



September 2003

The Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum of Lithuania מלוכישער יידישער מוזיי א"נ ווילנער גאון NEWSLETTER 7

Dear Friends,

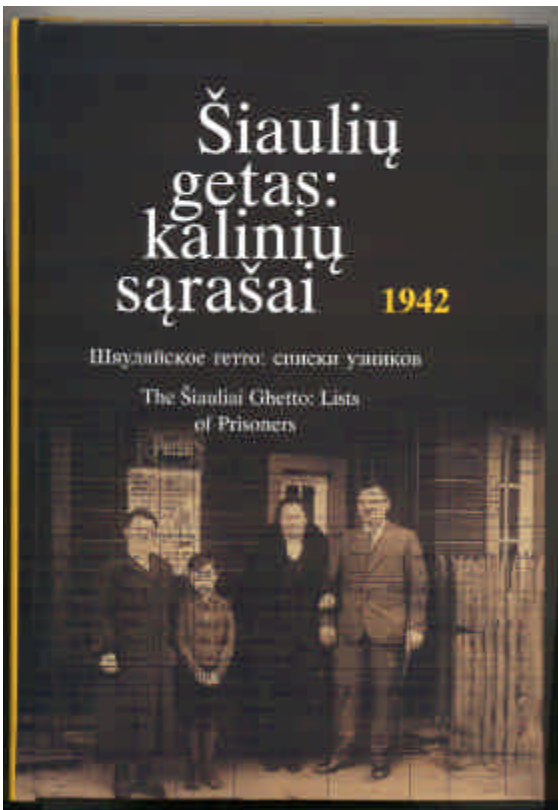
טייערע פֿריינט!

It is our great pleasure to congratulate you and your families, all the Jewish people in Israel and elsewhere with the coming Rosh ha Shana.

פֿאר אונדז איז דער גרעסטער פֿארגעניגן און ערע צו באגריסן אייך און אייערע פֿאמיליעס, אלע יידן אין ישראל און אומעטומן מיט רש ח שנה און ווינטשן

Peace for Israel, lots of Happiness and Health, Shalom!

שלום אין ישראל, געזונט און גליק, שלום!



This year carries a tragic sign - the 60-ies anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilna Ghetto. We thank our staff for having researched, prepared and published a very important academic book: "Vilnius Ghetto: The List of prisoners", 1996-1998 (two volumes). Compiled by Irina Guzenberg.

Considering our size and abilities, we hope to have achieved some serious results. We published more books, held lectures internationally and led educational programs throughout Lithuania and abroad. Our exhibitions are visited by hundreds of people. Students and pupils come here to study. Litvaks and their families come to search their roots. Historians come for consultations. Newspaper articles and letters from abroad acknowledge this.

Without your sincere support it would not have been possible. We toil for our history. Together.

Thank you so much, indeed. In the name of the museum staff and its director Mr. Em. Zingeris,

Rachel Kostanian
Vice director

“Šiauliai Ghetto: Lists of Prisoners.1942” already available

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After painstaking and accurate research and preparation the book came out of the printing house in January ... page 4.

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All texts by museum staff members. Edited by Rachel Kostanian Layout: Philipp Herzog	

"JEWISH LIFE IN LITHUANIA": SUCCESSFUL

The museum's traveling exhibition "Jewish life in Lithuania", officially opened in February 2002, continued its route in Lithuania and abroad.

This year's most important and successful stops were in Klaipeda/Lithuania and in Geneva/Switzerland, at the "Palais des Nations" of the United Nations.

The exhibition in the Palais des Nations was opened on the 10th of June. It was organized in cooperation with the Lithuanian and Israel Missions to the United Nations. As the Lithuanian Ambassador Dr. Algimantas Rimkunas stated: "... it is difficult to find a better place than the Palais des Nations for the exhibition, which witnesses well rooted, very rich, but sometimes complicated and even tragic history of Jewish community in Lithuania." Receiving many positive and thankful replies from high ranking diplomats of different nations, we are glad that the event could give an insight into the fascinating and tragic history of the Litvaks on such a high level.



