



# The Latvian Jewish Courier

## HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN LATVIA TODAY (PREILI AS AN EXAMPLE)

Previously, on several occasions, the *Courier* published information about Latvian teachers' participation in courses at the Yad Vashem International School of Holocaust Studies in Jerusalem. In these courses, teachers learned about techniques for teaching the Holocaust and strategies for further disseminating this knowledge among other teachers and their students—as well as educating the general population.

The Holocaust was one of the most significant and crucial events of the 20th century. When first beginning to teach the Holocaust to students and others, it can be their initial introduction to what is perhaps the ultimate manifestation of human cruelty and violence; it also involves helping people to understand the nature of such organized and sustained actions and to find ways to prevent such human and societal disasters. As part of preparation, regular trips were organized to Yad Vashem for a group of Latvian teachers.

So, what were used as examples and what was the outcome? The city of Preili, like many other cities and towns in Latvia, has made teaching about the Holocaust mandatory. When the German army came to Preili on June 28, 1941, local nationalists under the command of the Germans started the persecution of the Jewish population. By October 1941, more than 900 Jews from Preili and its vicinity had been killed.

One of the most recognized initiators and leaders in Holocaust education in Latvian schools (particularly in Preili) is Nora Shnepste, principal of School No. 1, where she teaches history and social studies. Ms. Shnepste completed a course in Holocaust studies for educators at The International School for Holocaust Studies in Yad Vashem, Israel, in 2006. She has made a number of presentations, among them: "Jews in Baltic Region: Perspectives of Remembrance and Strategies" at Latvia University Judaic Center in 2014; "Tolerance and Diversity. Teaching About Sensitive Historical Questions and Raising Tolerance Through Historical Education" at Riga Jewish Community Center in 2018; "Holocaust Education: Time, Place and Releva-



*Nora Shnepste speaks at the presentation of the honorary award on January 31, 2019*



*Tekla Bekesha speaks at the memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in Preili on August 6, 2017*

nce" at the 10th International Conference on Holocaust Education in Jerusalem in 2018. A subject matter expert in teaching about the Holocaust, Ms. Shnepste is passing on her knowledge to other teachers around Latvia, as well as to Preili's students. Her teaching methodology includes Holocaust witnesses' memories, survivors' diaries, materials published by Amsterdam's Anne Frank House and by the History Teachers Association of Latvia, various museums' educational programs, and training tours to Holocaust event locations. She is currently working on textbooks and developing methodologies and course materials for other teachers.

One of the strongest tools she uses: the special sessions at school and at the local museum to study Sheina Gram's diary. Tragically, Gram's family remained in Preili when the Germans invaded Latvia. Sheina, only 15, started her diary on the very first day of invasion: June 22, 1941. She wrote of her thoughts and emotions as she witnessed the horror of the extermination of Preili's Jewish community. One of her depressing entries: "There are many roads in life, all are



*Preili guests N. Shnepste and T. Bekesha together with JSL president D. Silberman in the Brooklyn Holocaust Memorial Park at the stone dedicated to the memory of the Jews killed in the Holocaust in Latvia*

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN LATVIA TODAY (continued)



Preili youth with German volunteers from the LOT camp on the remembrance day for Holocaust victims, August 9, 2013

good, take which you want, anyway at the end—grave.” Her last entry in the diary is dated August 8: “No one knows when our struggle will end, I have a feeling that the worst is coming.” The next day her family was killed. A copy of the diary is on a display at the Preili History Museum. The significance of this tragic document can be compared with the internationally known diary of Anne Frank. By familiarizing themselves with the contents of Sheina’s diary, students can begin to give their thoughts on topics like “What can we learn about Sheina Gram’s life from her diary?” and “If there is similarity between Sheina’s reflections and reasoning with that of my generation?” and “Was the diary writing an act of spiritual resistance?”

Students have the opportunity to read the memories of Morduch Hagi (Kagan), a Holocaust survivor from Preili; learn about Vladislav Vushkan, a Preili resident who, during four years of Nazi occupation, hid eight Jews in his country house on the outskirts of Preili. After his death in 2004, Mr. Vushkan was recognized as “righteous among nations” at Yad Vashem.

The memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in Preili was designed and installed next to the city’s Jewish cemetery in 2004. The impressive monument is in the form of a white arch, resembling the prayer shawl tallit; the metal gates are in the form of menorah.

As we previously reported, in the April 2017 the Latvian capital hosted the 10th International



I. Lensky, director of the Jews in Latvia Museum, presents an award to E. Rebainis, a student from a school in Preili

Conference “Jews in a Changing World: History and Culture of Jews in Latvia and Baltic Region” dedicated to Jewish cultural heritage. This conference was organized by the Jews in Latvia Museum and the Latvian University Center for Judaic Studies with the support of the Ministry of Culture and other organizations. All of these organizations sponsored an essay competition; at the conference, Egons Rebainis, a student of Ms. Shnepste, received the award for his essay: “Versatile Latvia: History and Present Day of Latvian Jewish Community.” Egons Rebainis was also awarded a diploma for his essay “Samuel Latvinsky—a Man Without Whom the Pages of Precious History of Preili Would be Incomplete.”



