



The Latvian Jewish Courier

COMMEMORATING INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY IN RIGA



Bikernieki Memorial

On January 27, 1945, Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi concentration and death camp, was liberated. Sixty years later, in 2005, the UN General Assembly established this date as International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Between 1941 and 1944, in Latvia, in Bikernieki forest, 35,000 people were murdered by Nazis and their local collaborators. Among those who perished were 7,000 Latvian Jews, 13,000 Jews from Austria, Germany, and Czechoslovakia, and 15,000 Soviet prisoners of war and those who participated in resistance against the fascist regime.

Commemorations of this day take place in Latvia every year; this year a commemoration was held at the Bikernieki Memorial. This time, something unusual: An interfaith worship ceremony was held with heads of different religions in Latvia attending and participating.

The representatives were:

Bishop Guntars Dimants, Evangelical

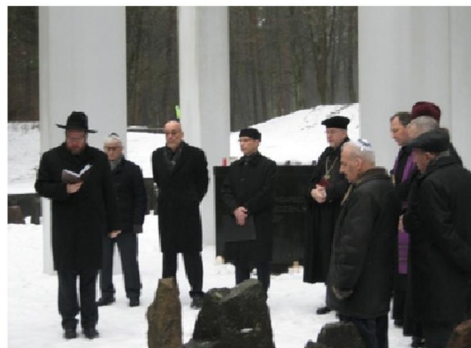
Lutheran Church of Latvia; **Vicar General Andris Kravalis**, Archdiocese of Riga, Roman Catholic Church of Latvia;

Jānis Dravants, priest of the Latvian Orthodox Church; and

Assistant Bishop Edgars Godiņš, Union of Baptist Churches in Latvia.

The commemorations included exhibitions, discussions, lectures, and screenings of several films—including documentaries. This range of events was made possible by the first-time participation and help of several embassies, including those of Israel, Romania, the United States of America, Switzerland, Spain, Lithuania, Germany, Canada, Poland, Italy, the Czech Republic and the EU.

Below is a list of several events that took place in Riga during the second half of January 2017.



Rabbi Kalev Krein read the Kaddish

The **Embassy of Romania** organized a discussion with Dr. Ana Maria Barbulescu, a researcher from the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania. S. Dubnov Riga Jewish Secondary School students participated. The discussion was followed by the opening of the exhibition "Righteous among the Nations."

The embassy also organized a

screening of *Gruber's Journey*. This movie is based on the pogrom in the Romanian city of Iasi on June 27–29, 1941; it depicts the dramatic experience of Curzio Malaparte, an Italian writer and journalist who had been sent to Romania in 1941 as a war correspondent for Italy's leading newspaper *Corriere della Sera*. The movie has English subtitles and will be translated into Latvian.



A shot from the documentary Not the Last Butterfly

Embassy of the United States of America organized a screening of the American documentary *Not the Last Butterfly*—the inspiring tale of "The Butterfly Project," a global education and arts program started in the United States. Its mission is to paint and display 1.5 million ceramic butterflies to honor and remember each child killed in the Holocaust. The screening was followed by discussions with the film's creators. Attendees took part in the painting of ceramic butterflies while listening to stories from a Holocaust survivor.

Embassy of Switzerland organized a screening of the documentary *Carl Lutz: The Forgotten Hero*, about a former Swiss diplomat in Budapest who, during World War II, saved between 50,000 and 70,000

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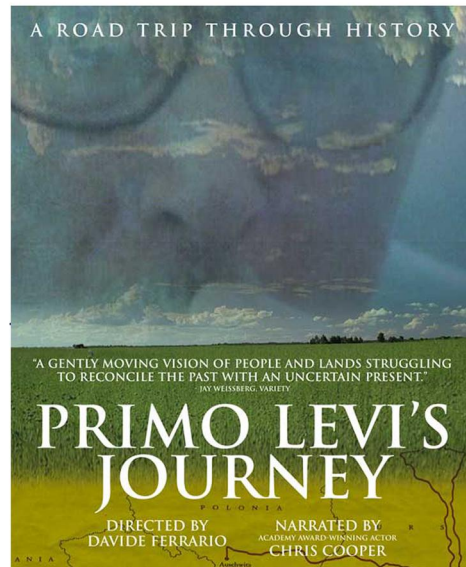
COMMEMORATING INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY IN RIGA

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Jews in Hungary using a so-called writs of protection to allow Hungarian Jews to emigrate. The movie has English subtitles and will be translated into Latvian.

Embassy of Spain organized screening of the film *El Angel de Budapest*, which is based on the book *A Spaniard Against the Holocaust* by Diego Carcedo. The plot focuses on Angel Sanz Briz, a Spanish ambassador in Hungary during World War II who helped to save the lives of thousands of Jews. There is also a romantic storyline that follows Antal, a Jewish young man who falls in love with the daughter of an Arrow Cross official. The movie has English subtitles.