Teacher training seminar in Klaipeda

Showing the more than 600 years of varied Jewish history in Lithuania, the exhibition is designed to acquaint the Lithuanian and world society with the history of the once biggest and most important minority in Lithuania.

By means of various additional media – seminars, talks with survivors, an important catalogue, which can be used as a school book and two films especially produced for the exhibition – we hope to reach our main aim: to contribute educating the Lithuanian youth in the sense of tolerance, to teach them an important part of their country's history, which is still often neglected in Lithuanian school and thus to contribute to the general efforts to strengthen an open, democratic and tolerant Lithuanian society.

In Klaipeda the museum scientific secretary and project curator, Ruta Puišyte implemented a new seminar idea. Besides the accompanying programs for teachers and pupils that usually take place in each venue, a specially adopted seminar for soldiers and officers of the Lithuanian Army was organized under her guidance.



Seminar for soldiers of the Lithuanian army

The aim was to stimulate discussions and self-reflection on how this occupational group should deal with their enormous responsibility in times of war and what lessons they can learn from the Holocaust. Therefore the filmmaker Saulius Beržinis presented his unique material – filmed interviews with the Holocaust perpetrators, former soldiers of the Lithuanian Army. To make the relevance of the topic for nowadays soldiers more clear also film-material of a war-correspondent in Chechnya Romas Dabrukas was shown. Therefore we express our thanks to both S. Beržinis and R. Dabrukas for their assistance.

The seminar was very much welcomed by high army officials so that we are optimistic that our new program also will be a story of success.

The project "Jewish Life in Lithuania" is seen as a successful result of already five years of cooperation with the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and its coordinator for Lithuania – Mr. Norbert Hinterleitner.



Vilna Ghetto poster

The traveling exhibition “Vilna Ghetto Posters” returned from the YIVO Institute in New York. It is currently shown in our museums’ Tolerance Center to the public.

Our third traveling Exhibition “Rescuers of Lithuania” is now in the Tolerance Center of the museum

OUR EXHIBITIONS

Permanent Exhibitions

As the museum already exists for almost 14 years, it is time to adapt our older exhibitions to the demands of a modern museum. In 1989 the museum started from scratch. Although we managed to build several good and impressive exhibitions it is necessary not only to keep them functioning but also to keep them on the level of modern time, trying to make them better wherever possible, make them more accessible, more attractive for a broader public.

Among others, our exhibition “Catastrophe”, about the Holocaust in Lithuania, is one of the main targets of this renewal project. The old panels are being replaced with ones of high tech quality, the texts are being rechecked and every item gets English subtitles, the missing of which was one of the big shortages of this exhibition until now. Due to the lack of money the progress in the reconstruction is slower than we would like it to be, but non the less three exhibition rooms out of six are already “modernized”. Here is the toil of Eugenija Biber the historian and Henrik Kostanian the designer.



The exhibition "Catastrophe"

Our other permanent exhibitions are:
At the address Pylimo 4

- The Synagogues of Lithuania
- Jews in the fight against nazism
- The gallery of the righteous
- Jasha Heifetz
- Mark Antokolski and Vilnius

Temporary closed exhibition:

- Memorials to sites of mass murder of Lithuanian Jews
- Ethnographic Judaica collection
- Original dolls of the Purimspiel

The Memorial at Paneriai

In Druskininkai:

Jacque Lipchitz. His life and family

OUR EXHIBITIONS

Visiting Exhibitions

Only two years ago our museum was enlarged by a new institution: The Tolerance Center. The idea and implementation belongs to our director, signator of Lithuania's Independence Act, Mr. Emmanuel Zingeris. Following the principle to make Jewish culture and heritage accessible to a broader Lithuanian public it hosted several international traveling exhibitions on Jewish themes this year:

- **”Psalms of David”** paintings by Ieva Babilaite
- **“Jewish Literature in the Czech Republic”**, organized in cooperation with the Czech Embassy
- **“Fragments of prewar Jewish Vilnius”**, an exhibition of works by the Polish photographer Jerzy Hoppen, organized together with the Institute of Polish culture.
- **“Jewish Vienna”**, photographs of Janos Kalmar, organized together with the Austrian Embassy.