The path to the memorial for Holocaust victims

Also noteworthy is Ms. Shnepste’s and her students’ support of the restoration of Jewish cemeteries by the International LOT organization, led by Pastor Klaus-Peter Rex (see March 2018 issue of *Courier*). In August 2014, 25 young LOT volunteers from Germany, Austria, and Italy finished the restoration and cleaning of the Preili Jewish cemetery.

A significant contribution to Holocaust education in Preili is made by the local History and Applied Art Museum. It has a permanent exposition dedicated to the history and vital activity of the Jewish community in Preili. Exhibits include historical and “our days” pictures that show visitors the history of settlement and everyday life of Jews in Preili, about their social and religious leaders, local synagogues and education, and involvement in Preili’s social and economic development. Also on display are some recent gruesome discoveries in Preili: a burning pit with the remains of Jews killed during the German occupation as well as some of their belongings. These material evidences were donated to the museum. The museum is in the process of obtaining additional facilities where Jewish heritage items would be exhibited.

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## HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN LATVIA TODAY (continued)

Ms. Shnepste and the director of the Preili History and Applied Art Museum, Tekla Bekesha, were invited to the 12th Annual Student Literary Award Ceremony: "Truth about Holocaust and Stalinist Repression" (January 31, 2019, Bergen Community College, Paramus, NJ) to receive awards for their tireless work in Holocaust education. While accepting the award, Ms. Shnepste said: "History and social studies have always been in the scope of my interest. Working at school, being a teacher of history, attending different courses, seminars and conferences, studying independently, I got more and more interested in the theme of the Holocaust. I personally also would like to find the answer to the question 'How could it be possible?' not only in the aspect of historic events, but also to find out the causes of these events and the motivation of people organizing them. It is of vital importance so that such events would never happen again. History sometimes is called the teacher of life, but people do not always understand its lessons."



Honorary diplomas given to N. Shnepste and T. Bekesh.

Museum director Ms. Bekesha made a fascinating presentation about expositions related to the historical heritage of Jews in Preili prior and during WWII.

An important conclusion can be drawn from Preili residents' educational and history-saving activity: Holocaust history and education are not only a learning process, but also a solid guarantee that humanity will prevail over attempts at genocide in the future.

**By Semyon Gizunterman  
Translated by Eric Kruglyak**

## ZHANIS LIPKE MEMORIAL



The general view and entrance to the museum



General front view and façade of the museum

On December 2, 2018, during our annual Yizkor, we had a pleasure of meeting Mr. Maris Gailis, the former Prime Minister of Latvia and Chairman of the Board of the Zhanis Lipke Memorial Association. During his presentation, Mr. Gailis shared many important and interesting details about the creation and operation of Memorial museum.

The only descendant of the Lipke family, Zhanis' daughter-in-law Arija Lipke, still lives on Kipsala Island—the location is so hidden that even city maps do not show it. It is somewhat symbolic because, during the Nazi invasion, some people hid there and others helped them hide.

Architect Zaiga Gaile created the main structure so that its shape is reminiscent of Noah's Ark—a ship of survivors. It also evokes an overturned boat, which also can be considered to

be a shelter. Architect Gaile was inspired by the tarred sheds of fishermen who built them from floated logs with their characteristic smell and color.

The memorial allows the picturing of the situation where, almost 80 years ago, people were ready to risk their lives to save others. The original bunker was situated close to the reconstructed one, thus the exhibition gives you a nearly perfect view of how it was eight decades ago.

The memorial building replicated as closely as possible the living conditions of those hiding.

Zhanis Lipke created a shelter for Jews he helped to escape from the Riga ghetto. It was impossible to build the Memorial precisely at that spot because the Lipke family still use the bunker for storing logs. So, the Memorial was built right next to this yard.

## ZHANIS LIPKE MEMORIAL (continued)



*A. Sukuts, Arija Lipke (Zhanis' daughter-in-law) and M. Gailis at the Lipkes' house before its last restoration*

As you enter the museum, the concrete bunker appears beneath with nine bunk beds along the walls. The only view is from the top; a visitor cannot actually enter the sleeping/living quarters. Difficult to imagine how some of those hiding could endure the cold and narrow darkness without water, fresh air, and even minimal sanitary arrangements. The bunker matches the size of the original—3x3 meters. Chinks in the planks allow only for weak daylight to enter, the wood echoes deeply at every step...

Right above the bunker, on the first floor of the building, stands a Sukkah. The conceptual artist responsible, Viktors Jansons, considers the Sukkah to be a symbolic semblance of the bunker; it is also a reminder that this is a temporary shelter on the path to survival and freedom. Those hiding in the bunker were subsequently transferred to rural locations in Reshni, Miltini, and Mezhamaki, not far from Dobele.

Above the Sukkah, on the attic level, is an open hatch in the floor through which the lower two levels can be observed. Those

who conceived the Memorial deemed it essential for visitors to be able to view the real shelter, the bunker, and the symbolic shelter, the Sukkah, from above.

The history of creating the Memorial Museum is quite fascinating.

