous residents of Preili and of the surrounding districts of Latgale, government officials of Latvia, and ambassadors from Israel, Germany, and Russia. On the same day, based upon our documentation and the eyewitness report written by the survivor, Mordukh Khagi, Vladislav Vushkan was posthumously awarded the title, "Righteous among the Nations." The award was presented to Vladislav Vushkan's descendants in Latvia by Israeli ambassador Garry Koren and is on permanent display at the Preili Novada (Regional) Museum.

During the course of the

Memorial's construction, we gradually earned acceptance and support, and were befriended by many Preili residents, especially the local top administration: the head of the Dome, the chief architect, directors of both the Latvian and Russian high schools, the director of the Township Museum, and others. We met every year in an amicable environment, usually the summer months, since July 4 is Latvia's Holocaust Mourning Day. We supplied them with many books related to Holocaust history, the most valuable historical publication being Daugavpils Dr. Josif Rochko's Holocaust in Latgale.

As a result of our many years of goodwill and cooperation since the dedication of the Holocaust Memorial in 2004, the Preili administration established an annual tradition of a Holocaust Memorial meeting in early August to honor the Preili Jews murdered by the German Nazis and their local collaborators.

The next meeting is scheduled for August 8, 2015, coinciding with the completion of the second stage of construction and dedication of the restored/renovated Old Jewish Cemetery in Preili, when it will be converted into a Memorial Park to honor a former vibrant Jewish community that was destroyed in the Holocaust and has ceased to exist.



Present view of the building in which the main Preili synagogue was located before World War II.

ACADEMICIAN STRADINSH: LATVIAN JEWS MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO LATVIA...

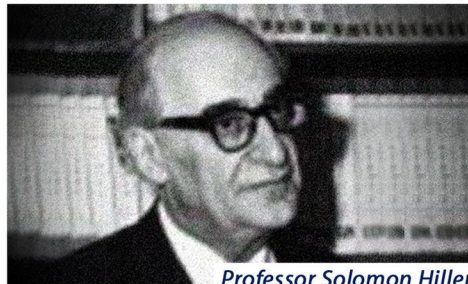


Academician Janis Stradinsh

This release of Courier in the section "News from Riga" provides information on a session of the Latvian Academy of Sciences mostly devoted to the 50th anniversary of the development in Latvia of one of the most important cancer-fighting drugs: Ftorafur. At the same meeting, academician Janis Stradinsh, former president of the Academy of the Republic of Latvia, gave a speech. Below, we have provided part of his speech, which was devoted to the contribution of Jews to Latvia's spiritual achievements:

"... Today we commemorate Professor Solomon Hiller, whose 100-year anniversary will pass in one and a half months, on January 14, 2015. Hiller was an extremely intelligent, perhaps controversial, person, a Jew from Riga, a graduate of the chemistry faculty of the University of Latvia. If, in then-Soviet Latvia, there would have been many more such Hillers who would have maintained their influence in independent Latvia, then today, Latvia in the scientific world would have been much stronger. . . I would like to express my thoughts on the significant contributions to Latvia of Latvian Jews — scientists, inventors, and intellectuals. Valter Caps was an inventor of the camera Minox and a Latvian Jew; he began his work in Estonia and concluded it in Riga. Many Latvian Jews have acquired worldly fame. We should

at least mention Iesaja Berlin, Gidon Kremer, Solomon Mikhoels, Mikhail Thal, Mark Rothko, and Lipman Bers, who was the founder of supersonic mechanics. Solomon Hiller and Regina Zhuk, inventors of Ftorafur, also got their creative inspiration in Latvia. Hiller was an influential man, he knew how to establish connections everywhere, including Moscow. He was far from a Zionist — in fact, he thought that the Jews should work to benefit the country in which they lived — he never forgot his nationality. At the Institute of Organic Synthesis (of which he was the chairman), he worked with many national and nonconformist Jews. I remember how, in 1968, the almighty Yuri Andropov, arrived in Riga and met with Hiller. Then he, Hiller, Regina Zhuk, and I toured the former Riga ghetto with survivor Abram Itsik (Mytia) Shpungin, the head of the supply division of Hiller's institute. Shpungin's political views on the national question were dramatically different from those of Hiller and soon Shpungin became an 'otkaznik' and immigrated to Israel.



