



The Latvian Jewish Courier

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JEWISH SURVIVORS OF LATVIA, INC.

JSL's 2013 Yizkor

Our 2013 Yizkor was held on Sunday, November 17, at Park East Synagogue on New York City's Upper East Side. The program began with remarks by our Vice President, Joseph Faerber, who read a letter from our President, Steven Springfield, who was unable to attend. The lighting of memorial candles followed—six for the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust, one for the fallen Jewish fighters in the Allied Armies, one for the survival and independence of Israel, and one for the Jewish writers, public figures, and other bearers of Yiddish culture and tradition killed under the Stalin regime.

David Silberman, the Acting President, shared his vision for the future of our organization, and guest speakers Douglas Davidson, U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, and Roland Binet, a Holocaust researcher



Douglas Davidson, US Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues.

from Belgium, followed.

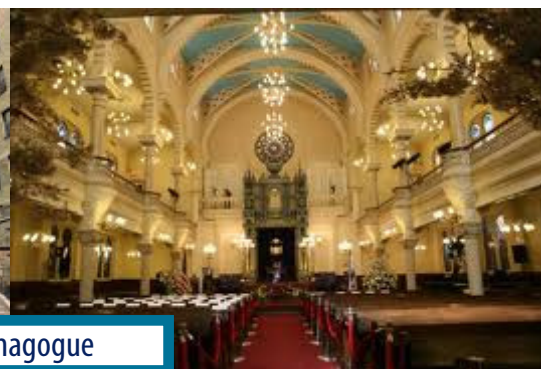
Cantor Sholom Kleinlehrer sang the prayer "Ele Mole Rachamin" and the traditional Kaddish, closing the official ceremony. Afterwards, we screened a documentary film "Ghetto Stories" produced in 2013 by Riga Cinema Studio, presenting recollections of Jewish survivors, former prisoners of Riga ghetto, and Latvian and Russian eyewitnesses to the horrific Nazi crimes.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The World Reunion of Liepaja (Libau) Jewry will take place in Liepaja from July 7-10, 2014 and is dedicated to the 215th Foundation and 25th Renewing anniversaries of the Jewish communities of Liepaja. For more information contact: Ilana Ivanova, née Zivcon, Organizing Committee Chair; Phone + 371 29232949; e-mail: ilaval39@gmail.com



Park East Synagogue



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2013 YIZKOR SPEECHES

Letter From the President Steven Springfield

Dear Friends,

It is with deep regret that because of health reasons, I will not be able to join you at this year's memorial gathering. Following my doctor's advice I am not allowed to travel long distances.

May I express to you my gratitude for allowing me to be the President of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia for the last twenty years. It was a great honor for me but most of all to try to remind the world of the tragedy that befell our Jewish people. It is our moral duty to keep reminding our future generations of the Nazi atrocities, and the unspeakable, horrible suffering that our people had undergone.

Keep the torch burning for our survivors. I wish you all good health. I will miss you very much. My mind and heart will be with you.

Steven Springfield

Address Of the Acting President David Silberman

It is a great honor and privilege for me to accept the position of acting President of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia organization.

I consider it a symbolic act to continue the sacred task of our senior members, who endured and survived the horror of the Holocaust, to remember the victims and pass the history on from generation to generation, never to forget!

We recently lost our good friend and long-term active member, Leo Kram, Zichrono Le'Brachah. Blessed be his memory. Leo was our Treasurer and he was also responsible for collecting and publishing material for our newsletter, the Courier.

Several of our founding members have passed away or become incapacitated, requiring younger members of the Board to step up and undertake the work of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia.

This organization, founded in 1984, has been active without interruption for almost 30 years.

I am especially grateful to Steven Springfield and George Schwab for their assistance and guidance, as I prepare to assume the leadership.

My deep appreciation goes

continued on next page

also to Ivar Brod and Gerta Feigin for their devotion to the cause.

We welcome our new Board members—Mitchell Lieber, Lev Posvolsky and Yefim Shteinfeld—and wish them success in their work. A special word of thanks to Mitchell Lieber, for his invaluable contribution to our organization with his film, *Rumbula's Echo*.

We wish our good friend Michael Dumesh a speedy recovery from illness so that he can rejoin our Board in good health.

Our gratitude goes to the *Courier* staff: Linda Feigelson, Managing Editor, and Emili Allen Feigelson, the new Creative Director.