Mr. Gailis with his friend Mr. August Sukuts were initiators, creating and building a museum near the spot where Mr. Lipke hid and thus saved Jews. Work began in 2005. Seven years later, after much work and significant donations, the Zhanis Lipke Memorial officially opened its doors with the Presidents of Latvia and Israel, Mr. Andris Berzinsh and Mr. Shimon Peres, in attendance.

Among the guests of the opening were descendants of the saved Jews—representatives of the Smolyanskis, Cesvan, and Libchen families who came from Israel. Boris Smolyanskis spoke during the opening ceremony and also deposited a relic of his family to the memorial: the Torah Scroll that belonged to his father Haim Smolyanskis, a close friend of Zhanis Lipke.

**By Yefim Shteynfeld**



*The presentation auditorium*



*Copies of genuine newspapers from the times of occupation are pasted on the walls in the aisles, which allows the guide to better illustrate the story of the events of that time*

## HEROES OF THE RIGA GHETTO

**From the Editor:**

At an event in the Jewish community of Riga that took place on the 75th anniversary of the beginning of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto, Professor Margers Vestermanis spoke about what he witnessed and participated in and about the preparations for an armed uprising in the Riga ghetto. The uprising failed because an SD spy in the ranks of the organizers betrayed them; the uprising ended tragically, with the shooting of more than 40 young Jewish men from the Ordnungsdienst guard group. In 2019 we received several materials from the collection of the New York YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Among the materials was a poem written in Yiddish about the 40 heroes who were killed. The poem was written in 1946 by a surviving prisoner of the ghetto, Menachem Riger, and was kept in the YIVO archive among papers of the New York Jewish Latvian Relief, Inc. Survivor of the Riga Ghetto, a member of our JSL society, Jacob Basner, translated the poem from the Yiddish into English. We present here the translation of the poem, and on the next page— an excerpt from the speech of Margers Vestermanis.

A poem about the forty heroes of the Ghetto of Riga  
(Dedicated to the forty Riga Ghetto Jewish policemen—  
organizers of the resistance)

Desperation opens the window  
To the world with an orphaned call  
From burning ovens and graves  
Forty blessed heroes  
Are now standing up in Riga  
To consecrated pain and rage

Shadows of dying brothers  
Bending at the last minute  
For their hangmen and judges  
Forty twisted songs  
Describing with forty times courage  
The fever and flame of history

The sky, an intense storm  
Amid legions of stars quenched  
For all the rushed and tired  
Forty furious spirits  
At the bestial nest  
Are preparing for fight and revolt.

As ships controlled by ice,  
Heroes are struggling in distress  
Propelled with hatred to prayer and fervor  
Looks with sinister gazing  
Upon forty dark phantoms  
And weave the threads of destruction.

The forty as ever still brave  
They pour out bullets of lead  
A thousand times, a thousand dangers  
Not seeing, as opens the bloody circle  
Which leads them in smoke  
Where stubbornness is whipped

Phantoms open the gate  
Where forty lived  
With secrets of planned revenge  
Rebels—one stony wall  
They are not bowing their heads  
For generations to come, lamentation

Forty with shining eyes  
Walked up a powerful bridge  
For passage of lighted messages  
Proud, purified birds  
Now came with them forty times victory  
The highest of Jewish heroism

The hangman considered them in his play  
He tortured and degraded them  
Became astonished and amazed  
It is impossible to break the forty  
They return to life again  
The next day, even after cruel slaughter.

**By Menachem Riger**

**Translated from Yiddish by Jacob Basner**

**JEWISH LATVIAN RELIEF, Inc.**

מנחם ריגער.

**פאָעמע וועגן די פּערציק העלדן פון ריגער געטאָ**

(געווידמעט די 40 יידישע געטאָ פּאָליציסטן פון  
ריגע-ארעניואַטארן פון ווידערשטאַנד)