Professor Solomon Hiller

This was the time of the so-called Prague Spring. This walk through the Riga ghetto was unforgettable, as were the books on the Holocaust, which were given to me by Shpungin, a very

smart and honest person. This gave me the opportunity to look deeper into the world of Jews and enabled me, at a later time in the years of Atmoda, to become the honorary president of the Latvia-Israel Society. Shpungin stood with me when we were in Jerusalem in the Yad-Vashem Museum. I made a statement at the opening for the Jews of Latvia and Estonia killed in the Holocaust.

On my return in May of 1990, I wrote the text of the Declaration on the inadmissibility of anti-Semitism and the genocide of Jews, supported by Anatoly Gorbunov, Ita Kozakevitsh, and Ruta Shats-Mariash. This Declaration, adopted by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia on September 19, 1990, opened the way for a visit to Latvia of the chairman of the Israeli Knesset during that same autumn, the first visit of the head of another country to Latvia, which had only just reclaimed its independence and statehood. All of this possibly would not have been had The Institute of Organic Synthesis, Hiller, Shpungin, and the Institute's freedom-loving atmosphere not existed.

We have much to learn from the Jewish people, an ancient and intelligent group, and who gave to the world the Bible, Jesus, Einstein, and, as we now also recognize, Karl Marx. It is a group of people that has enriched Latvia with outstanding individuals. . . it is often said that the Jews are as salt to a soup; they transform the taste. With such recognition, we will include creative Latvian Jews in the inheritance of our common culture and knowledge."

Translated from Latvian by Ivar Brod

News from Riga



Israel ambassador Hagit Ben-Yaakov at the presentation of F. Mihelsone's book.

On Holocaust Memorial Day on January 27, we commemorate the victims of the Holocaust. On this day in Riga, a Latvian language translation of the book, *Es izdzīvoju Rumbulā* (I Survived Rumbula), by Frida Michelson and David Silberman was launched; Ms. Michelson was one of the survivors of the Rumbula massacre. This book was published initially in Russian in 1973 in Israel, then in English in 1979 in New York. The book describes the horrors that the Jewish community faced in Nazi-occupied Latvia during the massacre in Rumbula in 1941. Over 25,000 Jews were killed in Rumbula. Her memories have now been translated into Latvian and published with the support of ICEJ-Lavija, the Embassy of Israel to Latvia, the Embassy of Germany to Latvia, Riga Bank Rietumu, and the Jewish Survivors of Latvia in USA. Speeches on the presentation were given by Ambassador of Israel to Latvia Hagit Ben-Yaakov, Ambassador of Germany Andrea Viktorina, Deputy Ambassador of the Netherlands Martijn Lambart, State Secretary of Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Andrejs Pildegovichs, Chairman of the Latvian Council of Jewish Communities Arkady Suharenko, and others. Video-speeches were presented by Lev-Ary Michelson, son of Frida, and David Silberman, co-author of the book. The speeches reminded us of the importance of remembrance and expressed the value of stories like Frida's.

On March 16, the Annual Latvian legionnaires' memorial procession, which honors the Waffen SS, part of the Nazis' armed wing, took place in Riga. The procession was peaceful. Immediately after the end of the liturgy, the organizers of the society "Latvijas Vanagi" and the representatives of the National Union led a convoy that peacefully and with the legionnaires singing, traveled from the church of St. John up to the Monument of Freedom, where they placed flowers. Some of the former legionnaires also placed flowers at the cemetery in Lestene. No confrontation occurred with anti-fascist protesters at that time. The representatives of the Latvian anti-fascist committee — dressed in white suits with signs reading "disinfection" — were surrounded by a crowd of journalists and the police. They arrived at the Monument of Freedom and placed a wreath dedicated to the "memory of victims of Nazism." The group also displayed historic photos of the inmates of concentration camps.



President of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, Ojars Sparitis, presents the award to Regina Zhuk.

On November 27, 2014, in Riga, the annual session of the Latvian Academy of Sciences was held. At this session, the academy's highest award — a Great Academy medal — was presented to Regina Zhuk, Ph.D. in chemistry, foreign member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, now living in Israel. Fifty years ago the Latvian chemist Regina Zhuk, together with Professor Solomon Hiller, was one of the main co-developers of Ftorafur, a cancer-fighting drug that is still widely used for the treatment of stomach tumors, digestive tract tumors, and tumors elsewhere in the body. The technology of

continued on next page

Ftorafur production was purchased by the Japanese firm Taiho Pharmaceuticals, which is still producing it today, as well as the Latvian company Grindeks. In those years, Ftorafur was the only Latvian commodity of scientific export and the largest source of hard currency for the Latvian Academy of Sciences. The proceeds from the sale of Ftorafur technology enabled the acquisition of modern equipment for many years, both for the Institute of Organic Synthesis, where Zhuk and Hiller worked, and for other academic institutions.