I would like to thank our guest speaker, Mr. Douglas Davidson, for raising in solidarity with us the painful issue of the return of Jewish communal properties, first stolen by the Soviets, then by the Nazis, and now being kept by the Latvian government.

Also, our gratitude goes to Roland Binet, a unique personality, for his steadfast defense of the true history of the Holocaust.

Finally, looking to the future, our plans include our annual memorial, to remember the Holocaust in Latvia, quarterly publication of the *Courier*, and the expansion of membership to include children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors and other friends of

our cause. We will continue to speak out on issues relevant to Latvian Jewry, and to collect and publish information on current Jewish life, the history of Jews in Latvia, Holocaust research and eyewitness accounts of Holocaust survivors. We hope to carry on our memorial trips to Latvia (the next one is scheduled for Liepaja, July 7-10) and Israel, to cooperate with sister organizations in Latvia, Israel and elsewhere, and to strengthen our association with Holocaust museums in New York, Washington D.C., and Yad VaShem. We will continue to fight anti-Semitism, neo-Nazism, racial discrimination, Holocaust denial, anti-Zionism, and the refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist.

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WE THANK ALL WHO SENT MEMBERSHIP DUES, AND THOSE WHO MADE ADDITIONAL DONATIONS TO SUPPORT OUR ONGOING WORK, AND REMAIN ACTIVE MEMBERS.

IF YOU HAVE NOT YET SENT YOUR DUES, PLEASE DO! PLEASE ALSO CONFIRM YOUR MAILING ADDRESS. WE WILL NO LONGER SEND OUR COURIER OR CORRESPONDENCE TO UNCONFIRMED OR UNRESPONSIVE MEMBERS.

IN MEMORIAM

DR. STEPHEN UDEM,

AT THE AGE OF 69,

PASSED AWAY ON JANUARY 11, 2014.

WE ARE EXPRESSING OUR DEEP CONDOLENCES TO ALL MEMBERS OF HIS BELOVED FAMILY.

WE MOURN THE PASSING OF

ERNEST KAN,

HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR,

WHO DIED ON FEBRUARY 2, 2014.

HE WAS 90 YEARS OLD.

ERNEST KAN WAS THE LAST OF FEW JEWISH STUDENTS TO BE EXPELLED FROM THE PRESTIGIOUS BERLIN SCHOOL TWO DAYS AFTER THE INFAMOUS KRISTALLNACHT.

AFTERWARDS HE JOINED HIS FAMILY IN RIGA, WHERE HE BECAME A PRISONER OF RIGA GHETTO. HE WAS LIBERATED BY U.S. ARMY IN APRIL, 1945, LATER EMIGRATED TO THE USA.

HE IS SURVIVED BY HIS WIFE ANA, ALSO A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR, AND HIS CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN.

Dear Members:

A few years ago we sponsored the publication of English and Russian translations of Max Kaufmann's book *Churbn Lettland—The Destruction of the Jews of Latvia*, updated with commentaries and photos. Both editions are available by mail. If you are interested, please make out a check for \$20.00 (which includes handling and postage in the USA) payable to Jewish Survivors of Latvia and mail it to the address listed on page 2. Please specify whether you would like English or Russian edition!

2013 YIZKOR SPEECHES

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Douglas Davidson, US Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues

On July 4 of this year, I was in Riga to participate in a Holocaust commemoration event. It was a sunny and unusually warm day. A good-sized crowd had gathered to remember those killed in the fire in the Great Choral Synagogue seventy years before. The President of Latvia spoke, as did the Acting Prime Minister. Rabbi Andrew Baker of the American Jewish Committee spoke. So did I. We then laid flowers near a monument to rescuers. There was little trace of the deceased or of the synagogue itself.

As this suggests, the struggle to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive in Latvia is not an easy one. On a subsequent trip in the autumn I traveled to the town of Bauska. There some survivors are attempting to build a Holocaust memorial. It did not go unnoticed that a monument to the victims of state communism had been erected in that town rapidly and without the struggle that has surrounded the Holocaust memorial. I believe the city authorities and the Latvian Jewish community have agreed on the composition of a design committee. But the memorial itself is yet to be begun.

My first-ever visit to Riga was in January of 2011. It was quite cold, and snowed heavily all three days I was there. My

first stop, right after I landed at Riga Airport, was the Ghetto Museum. I hadn't realized that it was outdoors. (I do hope they've finally succeeded in moving it indoors.) As I walked, shivering slightly, through the exhibit and through the snow with the rabbi who was my guide, I was trailed by cameras. When they had the chance, the reporters there confronted me with the question: "Why have you come to demand that the government pay 30 million Lats to the Jewish community for lost property?"