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<p>די 40, ווי קיינמאָל נאָך מוטיק, זיי גיסן אויס קוילן פון בליי, כיי טווינט מאָל טווינט סכנות — ניש זענען, ווי ס'עפנט זיך בלוטיק דער קרייז, וועלכער פירט זיי אַרײַן אין רייך, וואו געבייטשט ווערט עקשנות .</p> <p>געשעפּענסט האָט געעפנט דעם טויער, וואו 40 עס האָבן געלעבט מיט סוד פון געפלאַנצטער נקמה — בונטאַרן — איין פעלערנער-מויער, זיי בויען אויך איצט ניש די קעפּ, מיט דורות פאַרזשטאַלן יאַמער . . .</p> <p>40 מיט שײן אין די אויגן פאַרוואַרפן אַ מעכטיקע בריק פאַר דורכגאַנג פון ליכטיקע בשורה — שמאַלצע, געלייטערטע פייגלען איצט טראָגן מיט 40 מאָל זיג דאַס העכסטע פון יידישע גבורה . . .</p> <p>ס'האַט תליון אין שפּיל זיי פאַררעכנט. ער האָט זיי געפייניקט, געשמיקט, געוואָרן דערשטוינט און פאַרציטערט — די 40 מען קען ניש צוברעכן, זיי קומען צום לעבן צוריק און וועבט צו פאַרניכטונג דעם פאַדים . . .</p>	<p>יאוש עס עפנט דעם פענצטער צו וועלט מיט פאַרײַתומ'טן רוף פון ברענענדע אויוונס און קברים — 40 גבורים געבענטשטע שמיען אין ריגע איצט אויף צו הייליקן ווייטאַק און צאַרן.</p> <p>שאַטנס פון שמאַרכנדע ברידער עס קניען מיט לעצטן מינוט, פאַר זייערע הענקער און ריכטער — 40 געפלאַכטענע לידער פאַרשרייבן מיט 40 מאָל מוט, דעם פייער און פלאַם פון געשיכטע . . .</p> <p>הימל אין גרעסטן געווייטער, און האַפענונג שמערן זיך לעשט פאַר אלע געיאָגטע און מידע — 40 צוברויזטע געמיטער אין רויבער'שן, היה'שן נעסט, זיך גרייטן אויף קאַמף און מרידה.</p> <p>ווי שיף אין באַהערשונג פון קריעס, עס ראַנגלען זיך העלדן אין קלעס, מיט האָס צו געבעט און חסדים — עס קוקט נאָך מיט פינצטערע וויעס אויף 40 אַ שוואַרצער געשעפּענסט, און וועבט צו פאַרניכטונג דעם פאַדים . . .</p>
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## EXCERPTS FROM M. VESTERMANIS' SPEECH ON APRIL 19, 2018



*The Riga Ghetto—Lachplesha Street on the way to Moskavas Street*

Information on the resistance movement in the Riga Ghetto can be seen in museum's Jews in Latvia exhibition about the Holocaust. We considered it very important fundamentally to have one exhibition dedicated to an event that happened in Riga; after Rumbula, there were men who had lost their whole family; the overall mood completely changed. Our lives had no purpose. Then a thought spontaneously arose that we could not continue to live like this, even in these camps, when all of our people—families, friends, and our entire Jewish community—are simply killed for no reason. I don't know if it was Mordechai Glaser or someone else from the organized Ordnungsdienst, i.e., security services in the ghetto, that started this. They wore special sashes and had the opportunity to do a lot of things. These guys started digging bunkers pretty soon afterwards. This can be seen on the map of the ghetto in our museum: four bunkers with mattresses, water, and small bits of bread, as well as weapons. All the young people in the Riga ghetto were involved in these hidden deals with the weapons. Unfortunately, I only experienced such happiness twice (I say this without any embellishment) when I was entrusted to carry rifle bolts into the ghetto. I worked in the carpentry shop and it was not at all difficult to cut the log in half, put the bolt in there, glue it in and then carry it down—we were allowed to bring one log of wood into the ghetto, so the risk was small. But that feeling that we were doing something to the Nazis was very incredible.

In the basement of the building at the corner of Ludzas and Lauvas streets, with the entrance from Vilanu Street through the underground passage, a shooting gallery was set up where they trained the guys to shoot. Upstairs there was a smithy, where Lithuanian workers toiled noisily and sharpened knives. It's hard to imagine how this could've ended. Everyone knew about this place.

The underground of the ghetto was divided into two political factions: people from the Ordnungsdienst, who believed that when the time came, they would

supposedly get shot and die and that there was no other option.

The second group, to which I belonged, believed that we didn't have to wait for them to come kill us. We needed to look for partisans. This romanticized, naïve, childish idea was derived from movies of the '40s about the partisans during the times of the civil war. In 1942, Latvia had no partisan detachments, absolutely none. There were neither Soviet nor national civilians from the so-called underground Latvian Central Council. But we wanted this very badly. And one fine day it was heard in our circle: "There are people who will lead us—and it is known where—to Augspils, where the partisan group is being created. It was toward the end of September 1942. Now it is known that one of our activists—Abram Russ—was associated with a certain person who spoke Russian, who wished to join this group and addressed him with the words "I am a Russian officer and I am a Jew." The news spread—we would now have a military leader, a front-line officer, even though, basically, he was not at all a combat officer.

In 1962, I worked in the State Archive as the head of the Department of Scientific Publications and compiled a collection called "We Accuse." Suddenly, I stumbled on a message signed by Borka Pismanov in which he reports about the bunkers, what weapons were used, and how he was treated. The letters were signed with V.M. What could that be? Only then did I realize that V.M. means *Vertrauen Man*, i.e., a "trusted face." Therefore, from the beginning of October 1942, the Abwehr and the SD monitored every move of our people. Not without their help, the idea was put forward that they should immediately go to this Augspils. On October 28, 1942, a car drove up with nine of our guys, along with a Soviet paratrooper who was actually a Gestapo agent. They got into the car and then took Madonna Road, which was completely unpaved—and they were then on their way to this Augspils. They didn't get very far. At the 16th kilometer a huge armed group was waiting and the Jews were shot at for an hour and a half and left for dead. The Jews had only revolvers; the Germans had automatic rifles and machine guns. Why was there a fight for an hour and a half? On October 31 the ghetto was surrounded, and young guys from this Ordnungsdienst were brought to Blechplatz on Krasnaya (Sarkana) Street and shot. The blow was incredibly strong. That's how they took us like naïve lambs—OK, I was 17 years old, but there were adult men there, too, what were they hoping for? They were inspired, happy for the opportunity to resist. We were ready to die, and die we surely would, but not how we planned.