In the last issue of the Courier, we reported on the celebration in Riga of the young soloists' competition devoted to the 100-year anniversary of Michael Aleksandrovich. The contest was organized by The Max Goldin Society of the Jewish Cultural Heritage and the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia. Recently, this competition, which was held in three rounds, was completed; on February 21, the laureates sang and accepted congratulations during the concert *Dziesmu karuselis*, which was held on the International Day of the Native Language. The concert was held in the Jewish Theater at 6 Skolas Street. The winners: Evia Hilmane in academic singing and Ornella Rudevich for modern singing. The songs were performed in Yiddish, Hebrew, Latvian, English, German, Ukrainian, Romany, and Armenian.



Jury and winners of the M. Aleksandrovich competition.

On February 20, Chairwoman of the Latvian Saeima, Inara Murniece, visited the Museum of the Ghetto. Rabbi Barkan proudly reported that, to date, 40,000 people have visited the museum and spoke about the history of the museum and the plans for the future. Ms. Murniece's attention was drawn to the map of commemorative places of the 1918–1920 war for independence of Latvia. Rabbi Barkan reported that a map of places where Jews were executed and of the synagogues of Latvia is planned. Ms. Murniece noted with appreciation that the museum exhibition is devoted not only to the history of the Jewish community, but also to much of Latvian history. She also inspected the workshops where children were preparing portraits, ceramics, and porcelain products. The workshops include Jewish, Latvian, and Russian children; the museum serves as a center of friendship for children of many different nationalities.



Ludza synagogue building.

At the end of 2013, the Ludza synagogue — the oldest surviving synagogue in Latvia — was granted the status of a national monument and preliminary work on the restoration project was started. Last year, funding was obtained from the EEA Grants/Norway Grants program, and reconstruction efforts are now in progress. Restoration is planned to be completed by early 2016. The renovation will transform the building into a museum with some permanent exhibits on Judaism. On the ground floor will be an exhibition dedicated to world-famous Latvian-Israeli documentary film director Herz Frank and his father, the pre-World War II Ludza photographer Wulf Frank.

Compiled by Bronya Shif

CONCERTMASTER M. RABINOWITSCH

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

Rabinowitsch, Max-Mendel (June 16, 1890,* Libava [Liepaja] – January 12, 1973, Laguna Beach, CA, USA) — Concertmaster. He grew up in Libava and was schooled in the piano since childhood. At age 15 years, he appeared on stage in Riga for the first time, performing a Mendelssohn Concert in G Minor with an orchestra under the J. Eibenschutz. Since 1909, he had studied law at the University of Tartu, transferring in 1913 to the faculty of law at Petrograd University. He was concurrently studying piano at the Petrograd Conservatory in the class of Professor Anna Yesipova. He graduated from the University of Tartu in 1916, but never practiced law — instead deciding to devote his life to music.

After the Bolshevik's rebellion, Rabinowitsch returned to Riga, where he organized a music studio and performed concerts in Latvia, Estonia, and Germany. In 1920, he served in the army of the Republic of Latvia. In August 1922, he was invited by the great Russian singer Feodor Chaliapin to accompany him as a concertmaster on his tour of America. For the next eight years (excluding the 1923–24 season), Chaliapin preferred to perform with Rabinowitsch, giving

concerts in America, Europe, and the Middle East. Max Rabinowitsch was most likely favored because he was very adroit and flexible in his accompaniment. For these concerts Rabinowitsch served as both concertmaster and concert pianist, performing perfectly the most complex compositions of classical music. At the same time, he had joined Chaliapin in producing audio recordings, mainly with the well-known Victor Company. However, in 1929, they had to part because of financial problems resulting from the stock market crash.