Embassy of Italy organized screening of the movie *Primo Levi's Journey* directed by David Ferrario and starring Chris Cooper. Primo Levi, one of the 20th century's great writers, was liberated from the Auschwitz concentration camp and then embarked on a thousand-mile journey to his home in Turin, Italy; 60 years later, director Ferrario set out to follow in Levi's footsteps. *Primo Levi's Journey* is a comic, frightening, and picaresque roadtrip through history.



Poster for the film *Primo Levi's Journey*

The movie has English subtitles.

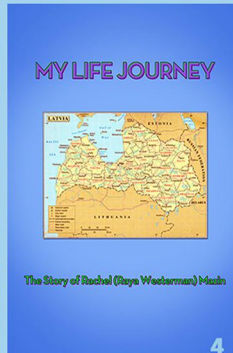
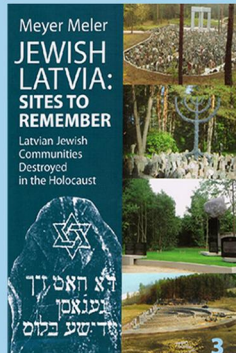
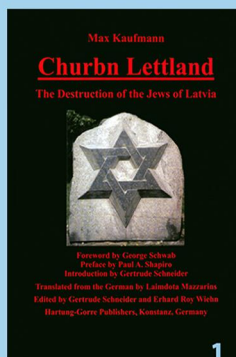
Embassy of Poland and **The Museum of Žanis Lipke** organized a discussion, "Humans in Inhuman Times—the Righteous Among the Nations in Latvia and Poland." Participants included Anna Stozh, head of the museum, which was named after the Ulm family in Markov and which showcases the Polish people who worked to save Jews in World War II, and other representatives of the museum.

By Yefim Shteynfeld

BOOKS AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE:

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 to World War II and the more than 200 sites where they were murdered.
4. Raya Mazin's *My Life Journey: The Story of Rachel (Raya Westerman) Mazin*, published in English, with color photos. This book was originally published in Hebrew and was translated and published last year by JSL.

All four books are available by mail. If you are interested, please make out a check for \$20.00 for each of Kaufmann's books, check for \$43.00 for Meler's book, and check for \$10.00 for Mazin'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.



2017 UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY



At the event in the United Nations hall. The Israeli delegation, including Holocaust survivor Noah Klieger.

On January 27, as in previous years on that date, I participated in an event in the UN General Assembly Hall; this year the UN titled the 2017 International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust: *Holocaust Remembrance: Educating for a Better Future*.

The program started with an introduction by Christina Gallach, Under-Secretary-General. Next UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres gave the keynote address. Peter Thomson, president of the seventy-first session of the UN General Assembly, spoke next.

In his address, Danny Dannon, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, stressed the rise of anti-Semitism in the modern world—promoted mainly by the radical Islamist organizations supported by Iran, its proxies such as Hesbollah, Hamas, and ISIS, and other extremist-terrorist entities that reject the existence of Israel

and the Jewish people.

Next to speak was Michelle J. Sison, Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations.

A Tribute to the late Elie Wiesel had been prepared by Ramu Damodaran, Chief, UN Academic Impact Initiative, of the Department of Public Information.

The Israeli delegation, including Holocaust survivor Noah Klieger made a deeply impressive appearance. Mr. Klieger's recounting of his experiences and survival was heartbreaking.

Musical performances, including Jewish ghetto songs and instrumental music, were part of the program. Cantor Israel Singer of Congregation Temple Emanu-El, Closter, New Jersey, conducted the Recitation of Memorial Prayers.

by David Silberman

ABOUT THE *UNKNOWN HOLOCAUST* DOCUMENTARY

At the memorial meeting on November 20, 2016, we screened a small segment of Israeli filmmaker and former Riga resident Boris Maftsir's documentary in progress, *The Unknown Holocaust*. Here we would like to acquaint our readers with the content of this film, which will be completed soon.



Author Boris Maftsir:

After I witnessed the impassioned and enthusiastic response of the audience of the play about Cukurs, I decided that I could not wait—the question of the memory of the Holocaust in Latvia needs to be addressed immediately and without delay.

The emphasis of the documentary is on the murder of Jews in small towns—like Preili, Auce, Malta, Bauska, Ludza, Jelgava—by the unit led by Arays and other local groups. We will attempt to convey as well as comprehend the depth of the nationalist hatred of the Latvian population for their Jewish neighbors. The vicious Latvian police unit commanded by Arays took part in the murders of approximately 30,000 Jews in cities and towns throughout Latvia. For this documentary, I tried to get a log of the unit's operations and reconstruct the activities of a "routine" week.