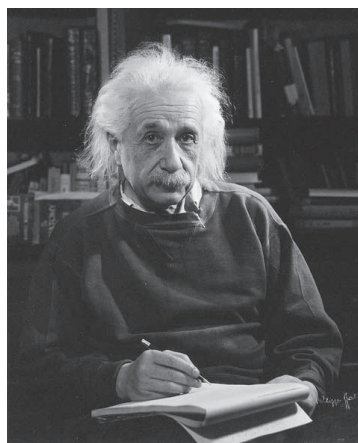
***Translated from Latvian by Ivar Brod and Eva Minkin***

# PHILIPPE HALSMAN: THE GREAT PHOTOGRAPHER

*In the fall of 2010 we began to compile articles about outstanding native Latvian Jews in the U.S. to be included in the Latvian Jewish Encyclopedia, planned for publishing by the Shamir society in Riga.*

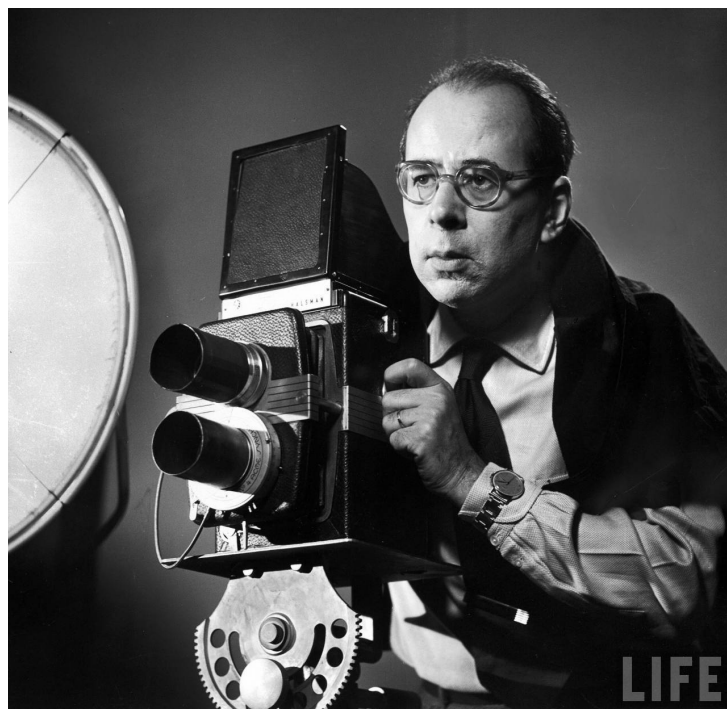
**Halsman, Philippe** (May 2, 1906, Riga – June 25, 1979, New York). Philippe Halsman was born into the well-to-do Jewish family of Max Halsman, a dentist. He graduated first in his class from high school. In high school, he became involved in photography but did not think of it as a possible profession. In 1924, Philippe went to Germany and was accepted into the electrical engineering program at the University of Dresden. In September 1928, Philippe's father died in the Austrian Alps, with Philippe being blamed for his death. Ultimately, Philippe was found guilty of unintentional manslaughter and sentenced to four years in prison. Many members of the scientific and artistic elite, including Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, and Thomas Mann joined the struggle for the liberation of the "Austrian Dreyfus." Finally, on October 1, 1930, the president of Austria granted Philippe a pardon on one condition: leave the country forever. In that same year, Philippe moved to France.

He then decided to turn his hobby into a profession and in 1932 opened a photo studio in Paris. He was very successful—by the mid-1930s, he was one of the most fashionable French photographers and his photographs were being printed in famous magazines like *Vogue*, *Vu*, and *Voila*. Thanks to the portraits of Andre Malraux, Paul Valery, Jean Painleve, Marc Chagall, Andre Gide, Jean Giraudoux, Charles Le Corbusier, and other members of the artistic cadre, the French press deemed Philippe the best portrait photographer in France.



Halsman's portrait of Albert Einstein

With the outbreak of World War II, Halsman's family immigrated to America, but Philippe, who had a Latvian passport, could not obtain a visa for a long time. Thanks to Einstein's intervention, Halsman was placed among the most important artists, writers, and scientists and was, as a result, given



Philippe Halsman

a visa for the United States. On November 10, 1940, Philippe arrived to New York.