I was startled by the question, for in fact I had not come to do that. We were well aware that legislation that would have done just that had failed in parliament several years before, when economic times were good. Now, Latvia was under an austerity program and struggling to right itself economically. In consultation with our then-Ambassador, Judy Garber, and the officers of our embassy in Riga, we decided to take a different tack. We decided to urge the Latvian government to return the actual property instead.

I got a sympathetic hearing from most but not all parts of the government and parliament when I discussed this idea with them. In the media, the reaction was different. As my

visit ended, I gave an interview to a young journalist from a popular newspaper called, if my memory serves, *Latvijas Avize*. I can still recall how she leaned across the table and asked me why they should do anything for the Latvian Jewish community, since almost none of its members were born in Latvia. What right, she said, do they have to this property? They're not the same as the community before the war

This was not the first nor was it the last time I have heard this sentiment in Riga. As an American—and therefore the descendant of people who were not born here—this bothered me immensely. I can only imagine how you must feel when you hear this, especially given the very high rate of extermination in Latvia during the Holocaust. But, aside from being offensive, this view can also raise a legal issue. It allows opponents of restituting or compensating for the loss of communal property to argue that the lack of continuity between the pre-war and post-war Jewish communities means that the latter has no claim on the property of the former.

In Latvia, if I understand it correctly, the way both pre- and post-war Jewish communities were organized—or, maybe better said, *continued on page 5*



not organized—also works against the community today. It reminds me of the joke about how, wherever there are two Jews, there you will find three synagogues. Other communities with a single and continuous legal identity have gotten their property back in Latvia. The Jewish community seems to be the lone one that has not.

Between my first and second visits—in January 2011 and July 2013—much changed and much didn't. Governments fell, new parliaments were elected, Justice Ministers resigned over the very issue of the restitution of Jewish communal property. The weather improved. On the other hand, no law governing the return of Jewish communal property was drafted, much less enacted.

I returned, very briefly, in October. I continued my discussions with parliamentarians, government

officials, and the leaders of the Jewish community. When I suggested that the government return five of the ten properties the Jewish community wished to get back that are now in the state's hands, I was surprised to find people from all parties expressing a willingness to do so. On the other hand, no one was willing to take the first step to make this happen. Someone else would have to do it. Nor, I think, is the Latvian Jewish community terribly enthusiastic about this idea, either. They fear, probably with some justice, that that would be that—that the eleven million or so Lats they seek as compensation for 270 other, unreturnable properties would never be granted.

The community's proposal for the use of such compensation is, I think, a good one. It cannot be said to over-reach. In fact, they model their proposal on the legislation recently enacted

in Lithuania. (They also say they developed their model before Lithuania did.) It would create a foundation into which the government would pay the allotted sum over a number of years, in order to ease the burden on the treasury. The foundation would support the Jewish community. It would also support Holocaust survivors in Latvia. It does not seem an unreasonable proposal to me. But not everyone in Latvia sees things as I do.

One thing everyone does seem to agree on, though, is this: It is election season. Although parliamentary elections are almost a year away, the campaigning has already begun. Any law on restitution or compensation will have to be enacted soon. It is too much of a political hot potato to be taken up when campaigning hits full swing. It may already, they say, be too late.

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US Special Envoy Davidson: The Restitution Report

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Our Ambassador in Latvia, Mark Pekkala, is fully engaged in an effort to make something happen as soon as possible. He has some very talented and dedicated American diplomats working for him. They have a hard road ahead of them. There is clearly a great deal of resistance in the Latvian public still to the very idea of returning property taken from the Jewish community. But they push on anyway.

Latvia has a better record on private property return. Unlike some of its neighboring countries, Latvia allowed foreigners to file claims for property. But no claims process is ever perfect. Because we are at a memorial service, I want to close by recalling someone who was unable to secure his property.

Just before my first visit to Latvia, a man named Eugene Levin called me from Boston. Eugene had read about my upcoming visit in the Russian-language Latvian press. He described to me his grandfather, Mozus Berkovich, and his twenty-year-long campaign to gain recognition of his ownership of a house in the village of Akniste. He asked if Mozus, who was then ninety-years-old, could meet me.

I said that I really didn't

have time to fly up to Boston before I departed. No, no, he replied. Mozus will come to meet you. And he did. He was still spry and sharp. Speaking in Russian, he told me his story as his grandson translated.