The film's central focus is an attempt to understand what prompted the majority of the Latvian population to turn so savagely against Jews at the outset

of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. What made so many take part in the persecution and murder of Jews? The desire to take revenge on Jews for their reaction to the annexation to the Soviet Union in June 1940? Were they jealous of the financial success of Jews in many areas? We can't predict or know the answers in advance, but I believe this to be the main objective of the film. This subject is one of the total conundrums of history—what is it that transforms everyday people into murderers?

And the big question: How do today's Latvians view the events through the lens of the present—seven decades on?

Below is a short description of the content of several segments of the documentary. The film offers eyewitness accounts and the views of historians of the Jewish tragedy in Latvia and other places. These recollections and opinions were given in places where executions took place.

1. Margers Vestermanis. On this day in December 1941, I worked in a team at the Old Jewish Cemetery in a Moscow suburb. Bodies of murdered children were brought there and laid down along the wall



to the left of the place where we now stand. As night began to fall, more corpses of children and women were brought. We had to

dig a trench for their grave and throw down their disfigured bodies. It was the most terrifying experience I had ever had in my life. I was 16 years old then; I am now over 90. The eyes and the expressions of those children have remained with me to the present day.

2. Antra Grube, Talsi. About 100 people were brought here in the morning one day in the first week of August. The action had been planned out to the smallest details. People were gathered in one place



and their valuables were confiscated. In Talsi, it was carried out at the match factory owned by the Jew named Lipkin. Then they were brought to the former *aizsarg's* shooting grounds, where they were forced to undress and were shot.

3. David Silberman, Preili. I stand at the house in which I was born and spent my childhood. My parents had a good flax business. In 1940, the Soviets came and our business was nationalized. My father became



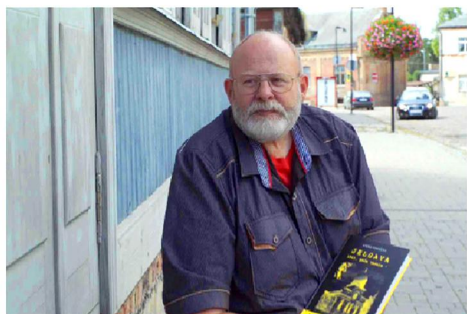
a servant for what was his former business. Father heard about the actions in the Polish ghetto and,

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ABOUT THE *UNKNOWN HOLOCAUST* DOCUMENTARY (CONTINUED)

when Germans entered Latvia, he decided to flee. My mother was against it, she remembered the gallantry of the German officers in 1914, but my father insisted and I supported him.

4. **Andris Tomosuns, Jelgava, writer.** Responding to a question from the filmmaker about the idea of writing a book about the Holocaust: Work on the book took about eight years. The first task was searching for documents about those events; only one Jewish witness was still alive, the rest had either been murdered or had died since the war. Some documents were found in the museum



of the Riga ghetto, as well as in the materials from the trial of the killers, which was held in Germany after the war. This was the basis of the book. The most valuable part in the book was the accompanying DVD, compiled from the statements of eyewitnesses who had lived in Jelgava in July 1941.

Mr. Tomosuns also talked about so-called detachment of self-defense. This detachment was headed by Martins Vagulans, an agriculturist and the editor of the local newspaper. He had received from Stahlecker, commander of the *Einsatz*-group, written consent to the establishment of the security detachment.

Since the end of June, he had participated in the guerrilla war against the Red Army, which did retreat.

5. **Ilana Ivanova, Liepaja.** She told the history of the photos of the shootings in Shkede. This happened at the end of the summer of 1943. Her father was a mechanic (he was called *David mit die goldene Hand*) and had been sent to repair the electricity in the office of Emile Shtrode. He was left alone in the



room, because Germans trusted him, first because he was fluent in hoch-Deutsch, and, second, it was not the first time he had done such work. By this time almost all Liepaja Jews had been killed, only 836 Jews were alive in the ghetto: the professionals in different specialties and their families. On Mr. Maftsir's question about how her father had found the photos, Ms. Ivanova said that her father himself never told her about this, she learned about it from her mother in the last years of her life. Her father was repairing the lamp in the office and in an open drawer he saw photos (or negatives). He took them and went downstairs to the basement, where Mayer Stein, also a prisoner of the ghetto, was staying. They copied the negatives and put them in an iron box, soldered it shut, and buried it in the courtyard of the building where

the stables were and where a parking lot is now.