Now began his most prolific period of his life: he became famous, made his dreams into a reality, took his most famous photographs, and published books. In 1941, Philippe met the famous surrealist painter Salvador Dali. Their friendly and creative relationship lasted about 30 years. In 1954, Halsman published his book, *Dali's Mustache*, in which he included many portraits of the Spanish artist, focusing mainly on his famous mustache. For one of the most famous photographs in the book Halsman used seven nude models to "build" a figure resembling a human skull. Another famous photograph titled "Dali Atomicus" was, in a sense, a photographic continuation of the painting "Leda Atomica." In the photograph, the Halsman and Dali

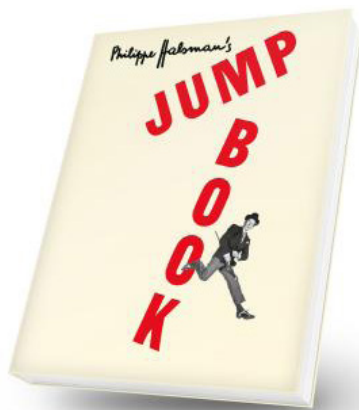
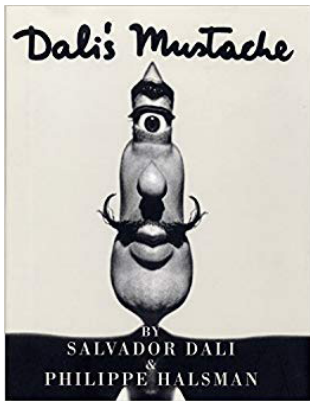


Halsman's photograph with Salvador Dali, "Dali Atomicus"

## PHILLIP HALSMAN: THE GREAT PHOTOGRAPHER (continued)

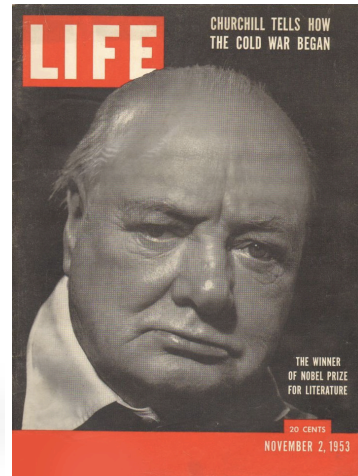
wanted to show the movement of electrons around the nucleus. To do so, on the count of “three,” assistants threw cats and splashed water out of a bucket; on the count of “four,” Dali jumped while flashes of bright light illuminated the room, allowing Halsman to record it all on film.

member of the famous photo agency Magnum Photos. In 1958, the magazine *Popular Photography* named him one of the “Ten Greatest Photographers in the World.” The photographer considered his highest achievement to be his 101 photos printed on the cover of *LIFE Magazine*, an unrivaled record.



*Halsman's books, Dali's Mustache and Jump Book*

He took “jumping” photos of Henry Ford, Grace Kelly, Marilyn Monroe, Audrey Hepburn, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, future U.S. President Richard Nixon, father of the atomic bomb Robert Oppenheimer, and many other actors, artists, politicians, writers, scientists, and photographers; all told, about two hundred famous jumpers including himself. In the preface to his photo album *Jump Book*, published in 1959, Halsman revealed his reasoning behind his idea: “When a person jumps, his attention is mainly focused on the act of jumping, the mask falls down and his true face will appear.”



*Halsman's photographs of Winston Churchill and Marilyn Monroe, featured on the covers of LIFE Magazine*

In 2006, in honor of his 100th birthday, a monument was built and dedicated to him—the first monument in the world honoring a photographer. The monument was first installed in the foyer of the Riga City Council; it was later placed in front of the house where the future photographer had spent his childhood.

*By Iosif Rochko (Daugavpils)  
Translated by Alan Solovey*



*Halsman's photographs of Richard Nixon and Audrey Hepburn jumping*

In 1945, Halsman was elected the first president of The American Association of Magazine Photographers, where he fought for the creative and professional rights of his colleagues. In 1951, he became a contributing



*The monument to Philippe Halsman, by G. Pototski, on the wall of the Riga City Council foyer*



## NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE



*Representatives of the main religious denominations of Latvia spoke during the ceremony at the memorial in Bikernieki*

In 2005, the UN General Assembly declared January 27, the day of liberation of Auschwitz concentration camp, as an International Holocaust Remembrance Day. To commemorate this day, a memorial event was held by the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia at the Bikernieki mass murder site. At this ceremony, the Rabbis Elijokh Krumer and Kalev Krelin of the Riga Peitav-Shul, as well the representatives of other main religious denominations of Latvia read the prayers. Attending were representatives of the diplomatic corps, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, other Latvian and foreign organizations, and members of the Jewish community.

The Bikernieki Forest holds the largest mass grave of the victims of Nazism in Latvia. From 1941 to 1944, 35,000 people were killed here, including 20,000 Jews from Latvia, Austria, Germany, and Czechoslovakia, as well as 5,000 opponents of the Nazi regime, and 10,000 Soviet prisoners of war.

The memorial, designed by architect Sergei Ryzh, was opened in 2001.

The Latvian Prosecutor General's Office decided to discontinue the criminal proceedings against Herbert Cukurs, the Latvian pilot in the '20s-'30s. In July 1941, Cukurs voluntarily joined the unit of the Latvian auxiliary police of the SD under the command of Viktor Arajs, who performed the killing of at least 30,000 Jews during the Holocaust. The case was initiated in 2006 in accordance with Article 71 of the Criminal Law "Genocide" but was closed in February, 2019, "due to the lack of corpus delicti due to lack of evidence." This decision prompted the relatives of Cukurs to resume the campaign to rebury him at the Riga Brethren Cemetery (Latvian: *Brāļu Kapī*). Such interment would be a slap in the face to Latvian Jews as well as many Latvians and other residents of Latvia.