In the same year, Rabinowitsch performed in his native town Libava. By this time, he had become a citizen of the United States and had settled in the suburbs of Los Angeles, California. Since the early 1930s, Rabinowitsch had actively worked with several major Hollywood film studios — RKO, Warner Brothers, MGM Studios, Paramount — as a musical director, composer, arranger, pianist, and, beginning in 1942, sometimes as an actor in many movies. For many years, the music accompanying dozens of famous Hollywood movies (*The*



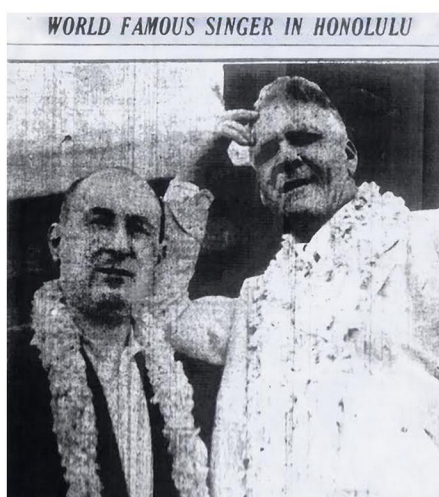
Max Rabinowitsch

Great Lie, Four Daughters, The Enchanted Cottage, and others) was performed by Rabinowitsch; he was the actual performer of the piano scenes for many Hollywood stars.

In addition to his work in Hollywood, he continued his concert performances and his work as a soloist. Rabinowitsch accompanied many stars: Isadora Duncan, Nathan Milstein, Jascha Heifetz, Frances Alda, Maria Jeritsa, Anna Case, and Igor Gorin (Greenberg). In his solo concerts, he won the hearts of all listeners by his outstanding grace and technical virtuosity, appearing to perform effortlessly the most difficult passages. He earned recognition from G. Gershwin as the best performer of the famous "Rhapsody in Blue" style.

At a fairly advanced age, he went to MGM studios several times a month to record and still performed concerts no less than two times a season.

* - Some American sources list another date of birth for M. Rabinowitsch — on July 7, 1891.



*F. Chaliapin and M. Rabinowitsch.
Photo from the newspaper
Honolulu Revue, October 8, 1926.*

By Ivar Brod

MY JOURNEY TO THE PARTISANS, PART V: (continued from previous issue)

1. BLOWING UP THE GERMANS

I began my combat training, which was often interrupted by actual fights with the Germans. At the end of November 1943, partisans blew up a long stretch of the Pskov Railroad, with almost all the units taking part in that operation. My unit was deployed at the Lokot railway siding, where I personally blew up the water tower. I bumped into my friends Sheinkman and Zalmanson after the operation on the way back to our base in Machkov Forest. Unfortunately, we didn't have time to chat because our units separated quickly.

My small unit, consisting of five explosives specialists, received our first individual assignment in January 1944. We were ordered to blow up a small river-bridge to isolate one German garrison from the other as they were stationed on opposite river banks. The Germans had erected concrete anti-aircraft cannon bunkers at each end of the bridge, and the bridge itself was patrolled by a sentry.

Four of us, each carrying 10 kilograms of dynamite, crawled on our bellies to place dynamite packages on the wooden trestles of the bridge. When we had crawled back to a safe distance from the bridge, our leader pulled the cord that was connected to the fuse, detonated the dynamite, and blew up the bridge. The Germans were totally astonished by the source of the explosion as they had expected an aerial bombing and began firing their anti-aircraft guns into the

empty skies. We enjoyed the fireworks for a little while and then returned to our base to report "mission accomplished."

I had an amazing encounter during one of the partisan raids. Our partisan unit has hooked up with another one, and I noticed a seemingly familiar figure among the other unit of men. The individual seemed to resemble Mendelevich, the guy who fled from Porkhov ahead of us. I looked closer and called him by name. When he looked in my direction, he recognized me and ran up to me with joy. We embraced and kissed each other. The surrounding partisans watched at our reunion in disbelief. We had just a little time that allowed me to tell Mendelevich that Sheinkman and Zalmanson had escaped with me and that they are fighting in a partisan unit in this same area.

I asked him how he managed to escape, but he answered only, "You see, I am here!" We were excited about seeing each other and waved farewell to each other as we marched with our respective units in different directions.

On February 22, 1944, our partisan group was honored to commemorate the Red Army Day by blowing up a German military railroad train at a point about five kilometers from Porkhov. The most dangerous part was getting to the railroad; it was closely guarded by the Germans, as was the surrounding area.

Armed with a load of TNT, we reached the main road and took cover in a ditch, observing the

From the memoirs of Mordukh "Monia" Gleser. Transcribed by Max Michelson. Translated by Leonid Pukshansky. In the last installment, Gleser was sent from the Riga Ghetto, where he smuggled arms for the resistance, to a work detail in Porkhov.

traffic and waiting for a suitable moment to cross. We saw a German armored vehicle equipped with a machine gun patrolling the road, passing back and forth at one-hour intervals. We waited until the vehicle was at the farthest point, then crawled across the road, ran for about a half kilometer, and took our position at the snow-protection barrier.