He was the only member of a family of 17 to survive the Holocaust in Latvia. In the intervening years, the house he and his brothers had built in Akniste—where he came from a long line of rabbis—had become a post office. When Latvia enacted its private property restitution laws in the early nineties, he began to seek the house back. He was already living in the United States.

After they returned to Boston, Eugene e-mailed me a thick packet of documents. They detailed his application to the local authorities, who later claimed to have no record of them. Mozus and Eugene's case went from the municipal courts to and through ever-higher courts of appeal. They lost at every turn. Finally, they turned to the European Court of Human Rights—which ruled that he should return to Latvia and seek compensation in place of restitution.

As all this happened, their attorney in Riga was disbarred for corruption. Mozus's best

friend, who was representing him there, passed away not long after my first visit.

Everything that could go wrong seems to have done so. The fates were clearly against him. So, once again, was Latvia's justice system.

Once again they turned to the European Court of Human Rights. Mozus passed away before the court announced its refusal to look at his case a second time. Perhaps it was for the best. How much more should any Holocaust survivor who simply seeks to get back what was taken from him have to endure?

This was, if nothing else, another small tragedy and another unknown injustice in the wake of the enormous crime and tragedy that was the Holocaust.

You know the reality of this far better than I ever could. I can only rely on books like Mr. Schwab's to help me understand the suffering and horror you experienced firsthand. As I close, then, I can also only assure you that the United States continues to pursue what we admit is imperfect justice for you and for your children and grandchildren. All too often this pursuit ends in failure, as it has done for Mozus. But this does not mean that we will not continue to try.

2013 YIZKOR SPEECHES

Roland Binet, Belgian Researcher of the Holocaust in Latvia

I feel honored to have been invited to speak at this Yizkor in memory of the Jews murdered in Latvia.

When I was 10 years old, I lived for 2 years next to a Jewish family whose only son died in Auschwitz. Aged 17, I saw my first documentary film on the Warsaw ghetto. I worked for 17 years in an import-export company with Jewish survivors from Poland and Romania. In 1973 I met Chaika Grossman, a Bialystok ghetto survivor, in Israel. She was a special person, acting as liaison among the ghettos of Vilno, Warszawa and Bialystok. In 1982 I visited Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Until 2009 I felt secure in my knowledge of the Holocaust in Europe. That year I went to Riga and visited the 'Museum of the Jews of Latvia'. When I saw these horrible pictures of the massacres in Shkede, taken by a SS officer, I felt disgust. I had seen these terrible pictures, but until then I had never realized that they were taken in Latvia.

I visited Rumbula last September (2013). There, as you know, about 28,000 Jews were killed in just two days. In Belgium, for comparison, 26,000 persons were killed

over the course of three years. In that desolate place, in Rumbula forest, I had to remember a part of David Silberman's book, where Ella Medalye told how it had been there on that day, December 8, 1941.

"Many bore children in their arms. The anticipation of a death close by touched them too, but the children did not cry. Their terrorized eyes expressed a sheer terror that froze your blood. The younger ones clutched their parents', grandmother's or grandfather's clothes, seeking shelter behind them. There are no words to express that monstrous sight of the mass killing of innocent people."

That is why I began to write about the Holocaust in Latvia, and have published a number of articles: on Dovid Katz's website *Defending History*, the Wiesenthal Center's website *Operation Last Chance*, and as a regular contributor to the *Latvian Jewish Courier*.

Let me add that I have listened to Mr. Davidson's speech with particular attention and learned that there is a discussion by Latvian authorities to pay financial compensation for



the properties robbed from the Jews during the war. But let me say that I am skeptical about that. When I was in Riga last year, I read an interview by the Latvian president, prior to the March 16th march, who said that the Latvian SS are to be considered heroes. I am a citizen from a member state of the European Union. In Belgium or France it would be unthinkable to have a march in honor of the SS or consider them heroes, but Western Europe keeps silent about Latvia.

I discovered Latvia late in my life but I vowed to myself that I would never forget the suffering that the Jews there experienced, or their fate.

Thank you for having invited me. It is an honor for me.