6. **Aigars Urtans, Bauska, historian.** In this place where we are now, which is in a forest 8 km from the center of Bauska, on the bank of the River Memele, there was a shooting grounds for the police and *aizsargs* before the war. At the beginning of August 1941, this place was chosen for the shooting of Bauska's Jews. The massacre was prepared for two weeks in advance. All employees of the police district were mobilized. The campaign began at approximately 9 p.m. People were taken at night from Bauska in this forest on trucks and kept all night on the embankment under guard. (*The shooting was moved to another location.*) In this building, where an



editorial office is now located, but which was a city outpatient hospital before the war, in July of 1941, a brutal crime was committed: 56 Jewish men were castrated. The intent of this action is unclear, as, in the end, they were shot. A Latvian city doctor named Naiders refused to take part in the operations, so a German doctor, with the assistance of a local veterinarian, did it without an anesthetic. Local policemen held the victims' hands and feet. The victims were kept there for two weeks, then killed.

In Memoriam GREGORY SMIRIN (MARCH 11, 1955 – JANUARY 16, 2017)

It is very difficult and sad to write an article if it concerns a person you like very much and to whom you feel very close. Gregory Smirin passed away on January 16, 2017, in Riga, Latvia. He was only 62 years old. He was born in a small city, Drissa (Belarus), located 20 kilometers from the border of Latvia. The name of the city today is Verkhnedvinsk. When he was 10, he moved with his parents to Jurmala, Latvia, where he resided until the end of his life. He was highly educated, with a doctorate in history; he was very friendly, always ready to help anybody who asked him.

He had written and published about 70 scientific papers and books. He was a superb book editor; he edited and published the Russian translation of Max Kaufman's *The Destruction of the Jews of Latvia*, which recounts the experiences of the Jews who stayed in Latvia during the Nazi occupation. Kaufman was a former



Gregory Smirin

inmate of the Riga ghetto; with Smirin's notes and comments, this book became a real encyclopedia of the Riga ghetto. He edited and took a big part in publicizing books in Russian that had as their subject the Jews of and in Latvia. Smirin was also a great friend, he took a large part in editing and publicizing my book. An honest and decent person, Gregory was deeply devoted to his profession.

At the end I have to repeat: it is a pity and it hurts to lose Gregory Smirin.

May he rest in peace.

By Gerta Feigin

Translated from Russian by Anna Rishik



A collection of books edited and prepared for publishing by Gregory Smirin

NEWS FROM LATVIA

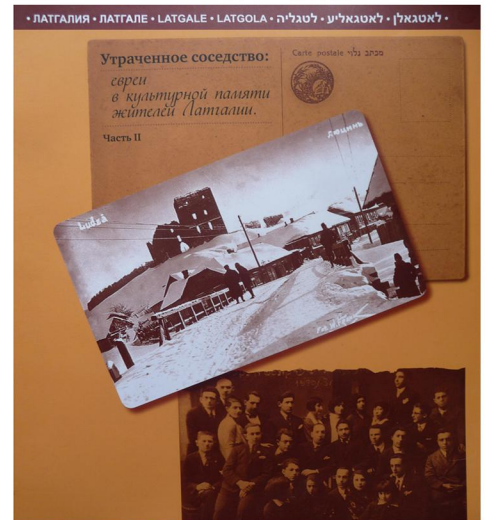


Joseph Shafro, the synagogue elder, lights the Hanukkah candle. Second from the left in the audience is president R. Vejonis.

A Hanukkah celebration organized by the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia took place at the Peitavshul synagogue in Riga. The event was attended by the president of Latvia Raimonds Vējonis, former president of Latvia Valdis Zatlers and his wife, Minister of Defense Raimonds Bergmanis, as well as other officials and members of the diplomatic corps, heads of various religious communities, representatives of culture and science, and many others. Guests discovered the history of Hanukkah, took part in the lighting of candles, and enjoyed a traditional festive meal.

the Czech Republic in Latvia. As Ambassador of the Czech Republic Miroslav Kosek explained during the opening ceremony, the exhibition provides a narrative for an unknown page in history. Through the stories of a few families the exhibition tells the story of how Czech Jews fleeing from Nazi Germany to the East, mainly Poland, after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact found themselves in the territories controlled by the U.S.S.R. and were then sent to the Gulag. Mr. Kosek noted that the fate of the Jews that ended up in the U.S.S.R. was less tragic than of those who remained under the authority of Germany. Some survived, and many joined the army of Czech General Svoboda, which was formed in the U.S.S.R. by the former citizens of Czechoslovakia to fight the Germans. "In Riga there is a large number of exhibits and events on the Holocaust, which all focus on the crimes of the Nazi regime. We have decided to show this page of history with another, more complex angle," noted the ambassador. The exhibition was developed by the Czech Institute for Research of the Totalitarian Regimes; after Riga, it will travel to Tallinn.