We needed to cover only 30 meters to get to the rails, but that was the most dangerous stretch. The Germans had strung wires attached to trunks of felled trees and hung empty cans on the wires. If touched, the cans' sound would be heard all around. So, we needed to be extremely careful not to touch them when getting to the rails.

There was another serious danger — the German shepherd guard dogs. Luckily, the partisans had devised a proven means to fool the dogs. We boiled our white camouflage cloaks in water to which homegrown tobacco had been added. We watched packs of dogs running very close to us, howling but not catching a whiff of our presence.

While a German patrol was walking along the railroad, carefully checking for the presence of mines or explosives prior to the train's passing, I clearly heard one of the Germans saying, "*Was suchst du dort? Kein Teufel kommt hier diese Nacht!*" ("What are you looking for?

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Even the devil wouldn't come here tonight!")

Soon we heard the train approaching; the wait was over. We crawled to the railroad and placed the explosives between the ties. I attached the second fuse and we fled quickly.

The Germans had certainly taken every precaution: the first two cars of the train, ahead of the locomotive, were just flatbeds loaded with stones. Aware of that, our group leader watched the silhouette of the train and pulled the cord at just the right moment. The blast was thunderous. We saw smoke, steam, fire, flying parts of the cars, and heard loud moans from the injured. We started running back to the main road, about 600 meters away, but the area we had to cross was absolutely bare because the Germans had previously cleared all the trees as a security measure. A few flares lit the sky just at the moment we reached the main road and we dropped flat onto the snowy ground. The German troops arrived and encircled the area.

A group of Germans came very close to us, perhaps just 40 meters away, but they remained on the roadway running atop the embankment, while we, in our white camouflage cloaks, were lying low at its base. They never spotted us, but started shooting randomly in the direction of the railroad just as we heard a shot from the opposite direction — from the woods. It was our comrade partisan, the driver who had brought us and the explosives on the sleigh and

was now awaiting our return in the woods. He was drawing the Germans' attention upon himself and away from us.

I heard the German command, "Alle Mann rechts!" ("Everybody go right!"), after which the Germans started moving to the right along the road. I yelled to my comrades, "Brothers! If you want to live, follow me to the left!" We crawled across the road and ran to the woods. The Germans noticed us and opened a maddening fire with explosive bullets from machine guns, but they didn't dare venture into the woods.

We ran as fast as we could into the thick of the woods. I became so exhausted that I lagged far behind my comrades and lost sight of them. They thought that I had been killed and continued running. I remained alone in unfamiliar territory. I wandered in the woods through the evening of the next day until I saw a village, which I couldn't recognize from afar. Nevertheless, I decided to go there and ask for directions to the partisans. As I neared the village, I couldn't believe my eyes — it was Rechitsa, the starting point of my long and arduous journey to the partisans. I felt horror and despair: after having been a free man, I was again in enemy territory! I was just about to weep, but pulled myself together—the feelings of freedom and the desire to fight the enemy were too strong in me. I was exhausted, yes, but I had to get back to the partisans.

I went to my friends, the Yemelianovs. The whole family was

inside the hut — Katia, Gennady, and their parents. They didn't recognize me at first and even got scared, since I was wearing my white camouflage cloak and carrying a German carbine. That changed when I said, "Katia!" They were happy to see me but were afraid that the Germans might burst in at any moment—if the Germans found me, they would burn the entire village to the ground. I told the Yemelianovs to calm down, that I would leave them shortly. I briefly described to them what had happened to me since our last meeting and, at the end, asked, "Did you hear a big explosion last night?" "Yes," they answered, and I announced proudly, "That was my explosion, I did that!"

The Yemelianovs served me supper and suggested that I take a nap because it was obvious that I was too tired to do anything else. They would take turns watching outside to alert me if the Germans were coming. My nap became a sound night's sleep. Old man Yemelianov awakened me in the morning, gave me a bag of food and a compass. He pointed out the direction on the compass that I should follow to get to "your buddies." I was deeply touched by his actions and kind words. We kissed each other and I left encouraged. It took me four days of walking through the woods and marshland to reach my partisans. They were extremely happy to see me alive.