Roland Binet is also a composer and musician. You can hear his five-part work inspired by the Latvian Holocaust at [http://defendinghistory.com/a-jewish-tragedy-in-the-baltic-states/63283//](http://defendinghistory.com/a-jewish-tragedy-in-the-baltic-states/63283/)

News from Riga

By Ivar Brod

Translated by Anna Rishik

On November 24, 2013 a coalition of Latvian Jewish groups held a mourning ceremony at the place of 1941's mass shooting of Jews in Rumbula. The organizers included the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia, the Riga Jewish Community, various Jewish religious organizations from Riga, and the Latvian Society of Jewish Ex-Prisoners of Ghettos and Concentration Camps. The speakers included Israeli Ambassador Hagit Ben-Yakov and Knesset member Yoel Rasvosov. In the evening, a program of songs from the Riga ghetto was performed in the Concert Hall of the Riga Jewish Community, in memory of Johanna Spector (1915-2008), born in Libau and imprisoned in the ghetto and concentration camps. After liberation, she published the book "Ghetto and Concentration Camp Songs from Latvia and Lithuania" ("Ghetto und KZ- Lieder aus Lettland und Litauen"), and later became a professor of ethnomusicology at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, where she taught for over 30 years.

On November 17, the "Misha Aleksandrovich International Festival of Jewish Music" began with

the song "Moyshele, mayn fraynd." The program included arias, romances and songs from Aleksandrovich's repertory, the music of his contemporaries and colleagues, and rare video and audio recordings, as well as the above mentioned concert in Johanna Spector's honor. The artistic director of the festival was Vlad Shulman. Special guests included Ilona Mahlis, Aleksandrovich's daughter, and her husband, Leonid Mahlis, the author of "Six Careers of Mikhail Aleksandrovich," recently published in Moscow. In July 2014, the noted Aleksandrovich centennial will be held in Riga.

On November 5, the Museum of "Jews in Latvia" opened an exhibition on "The White Rose," the eponymous underground resistance group founded by students at Munich University in 1942-43. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation of Germany, the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia, and Russia's Eurasia Fund supported the exhibit.

At the end of 2013, Mayer Meler published a Latvian translation of his 2010 book, *Sites of Memory: Jewish Communities of Latvia*

Annihilated in the Holocaust. Meler's opus describes hundreds of Latvian cities and shtetls where Jews lived prior to World War II, and more than 200 sites where they were murdered. More than a thousand photos are included, with maps and detailed references. The Museum of Jews in Latvia collaborated on the translation with the Institute for History and Philosophy of Latvia University. The Project was supported by the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia, American Joint Distribution Committee, and the Embassy of Canada in Latvia.

The book "Lost Neighborhood," published 2013, shows Jews in the cultural memory of the inhabitants of Latgale. In 2011-2012, Moscow's Sefer Center for Hebrew study and education, together with the Museum of Jews In Latvia and the University of Daugavpils, organized an ethnographic field study of non-Jewish residents of Latgale in relation to the Jewish population. The research, the basis for this book, is comprised of 133 interviews reflecting the recollections of the inhabitants of Latgale of their f o r m e r *continued on page 10*

BUILDER OF BRIDGES: LEON MOISSEIFF

By Ivar Brod

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.

LEON SOLOMON MOISSEIFF (1872-1943), developer of the now established deflection theory of bridge engineering, and one of the most knowledgeable and esteemed practitioners in that field, was born and educated in Riga. After he graduated from Riga Polytechnic Institute, in 1891, his family moved to the U.S. because of political persecution. He received a diploma in civil engineering from Columbia University in 1895 and later became a control officer in charge of bridge construction in New York City. He was a strong supporter of all-steel design, a then up-and-coming technology, and gained national attention as one of the designers of the Manhattan Bridge over the East River. Opened to traffic on December 31st 1909, it is one of the most aesthetically pleasing spans in New York City.

He went on to design the suspension systems of several American bridges, including the Benjamin Franklin Bridge in Delaware (1926); the George Washington Bridge in New York (1931); and, in tandem with Charles Ellis, the elegant Golden Gate in San Francisco (1937); the Bronx Whitestone Bridge (1939); and the Tacoma Narrows Bridge in



Washington State (1940), which he considered the most beautiful in the world. To his dismay, the bridge collapsed, only 4 months after completion, in a raging storm. This event led to further research and improved theories and methods of calculation in the construction of suspension bridges. Afterwards, in spite of his unprecedented prolificacy, Moisseiff never regained his reputation as a master builder. He died of a heart attack three years later. In 1948, the American Society of Civil Engineers created the Moisseiff Award (at right) to recognize pioneering research work that contributes to structural design, theoretical analysis or construction improvement of engineering structures.