Most Latvian historians expressed their bewil-

derment at the decision of the Prosecutor General's Office and consider the reburial of Cukurs in the Brethren Cemetery to be unacceptable. The opinion of the Jewish community was expressed by the director of the Jews in Latvia Museum Ilya Lensky in a special program on Latvian television: "If we consider that the Brethren Cemetery is the Latvian Pantheon, where the people buried there are meant to inspire and set an example, then there is no place for Cukurs there. There is simply no place."

JSL President David Silberman, on behalf of members of the organization, sent a protest to the Latvian President Raimonds Vejonis. A similar protest was also sent to the Latvian Prosecutor General's Office by our brethren organization in Israel—Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel. The Jewish community of Latvia is preparing a legal request to access the case files; after these are reviewed, further steps will be taken.



*The memorial at the Riga Brethren Cemetery*

The October 2018 decision of the European Parliament that condemned the speeches of neo-Nazis in some European countries was apparently considered by Latvian politicians when planning the events of March 16, 2019. The recent proposal of the National Association VL-TB/LNNK to make March 16 an official day of commemoration of the Latvian military was not supported by its coalition partners, thus this issue will not be considered in the Saeima. The new Prime Minister of Latvia, Krishjanis Karinsh, said that members of his cabinet should not participate in events dedicated to the memory of Waffen SS Legionnaires in the center of Riga. He noted, however, that he himself is the grandson of the Legionnaire and understands the "true origin of March 16." At the same time, Karinsh believes that the hype around unofficial processions in the center of Riga on this day does not contribute to the Latvia's image.

On March 16, 2019, in Riga, more than a thousand

## NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)



*The march in memory of Waffen SS Legionnaires through the streets of Riga was guarded by a chain of policemen*

people gathered at the events commemorating Latvian Legionnaires. The Riga City Council had approved three applications for holding various actions. Early in the morning of March 16, police officers installed yellow barriers near the Freedom Monument. Fences on the square near the monument are installed on this day annually in order to prevent physical contact between the opposing groups. At 11:30, the march commemorating Legionnaires began at the Church of John and continued on to the Freedom Monument. Participants sang patriotic songs and carried banners with inscriptions condemning communism and Nazism. Order was maintained by numerous police officers who stood on both sides of Kalku Street, forming a chain and allowing only the marchers and the press to walk along the route. When the marchers reached the Freedom Monument, they began the symbolic laying of flowers at the foot of the monument. Among them was Janis Dombrova, the deputy of the Saeima from the National Association, who told reporters that Prime Minister Karinsh, who called on coalition partners not to participate in the march, "should not suppress democracy, but be with the soldiers." Supporters of the opposing ideological camp, about 50 of them, stood behind the barriers near the Freedom Monument holding up posters that said, "They fought for Adolf Hitler." The Latvian Anti-Nazi Committee also planned to hold a protest on that day near the Freedom Monument, but the Riga City Council, as in previous years, ordered that the event be moved to another location. As a result, the anti-fascist meeting was cancelled. In general, the event took place without incidents.

On January 31, 2019, Ambassador Ferenc Bányai presented the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit of Hungary to Margers Vestermanis, the former prisoner of the Riga Ghetto, historian and public figure.

Margers Vestermanis has been honored for his efforts in researching the history and preserving the memory of the Hungarian Jewish women who were killed or perished in Latvia during the Holocaust.



*M. Vestermanis with his Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit of Hungary*



*The book Rescuer Zhanis Lipke*

On December 18, 2018, a presentation of the long-awaited book, *Rescuer Zhanis Lipke*, took place in the Zhanis Lipke memorial museum. The book was presented by the creator of the museum Maris Gailis, Director of the Museum Lolita Thomsone, Lipke's daughter-in-law Arija Lipke, and others. The

book introduces brave Latvian individuals who, during the Nazi occupation, stood against the regime's murderous violence by saving lives, irrespective of faith or ethnic origins. Zhanis and Johanna Lipke rescued more than 50 Jews, helping them escape from the Riga ghetto and concentration camps and caring for them in hiding places in Riga and around Dobeles.

Zhanis and Johanna were acknowledged as the "Righteous Among the Nations," the title awarded by the Yad Vashem to those who saved Jews during the Holocaust. Readers who undertake this difficult historical journey will be rewarded with the evidence that even in the most horrific circumstances one can hope to meet people who will not betray but will help.

The source for this book was *Like a Star in the Darkness* by David Silberman, supplemented by unpublished

## NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)

documents from the Zhanis Lipke Memorial, survivor accounts, recollections, letters, archive materials, and photographs. The book has been published in Latvian; it will be soon translated into Russian and English.