The presentation of the scientific anthology *Lost Neighborhood: The Jews in the Cultural Memory of the Inhabitants of Latgale (Part II)* was held in the Jews in Latvia Museum in the autumn and was subsequently presented at the Faculty of Human Sciences of the University of Latvia in January. This volume is part of a large-scale project researching Jewish history, culture, ethnography, and epigraphy, as well as the stereotypical notions and beliefs of different ethnic groups about Eastern European Jews. This book is based on the data collected during expeditions to Latgale and Israel between 2011 and 2015.



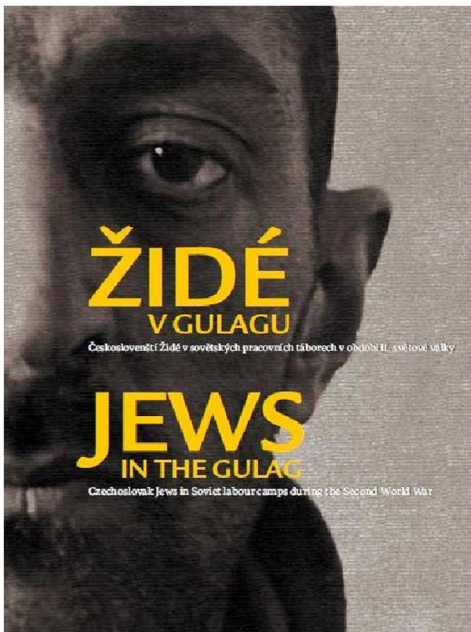
Lost Neighborhood anthology cover

This new volume is the second part of the book series about Latgale published by the Center "Sefer" and the Jews in Latvia Museum (the first volume was released in 2013). The articles in the book were prepared by researchers from Latvia, Russia, and the United States.

The Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia, the Jews in Latvia Museum, and the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia have announced an essay contest "Diverse Latvia: The Jewish Community in the History of Latvia and Today" for Latvian students in grades 8 through 12. The objective of the contest is to stimulate students' interest in the history, culture, and traditions of the Jews in their province, city, and Latvia as a whole. Particular attention will be paid to the contribution of Jews to the development of the Latvian state and its social, economic, political, and cultural life.

Financial support for the competition is being provided by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia. The awards ceremony will be held on April 26, 2017, in the House of the Riga Jewish Communities at 6 Skolas Street.

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"Jews in the Gulag" exhibition poster

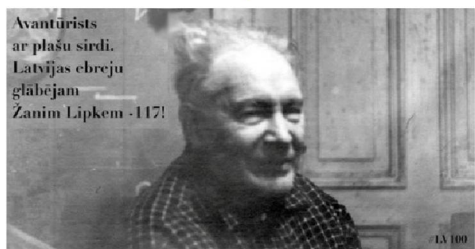
The "Jews in the Gulag" exhibition opened in the Jews in Latvia museum with the support of the Embassy of

NEWS FROM LATVIA (CONTINUED)



A shot from the upcoming film.

At the end of January, a new feature film dedicated to the life and work of Zhanis Lipke began filming in Jurmala. The film, titled *The Boy with a Dog*, is being directed by Davis Simanis, with Arturs Skrastinsh playing the role of Zhanis. The protagonist is Zigis, son of Zhanis and Iohanna Lipke. Zhanis is the most colorful figure among the Latvian saviors: an enthusiastic and fearless adventurer who, because of his humanity, saved more than 55 Jews during the Holocaust. *The Boy with a Dog* will be the first film telling of these tragic events in the history of the Latvian Republic. These events have been interpreted differently at various times and have been a subject in many discussions. Collaboration policy and resistance during pivotal points in the war have been of great interest to historians, but their portrayal in the arts is also important to the future existence of the nation believe the movie's creators. The movie will premiere in 2018 as part of the program dedicated to the centennial celebrations of the establishment of the Republic of Latvia.



Translated text: "An adventurer with a big heart. The savior of Latvian Jews, Zhanis Lipke, is 117!"

On February 1, the 117th birthday of Zhanis Lipke, the Lipke Memorial invited all those wishing to gather to

meet the creators of the movie and enjoy food prepared by Arija Lipke, Zhanis's daughter-in-law.



In January 2017, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., convened a seminar on Holocaust Studies in the Baltic States. The focus was on current scholarship and future directions. Topics discussed included the material relevance of eyewitness accounts and the preservation of documentary evidence; the Holocaust in textbooks; restitution of properties seized by the two occupying powers—Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany; and motives of local participants in the slaughter of Jews. Extensively discussed without reaching conclusions was the question: To what extent was the mindset of locals infested by Nazi propaganda, which equated Judaism with Bolshevism? It was agreed that Judeo-Bolshevism was a potent weapon that spurred some locals to participate in the murder of Jews—but this needs further investigation.