Moisseiff was very knowledgeable in the Yiddish language and literature, and saw the language as

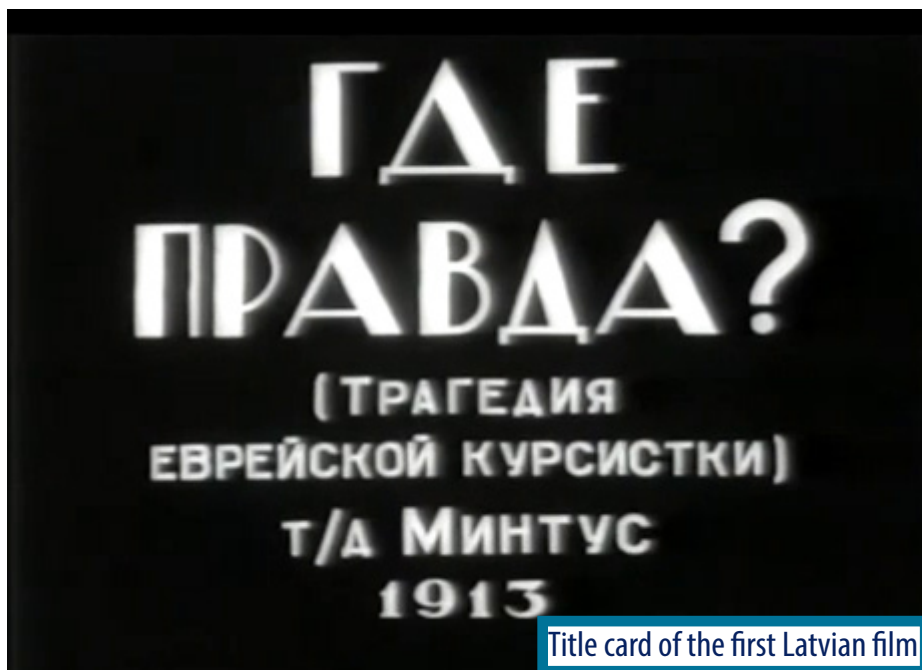
“part of the creative evolution of the Jewish people”. He was a publisher of a Yiddish literary magazine, *Freie Gesellschaft* (Free Society), and a presenting member of the New York Judaeon Society, an intellectual



group. He served more than 20 years on the editorial board of the Jewish Publishing Council of America, and was chairman of the Scientific Committee of American Friends of the Hebrew University.

News From Riga

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Title card of the first Latvian film

Jewish neighbors' life and culture.

Latvia and the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).

On December 18, 2013, the Museum of Jews In Latvia commemorated the 100th anniversary of the first Latvian movie. In 1913 the Jewish producer S. Mintus (Mintus' first name has been lost to history) released "Where Is the Truth?, or The Tragedy of the Jewish Girl-Student". This film sparked tremendous public interest in the Russian Empire for years to come. The event included snippets from the movie and a lecture on its creation.

Kindergarten "Motek" of the Riga Jewish Community opened in the building of the Simon Dubnow Jewish School at Miera Street, 62. This project was supported by the Council of Jewish Communities of

In February and March 2014, the Riga Jewish community and the Museum of Jews In Latvia will offer training courses on Jewish history for tourism operators and employees. The EU has designated Riga as a European Capital of Culture for 2014. The city expects to be visited by a large number of culture-seeking tourists who will also be interested in exploring Jewish Riga.

MY JOURNEY

We spent the night on the truck. Next morning, the Germans, obviously afraid of partisan attacks, drove us toward Porkhov in a twelve-truck column protected by an armored personnel carrier. Burned German vehicles and bodies of dead German soldiers were strewn along the road.

Feigning naiveté, I asked one of the Vlasov soldiers if the dead bodies were here from the beginning of the war.

"Are you a real idiot or just acting like one?" he sneered. "Can't you see that the partisans have given the Germans a blood bath here?"

Upon arrival, my Jewish companion and I were put into a hut on the outskirts of Porkhov, with a few Jews from Riga, and a Vlasov soldier guarding us. We would be laboring on the construction of the Gestapo Headquarters in Porkhov. Obersharführer Backes warned us not to get any ideas—that no one had ever escaped the clutches of the Gestapo.

We crushed stone, mixed concrete, and carried all kinds of equipment. I brought water to the site. Soviet POWs and local prisoners erected the building itself. After a little while, the Germans, evidently cocksure, allowed us to move about unescorted. The lax security boded well.