In the meantime, the military situation had turned strongly in our favor. The Red Army had advanced



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to the Dno railroad station that was only 20 kilometers from Porkhov. We could clearly hear the artillery bombardment and expected to meet up with the Red Army any day now. The Fascists were retreating along every road. The partisans' objective was to impede their movement in every way possible and that was exactly what we were doing. We finally saw the Soviet regular soldiers riding on tanks on February 28, 1944. It is impossible to describe our elation and how emotional we all were when they and we embraced.

* * *

The Red Army moved on and we, the partisans, found ourselves in the rear. The war was still raging on and the foe was still occupying parts of Soviet territory, so we wanted to continue our fight. The partisans asked for permission to enlist in the Red Army and, of course, permission was granted. We became Red Army soldiers and my unit was integrated into an antitank battalion, where I became a 45mm gun layer. I went through many battles in Estonia and was promoted to the rank of corporal.

Our unit was then transferred to the Finnish Front, to the

Mannerheim Line. At the Battle of the Beloostrov Station on July 5, 1944, I was badly wounded and transported to Hospital #1117, where I convalesced through the beginning of October 1944. Upon my discharge from the hospital, a panel of medical experts found me unfit for duty and classified me a disabled veteran of the Great Patriotic War.

EPILOGUE

M. GLESER
Riga, 1960–1962

I returned to Riga on November 14, 1944. The city had been liberated from the Germans by the Red Army one month earlier. A free Soviet citizen, I walked the streets of free Soviet Riga in a state of excitement — joy over the Soviet Army's victory, joy over my survival, and satisfaction over my contribution to the fight against the Fascists. Yet, these feelings were overshadowed by grief over the enormous number of the best men lost in the war's carnage and over innumerable innocent victims who had been slaughtered by the Fascists in the ghettos and concentration camps. The number of Jewish survivors in Riga was very small, and it included just a handful

of the Ghetto Resistance Organization members.

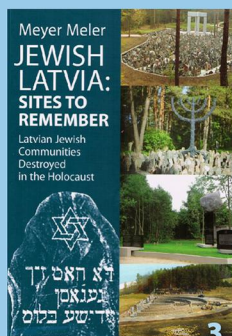
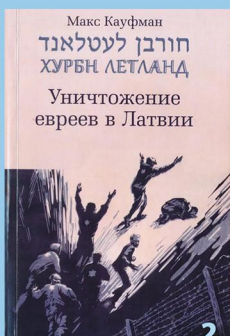
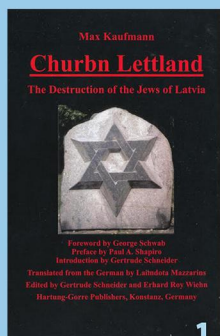
A few days after my return to Riga in November 1944, I met my comrade-partisans Sheinkman and Zalmanson, who were on a short leave from the Soviet Army. We were overjoyed to see each other and shared our individual combat stories. The three of us went to the former Riga Ghetto, finding it inhabited by total strangers. There were no signs of the recent tragedy that had occurred there; we had only our memories of the past.

We visited the old Jewish Cemetery that bore witness to the Fascist atrocities and genocide. The surrounding stone walls of the cemetery were scarred with bullet holes left after the killing of the Ghetto Jews by their German murderers — the gravestones had been broken or stolen.

We also went to Rumbuli Forest, the site of the actions. We bowed our heads and stood in silence with heavy hearts by the mass graves of our brethren slaughtered by the Fascists.

May the memory of the innocent victims of the Fascists live in perpetuity!

May the glory of their avengers, the Soviet soldiers, live forever!



DEAR FRIENDS,
As before, we suggest that you purchase one or more of these recently published books:

1. Max Kaufmann's *Churbn Lettland* — *The Destruction of the Jews of Latvia*, English translation, updated with commentaries and photos.
2. Max Kaufmann's *Churbn Lettland* — *The Destruction of the Jews of Latvia*, Russian translation, updated with commentaries and photos.
3. Meyer Meler's *Jewish Latvia: Sites to Remember*, published in English. This book describes hundreds of Latvian cities and shtetls where Jews lived prior World War II and the more than 200 sites where they were murdered.

All three books are available (Meler's book is in short supply) by mail. If you are interested, please make out a check for \$20.00 for each of Kaufmann's book, and check for \$40.00 for Meler's book (includes handling and postage in the U.S.) payable to Jewish Survivors of Latvia, Inc., and mail it to the address listed on page 2. Please specify whether you would like English or Russian edition of M. Kaufmann's book.