The overall sense was that Holocaust studies in the Baltic States are still in their infancy. Participants from Latvia included Ilya Lensky, director of the Jews in Latvia Museum; historian Didzis Berzins (University of Latvia); and researcher Edwin Ewarts (Institute of the History of Latvia). U.S. observers included, among others, Sheila Johnson Robbins and Professor George Schwab.

Thanks to the Frida Michelson's *I Survived Rumbula* (see *Courier* Vol. 29, Issue 2 - September 2015) and Yad Vashem exhibition that tours the schools all over Latvia, students in various cities (Ogre, Jelgava, Jaungulbene, Gulbene, Riga) have had an

opportunity to meet with Israel's Ambassador Lironne Bar-Sadeh, ask questions, and listen to her presentation about Israel's past, present, and future.



L. Bar-Sadeh, Israel's Ambassador, speaks at a Latvian school

On February 22, Ms. Bar-Sadeh visited Frida's native town Jaungulbene, met with teachers in the local gymnasium, delivered a presentation about Israel, and opened a discussion with students. Frida's books were presented to the school, local municipality, and library.

Several events were held in Riga, Latvia, on March 16—the memorial day of Latvian SS legionaries.

One of the central events during the first half of the day was the march from the Church of St. John in Vecriga to the Monument of Freedom, organized by a branch of the Daugavas Vanagi Latvija Society. This rally was attended by members of this organization and others, about two thousand people bearing Latvian flags and flags of their organization.

The Riga City Council rejected the claims of the Latvian anti-Nazi Committee (LAC), suggesting to move its protest to another place. The committee considered this proposal to be humiliating and decided to abandon the protest. Nevertheless, some LAC activists and their supporters went to the Monument of Freedom on the afternoon of March 16 and lit candles in memory of those peaceful inhabitants of Latvia who were destroyed by the Nazis. A demonstration was held concurrently at the Monument of Freedom in memory of the victims of the Latvian Ghetto and the Nazi concentration camps.

Compiled by Ivar Brod
Translated from Russian by Mariya Taukule

ABRAHAM BRAUN: LEADER OF THE BUND IN LATVIA, JOURNALIST, ATTORNEY

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.

Abraham Braun, Sergei, (1/12/1881, Riga – 11/23/1940, New York)—the leader of the Bund in Latvia, journalist, attorney. He was born into a prosperous family known for its public activity.

In 1900, he entered the Riga Polytechnic Institute and was captivated by the ideas of the Bund; he was soon expelled from the Institute for underground political activities. He was able to complete his higher education by 1910, when he received the diploma of first degree (Candidate) law from the University of Paris. In 1901, he became an active Bund member. During 1902–1903, authorities severely persecuted revolutionaries; in response, Braun became one of the leaders of “organized revenge”—an established terrorist group in Riga. It was then that he took his undercover name of Sergei; it stayed with him for the rest of his life. During these years, he was arrested and imprisoned many times. In 1906 and 1907, he was a delegate to the Bund conferences.



A. Braun's journalist ID card from Berlin, 1923

The Bund sent him to South Africa, where a community of Jews from Latvia and Lithuania was being organized. Here he created Bund cells and collected money for the party. From 1908, he lived in Paris, returning in 1912 to Russia and working in Moscow and in St. Petersburg.

At the beginning of 1917, Braun was serving on the Moscow Military-Industrial Committee. After the coup, he intensified his participation in the Bund and moved to Minsk, where the Bund Central Committee was located. During the eighth conference of the Bund in December 1917, he was elected as the candidate member of the Central Committee. In 1917–1920 in Belarus, Ukraine, and later in Russia, he spoke out against the revolution and the Bolsheviks in both print and at various meetings. In 1921, he returned to Riga, where the authorities arrested him on suspicion of supporting Bolsheviks. Only the



*A. Braun with his comrades-in-arms at the 35th anniversary gathering of the Bund. Front row, left to right: **Jacob Landau** - head of the department of Jewish education, **Noah Maisel** - Saeima deputy, **Unknown**, **Isaac Levin-Shatkes** - journalist, **Perets Meiksin** - one of the Bund leaders, and **A. Braun**.*

intervention of leaders of the international social-democracy movement saved him from execution. After his release, he actively engaged in party propaganda, wrote articles, and participated in the discussions about communism. Braun's views could not always be clearly labeled left or right; he often spoke in opposition to all. At the same time, his abilities as a public speaker were considered outstanding. He lived in Riga until 1934, with long absences associated with fulfilling journalistic commitments. For several years, he was a correspondent in



Abraham Braun

Berlin. In 1925, he became editor of a popular newspaper, *Dos Folk*; after it was closed in 1927, he became a representative of the American Jewish newspaper *Forverts* in Riga and Berlin. In 1928–1931, he lived in Paris and was the correspondent of the newspaper *Socialdemokrats* in France and in Belgium.