On March 12, 2019, in the Jews in Latvia Museum, the exhibition “For My People and For My Country: Paul Mintz, Latvia’s Statesman” was opened. This exhibition, prepared by the Jewish Community of Latvia, tells the story of Paul Mintz (1868, Daugavpils – 1941, Krasnoyarsk Territory), an outstanding Latvian-Jewish public figure, politician, and intellectual during the first free Latvian state. He made invaluable contributions to the creation and development of the country. During the opening ceremony, three reports on various aspects of the life and activities of Mintz were presented:

- Ilya Lensky: Paul Mintz as a public and political figure
- Theiss Klauberg: Contribution of Paul Mintz to the development of Latvian justice
- Shaul Cohen-Mintz: Paul Mintz in the memories of his family

The exhibition was supported by the State Cultural Capital Foundation within the framework of the Latvia-100 program and the Riga City Council Education, Culture and Sports Department.

The exhibition will be at the museum until September 10, 2019. It will then travel to schools in Riga and elsewhere in Latvia in order to show to the younger generation the process of becoming an exceptional person in the era of the formation of a new state as well as to consider a fast-changing era through the fate of one person.

During the exhibition’s opening, visitors had an opportunity to meet ten descendants of Paul Mintz, who had come to Riga from Israel to participate in the event. The descendants presented a family heirloom—a tablecloth—to the museum. This tablecloth celebrated the tenth anniversary of the young Latvian republic and is

embroidered with the Latvian coat of arms. Paul Mintz’s daughter, Edith, moved to Palestine in 1939 and took the textile with her.



*I. Lensky, director of the Jews in Latvia Museum, and L. Thomsone, director of the Zhanis Lipke Museum, examine a gift from Paul Mintz’s descendants—a tablecloth dedicated to Latvia’s 10th anniversary*



*Boris Maftsir is interviewed by journalist Oleg Sulkin*

On Sunday, February 3, 2019, in the recital hall of Hunter College, the Israeli-Russian Film Festival was held in honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The guest of honor was the Israeli film director Boris Maftsir, who was born and grew up in Latvia; in 1971 he made *aliya* to Israel. During the festival Maftsir showed his latest documentary, *Drawers of Memory*. The drawers of memory open, exposing the complex history of Latvian Jews before, during, and after the Holocaust. First drawer: an unusual attempt by a group loyal to the memory of the victims to put together a full and detailed list of all the Jews who were in Latvia on the eve of World War II. Second drawer: the work of the Latvian “guardians of memory” who have devoted themselves to the idea of remembering how their long-gone Jewish neighbors looked. Third drawer: the personal drawer of

## NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)

Boris Maftsir, who discovers his own recollections of the Holocaust issue.

During the festival, Maftsir was given an award “for his courage and cinematic achievements in preserving the memory of victims sentenced to silence and oblivion and places of mass murder in the former Soviet Union.”

Excerpts from *Drawers of Memory* were shown to JSL’s members at our memorial meeting a year ago.

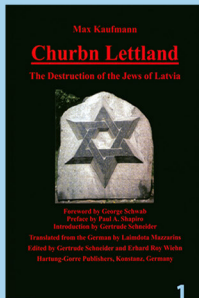
On April 14, 2019, the composer, Professor Mendel Bash (1919-2012), a prisoner of the Riga ghetto, would have turned 100 years old. An oratorio dedicated to the terrible years of the war, composed by him in 1961, was performed just once—in 1969 under the title “In Memory of the Victims of Fascism.” At the time, the oratorio could only be performed in the U.S.S.R. under this name. The composer, who also survived a concentration camp, dreamed of hearing a new performance of his work. The Max Goldin Jewish Cultural Heritage Society, of which Mendel Bash was an honorary member, in the begin-



M. Ioffe and V. Schulman welcome Professor Mendel Bash at the presentation on September 7, 2011

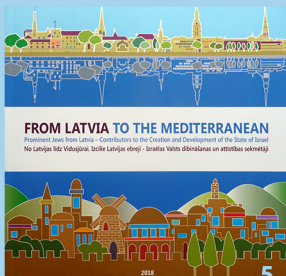
ning of the 21st century had begun preparations for the performance of the oratorio. Alas, the composer died before this came to fruition. Bash’s will instructed that the oratorio be performed under its original title, “In Memory of the Riga Ghetto,” during the concert that took place on December 1, 2013.

**Compiled by Ivar Brod**  
**Translated by Mariya Taukule**



### 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 73 Jewish communities in Latvia prior to World War II and the more than 200 sites where they were murdered.
4. Sergej Braun, *Beyond the Realm of the Past*, published in Russian. This book describes the author's life in exile in Siberia and then in Latvia and contains sketches of historical personalities.
5. *From Latvia to the Mediterranean*, published in English. This booklet, which was published last year, tells the stories of Jewish immigrants from Latvia who made a difference in Israel.



All five books are available by mail. If you are interested, please make out a check of \$49.00 for Meler's book, a check of \$12.00 for the Latvia-Mediterranean booklet, and a check for \$20.00 for any of the other books (including handling and postage), payable to Jewish Survivors of Latvia, Inc., and mail it to the address shown on page 2. Please specify whether you would like English or Russian edition of M. Kaufmann’s book.