There were a few decent lads among the Latvian volunteers serving in the SD Security Police. Sometimes we would chat in Latvian. I got one to do me a favor and carry my letter to the Jewish laborers at the Lenta factory in Riga. I wanted to inform the Ghetto that I was alive and staying at Porkhov. The Germans planned to relocate many Jews from the ghetto to Porkhov, so I tried to allay their fears by presenting my situation as rosier than reality, and sow seeds for involving more comrades in the risky

TO THE PARTISANS: PART II

flight to the partisans.

Five or six craftsmen soon came from the Ghetto to my hut. A larger group of about 20 soon followed to Zapolyanie, the concentration camp at the former kolkhoz (collective farm), about 7 km out of town. They joined a host of local prisoners, suspected of helping partisans or captured in the act, and their family members, all as doomed as the Jews. In the interim, they were slaves on the farm.

Some camp prisoners worked at my construction site. I befriended one of them, a 16-year-old Russian lad from Rechitsa (a village about fifteen minutes' walk from Porkhov) called Genka, short for Gennady Yemeliyanov. Genka was of average height: blond, kind, unsophisticated and trustworthy. He thought that his was just a minor infraction and that the Germans would release him soon. He, or his parents or sister, would help me to get to the partisans. He gave me code words and a detailed description of all the approaches to his family's house.

A few days later, I happened to be on the crushed-stone truck passing Rechitsa. I asked Pudan, the Latvian driver, to let me go into the village to trade my spare pair of pants for some food. He replied suspiciously, "You are not going to flee, are you?"

I pretended surprise. "Are you kidding? Such an idea never occurred to me."

Pudan parked the truck by the road and let me go while he awaited my return. I found the Yemeliyanovs' hut quickly. A young woman, pretty and blond, about 22 years of age, was inside the hut. She had kind eyes and I figured her to be Gennady's sister.

I said I was a refugee from Zapolyanie, and asked for the veterinarian named Katia (the code

words). She smiled and admitted that was her name. I confessed that I was not yet fleeing, but verifying my information. She approved my caution and called her mother in. I gave them greetings from Gennady and told my story. They were deeply touched and promised to help me escape.

Katia's husband had gone MIA from the Soviet Army, leaving her with a one-year-old child. When I escaped, she would lead me to the village of Kozenogovo, some 35 km away, a transit point to the partisans.

The Yemeliyanovs gave me a meal and some food for my trip, and for Genka. I left my spare pair of pants at their house to make my story look plausible to the truck driver. Now I embarked the next step in the unlikely (and potentially fatal) escape: confirming what I had heard about Kozenogovo.

I had sometimes worked as a janitor at the Gestapo headquarters, where I had discovered a topographical map of the Porkhov area on a wall, and taken a furtive moment to study it carefully. I located the village of Kozenogovo, marked by a little red flag and surrounded by little green flags—as Katia had informed me, the village was under partisan control but surrounded by the Germans.

My second meeting with Katia occurred unexpectedly about a month later. I was actually working under a truck in front of the Gestapo headquarters when I noticed a woman's legs approaching. I crawled out from under the truck and, much to my surprise, saw Katia!

She told me that she wanted to see me to find out why I had not yet fled. She had invented a narrative of going to the movie theater at the Gestapo office where local people were permitted once in a while.

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.

I became very nervous that the Germans might spot us talking.

As if in response to my fears, Obersturmführer Greif, a high officer of the Gestapo, exited the building at that moment and saw us. I told Katia to leave quickly, but it was too late. Greif yelled at me, "Was soll das bedeuten? Wieso diese Frau ist da?" ("What does this mean? How did this woman get here? What's going on between the two of you?")

"The lady is asking how to get to the movie theatre," I replied as casually as I could.

Turning to Katia, he shouted, "Sofort weg davon! Weist du den nicht, das jeglicher verkehr mit Juden verboten ist?" (Get out of here! Don't you know that any contact with Jews is strictly prohibited?) She didn't understand German, but she was frightened and ran away quickly. Greif looked at me suspiciously, but I rushed to crawl back under the truck.

I shared my thoughts, but not my plans, about escape with other Jews, but the majority of them saw no chance. The craftsmen felt that the Germans wouldn't liquidate them because they were needed. The rest of the Jews were just afraid. Only two men had the same mindset as I: Boris Sheinkman, age 20, and Villy Zalmanson, age 30.