After the coup in Latvia in May 1934, Braun, together with other social-democrats, was imprisoned in the concentration camp in Liepaja. After his liberation in April 1935, he was forced to leave Latvia, spent several years in Estonia, and, in October 1938, arrived in New York. Here he continued in journalism at the newspaper *Der Freind*; he also on behalf of the Working Circle (“Arbeter Ring”) spoke brilliantly to various audiences on the topics of “Dictatorship and Democracy,” “The Situation in Germany,” “Fascism in Europe,” and others. In 1939, he went on an extensive trip across the United States and Canada, giving lectures in about 40 cities. At the end of 1940, Braun decided to go to Europe, possibly to Latvia, where governing had moved to Moscow proxies, but at the farewell party he had a heart attack and, on the following morning, he died.

By Ivar Brod

Translated from Russian by Alan Solovey

JOE'S VIOLIN NOMINATED FOR 'BEST DOCUMENTARY SHORT' OSCAR

Each year in late January we find in many newspapers—not only American ones—a list of movies and their producers and actors who have been nominated for the Oscar, which is awarded by the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. This year, the list was of particular interest for the Jewish population of Latvia. Raphaela Neihausen, a member of our organization, produced *Joe's Violin*, which was nominated for Best Documentary (Short Subject). Raphaela attends our annual memorial meetings every year; last November her six-year-old son Bez was the youngest to light the Memorial Candle. Raphaela's parents are well-known to our community: her mother, Aelita Fitingof, international singing star, has performed beautiful Yiddish songs for us; her father, Jack Neihausen, author of *Thank You, Mr. Nixon*, served as sound technician at these performances.



Raphaela on the famous red carpet

Since her youth, Raphaela has dedicated herself to the cinema. She produced her first documen-

tary, *Miss Gulag*, in 2007; she has now reached a new level of success—a word we do not use lightly—as even a nomination is considered to be an outstanding achievement.

The theme of the movie is very close to Raphaela's heart. Both Fitingof and Neihausen family members perished in the Riga ghetto. For the members of the JSL society, the documentary's subject is also close to our hearts: the tale of a Holocaust survivor, Joseph Feingold, who made a decision that would change not only his own life, but the fate of a young talented girl.

A synopsis for the film: Joe Feingold is a 93-year-old Holocaust survivor from Poland. About three years ago, the lifelong violinist realized he no longer had the dexterity to play to his standards. He considered selling his instrument, but then heard an announcement on WQXR, a New York classical music station. The station was looking for used instruments to be donated to disadvantaged New York City schoolchildren. So, Joe hopped on a bus and went to the collection point at Lincoln Center, where he left his treasured violin. All might have ended there were it not for the fact that Feingold and his instrument had a fascinating past and the recipient, Brianna Perez, 12 years old at the time, had this potentially amazing future: Two strangers connected by a fiddle.

Feingold was born in Warsaw in 1923. After the Nazis invaded in 1939, word reached the family that his father was about to be arrested. So Feingold and his



father fled to eastern Poland, then under Russian rule. But the Hitler-Stalin pact changed everything. Father and son were sent to separate Siberian labor camps—both survived. After the war, Feingold made his way to a displaced persons camp in Germany. One day he was at a flea market, saw a violin, and decided to buy it. Lacking money, he bartered a carton of cigarettes for the instrument.

Why a violin? "Because I had a violin since childhood," he replies. Finally he came to the United States and settled in New York.

At the end of the film, we see Joe reading the letter Brianna wrote inviting him to her school. We watch him at an assembly speaking to the students and, later, listening to Brianna play the special Grieg piece she had carefully practiced. It is a wonderful film!

We heartily congratulate Raphaela, her parents, Aelita and Jack, and we recommend that all our members watch and enjoy this documentary:

Watch it here: bit.ly/2lfw2XB

by Bronya Shif

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN LATVIA

The Latvian Government has stood by its commitment to support Holocaust education, remembrance, and research that categorically condemns the Holocaust and commemorates its victims.

During the Soviet Union's illegal occupation of Latvia and the totalitarian regime instituted during that period, questions and discussions about the past, including Holocaust crimes, were discouraged and silenced or even directly prohibited. Only with the restoration of independence of Latvia in the 1990s did it become possible to address the need for Holocaust education, remembrance, and research. On September 19, 1990, Latvian parliamentarians adopted a declaration condemning genocide and anti-Semitism in Latvia.

Holocaust studies are now part of the standard history curriculum in Latvia's schools. The curriculum is regulated by the terms adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia; these terms regarding the teaching of history are enforced in all schools in the country. Questions about the Holocaust are included in the final primary school examination and in the history examination at the end of secondary school. The Holocaust has been included on the list of themes that are mandatory in the basic school program. During specific subjects—mainly in the context of history courses—teachers must set time aside to cover concrete aspects of the Holocaust. Several books on the Holocaust and the history of the Jewish community in Latvia are presently available for use by students, including: *History of Modern Times: the 20th*

Century (J.Freibergs, 1998), and *Jews in Latvia* (Leo Dribins, 1996, republished in 2002).