Boris came from Riga with the second group of Jews. He had first spent some time at Zapolyanie, where he narrowly escaped death due to a miraculous, random transfer to Porkhov. He told us about the terrible atrocities there. It



JOURNEY TO THE PARTISANS

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was no wonder that he was pushing me for an escape.

Villy had been a painter, a graduate of the Latvian Academy of Fine Arts, but the Germans used him as a house painter. He spoke hoch Deutsch (High German), which later came in handy for fabricating our fake IDs and passes. Later, he became an interpreter for the partisans.

When Sheinkman and I would bring timber from the woods to the construction site, an SD member would drive us. We met a few Russian women who were typical black-market food profiteers. They offered to help lead us to the partisans in the village of Krasny Bor (Lovely Pine Forest). Boris wanted to jump on the offer, but I remained suspicious of their quick, open and casual offer. We declined—wisely, since it turned out that they were provocateurs on the German payroll. When the Soviet Army liberated the area, they were shot by a firing squad as collaborators.

In September 1943, the Germans brought in a group of Russian prisoners when I was working on the construction site. I learned that one of them, a bearded, middle-aged man of average height, was from the village of Kozenogovo. He told me that he was imprisoned for aiding the partisans. We became fast friends and he gave me a contact in Kozenogovo named Turnova. This strongly confirmed to me that Kozenogovo was really the most desired and reliable destination point for us, and I relayed that to my co-conspirators, Sheinkman and Zalmanson.

Some days later, I was sent to bring more timber, and again, our driver was the Latvian Pudan. We were supposed to meet the Russian forester and fell trees under his direction. On the way there, we passed through Veretiny, where

a German garrison was guarding the main road. A large sign at the checkpoint read, in German, "Achtung! Partisanen!" (Warning! Partisans!) They checked our passes and let us through.

We barely made it a kilometer into the forest when the truck hit a large, sharp, protruding root. The truck stopped, and Pudan went beneath it to find out what happened. I waited for him in the cab where he'd carelessly left his sub-machine gun. It was so tempting to kill the driver and run to Kozenogovo, which was nearby, but I suppressed this idea because escaping without my comrades would have been a betrayal.

The driver jumped back into the cab, saw the gun, and accused excitedly in Latvian "Nu ko? Domaji mani nošaut? (So, you were going to kill me?)

I replied calmly, "No way! I have no idea how to use a gun."

"If the partisans grab us, they would kill both of us. You being a Jew wouldn't matter," he warned.

The root had punctured the oil pan, and all the oil had drained out. We had to get to Veretiny and call the Gestapo headquarters in Porkhov to ask them to deliver some oil to us. Pudan wouldn't let me stay with the truck, so I had to go to the village. I objected that upon seeing me, the Germans would decide that I am a partisan and shoot me on the spot. The driver realized that my apprehension was well grounded and ordered me to exchange clothes with him. When I put on his uniform, I looked pretty much like a real Unterscharführer of SD.

The moment I reached the main road, I heard, "Hände hoch! Parole!" (Hands up! Password!) coming from a patrol of Austrian soldiers.

Restitution

The Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the United States sent a letter, in December 2013, to Andris Bērziņš, the President of Latvia, urging the Latvian government and parliament to return, without further delay, the communal Jewish properties that legitimately, legally and morally belong to the Jewish community of Latvia. We will inform you of any response or action that follows in our next Courier.

December 6, 2013

His Excellency Andris Bērziņš
President, Republic of Latvia
Rātslaukums 7
Rīga, LV-1900
Latvia

Dear President Bērziņš,

On November 17, 2013, the Jewish Survivors of Latvia (JSL) in the United States commemorated the birth of the Republic of Latvia 95 years ago and the mass murder of Jews 72 years ago. On that occasion, we were also privileged to be addressed by United States Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues Mr. Douglas Davidson.

The JSL was saddened to learn from him of the tactics used by the Latvian government and parliament to thwart the return of the communal Jewish properties that legitimately and legally belong to the Jewish community of Latvia.

As a signatory of the Terezin Declaration, Latvia committed the country to morally solving this issue.

On moral grounds, we have not forgotten our Latvian brethren who saved Jews during the Holocaust, but we also do not forget the very-well documented participation of Latvians in the murder of the majority of Latvian Jews. We thus urge the Latvian government and parliament to promptly return to the Jewish community in Latvia what rightfully belongs to that community.

Thank you, Your Excellency, for your kind consideration.

Respectfully yours,
David Silberman,
Acting President