Different aspects of the Holocaust are also incorporated into other school subjects. For example, literature classes include studies of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Sunflower* by Simon Wiesenthal, and *Night* by Elie Weisel.



Teachers gathered before leaving for training in Israel in 2016

Among other books available are *Tell Ye Your Children*—a book on the Holocaust in Europe 1933–1945 by Paul A. Levine and Stephane Bruchfeld. This volume was the result of cooperation with the International Task Force. Seven thousand copies were published in Latvian, as well as three thousand in Russian. Materials for teachers have also been prepared, including the handbook, *A Controversial History*, published by the Latvian Association of History Teachers (LAHT). In collaboration with the Swedish Institute and the U.S. Embassy in Riga, LAHT organizes regular seminars on Holocaust education for teachers in Latvia. LAHT coordinates visits by teachers from Latvia to Israel under a teacher-training program.

A key tertiary education and research institution in relation to Holocaust studies is the Center for Judaic Studies, established in 1998 by the University of Latvia. The Center offers courses to students on the history of the Jewish community in Latvia and the Holocaust; it

engages Latvian and foreign scholars who are studying at the university in research on selected topics. The Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia, the Jews in Latvia Museum, and the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia have announced an essay contest for pupils in grades 8–12 attending Latvia's schools; the subject: "Diverse Latvia: The Jewish community in the history of Latvia and today." More detailed information can be found in the "News from Latvia" section of the current issue.

Education on the Holocaust is not confined to Riga. As a part of the project "Latvia's Jewish Community: History, Tragedy, Revival," an exhibition prepared by the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with the museum "Jews in Latvia" was opened several years ago in Riga. The exhibition has been successfully touring Latvia since the beginning of 2002, going on display at venues such as Daugavpils University, Vidzeme University College, Liepaja Pedagogical Academy, the National Library of Latvia, the Rezekne branch of the Latvian State Archives, and the Ludza Museum of Local History.



Teachers and representatives from Latvia in Yad Vashem. Seated in the first row on the left, Dr. Aron Shneer, Yad Vashem's leading expert in Holocaust Studies, native of Ludza, Latvia

The Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia actively cooper-

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HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN LATVIA

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ate in support of the opportunity for teachers in Latvia to attend courses at the Yad Vashem International School of Holocaust Studies in Jerusalem. Since 2010, six groups of Latvian teachers (a total of more than 150 teachers) have had the opportunity to participate in these courses to learn Holocaust teaching techniques and strategies and to acquire tools on how best to approach and deconstruct the discourse of anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial, and other forms of intolerance and xenophobia. In 2016, teachers, representatives of museums, and researchers (22 in total), led by representative of Ministry of Education and Science Mrs. O. Arkle, participated in these courses. They listened to a speech, given in fluent Latvian, by former Riga Ghetto prisoner Itzhak Pukin; the speech recounted his personal story about hiding and thus avoiding the massacre in Rumbula in late 1941. The audience had a very emotional response to his speech.



Holocaust survivor, former prisoner of Riga Ghetto and death camp Strazdenhof Mr. I. Pukin (seated, center) with group of history teachers from Latvia in Yad Vashem in 2016.

This year, 25 people (23 history teachers, 1 employee of the Z.Lipke Memorial, and 1 employee of the Latvian Museum of Occupation) visited Israel to participate in the training. Also, in the last three years, groups of teachers from Latvia have

participated in trainings hosted by Memorial de La Shoah in France.

Virtually all the teachers who took part in the special training programs at Yad Vashem are now actively engaged in different activities of the National Center for Education. These “graduates” are continuing their professional development, with some of them working on new textbooks and developing methodologies and course materials for other teachers.

Since 2012, the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, has organized a nationwide tour of Yad Vashem’s traveling exhibition “No Child’s Play,” which displays photos and information from archives about the life of Jewish children during the Holocaust. These tours have been attended by representatives of the Latvian government, the Diplomatic Corps, the Jewish community, policy makers in education and culture, historians, and journalists. The exhibition also served as a supplementary aid for Holocaust education—offering exhibits for schools.

In 2014, senior representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science and the Embassy of the State of Israel visited various schools in Latvia and assessed the general knowledge of the Holocaust. Key observations indicated that the knowledge is good, but that pupils should, nevertheless, be more actively encouraged to visit museums and memorials.

With great confidence we say that the Latvian Republic has adopted a strong political position on education about and research into the Holocaust.

By Semyon Gizunterman