Various conferences, lectures, performances and the like (associated with the designation of this museum branch) also took place in the Tolerance Center.

Concerning publications the last year was a very productive one.

We were able to present 3 new scientific books to the public, several others are in preparation.

But also in the non-scientific area we were not inactive: In early spring our museum entered the “modern world”: For the first time our museum can be visited from every point on earth – virtually, at our homepage at www.jmuseum.lt. Also a set of postcards on prewar Jewish Vilnius and Lithuania from the museum archives and a museum T-shirt - both works of our Austrian volunteer Philipp Herzog - went for sale.

ŠIAULIAI GHETTO: LISTS OF PRISONERS. 1942. Compiled by Irina Guzenberg

After a time of planning, detailed and accurate research in the archives, preparation of the text and raising funds, we finally could celebrate the long awaited publication of the book in early January this year. The main sponsor as usual is the Claims conference, which we thank heartily.

The official presentation to the public took place in the Jewish Community center, together with the presentation of another of our new books – “The H.K.P. Jewish Labor Camp. 1943-1944. Documents”.

After the festive event and a one minute’s silence, remembering those who were murdered, the numerous audience was invited to a buffet including some Jewish “Beigelech” and other samples of traditional Jewish food.



Irina Guzenberg presenting her book

The book itself contains the lists of prisoners of the Šiauliai Ghetto of the year 1942. The original lists from the archives were thoroughly checked, corrections and missings added. The lists are complemented with several historical articles on the Holocaust in Šiauliai and its surroundings, photographs and other documenting material. It was highly evaluated by professional researchers and scientific institutions as well as personally interested people. Some of their comments: Babey Trepman: ”This book is not only to turn pages and remember, it is a wonderful historical edition ... Your work is an unbelievable addition to the Shoa history, and should be put in every Holocaust museum, ...”; Saul Isroff:” ... I am sure that this [book] is of immense value to all interested in the Holocaust in Lithuania.”; Gideon Shub:“ I have some experience in publishing that kind of books, therefore I can estimate how much efforts and work you have put into that. But the essence is, that the result is an outstanding one.”

THE H.K.P. JEWISH LABOR CAMP. 1943-1944. DOCUMENTS. Compiled by Irina Guzenberg

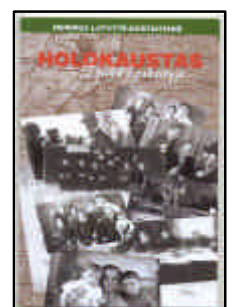


Although not as voluminous in pages as the “Šiauliai Ghetto” book, it is as thoroughly researched and also highly evaluated by scientists. For the first time the topic got a closer attention.

The book presents a collection of documents on the H.K.P. Jewish Labor Camp, which existed in Vilnius in 1943/44 after the liquidation of the Ghetto. It has an introductory article on the history of the camp and documents such as daily work sheets, tables, data on the number of inmates, official correspondence, etc.. Like the previous book it presents a new page opened in Lithuanian’s history and particularly in the Holocaust.

HOLOCAUST IN THE TRAKAI REGION. By Neringa Latvyte-Gustaitiene

A detailed, archive-based description of the destruction of Jewish communities in various towns of the Trakai Region in 1941 and the history of the Region’s Jewish forced labor camps (1941-1943). Due to the lack of money only a Lithuanian version could be published, but an English version of the book is to come when the financial part would be reached. It was represented to a numerous audience in the museums’ Tolerance Center.



At the beginning of July a group of students from Russia, Belarus and Lithuania attended a one week course on the “world of Lithuanian Jewry”, organized by the Russian-Jewish organization “Sochnut” with the help and active participation of our museum staff (especially Aiste Niunkaite-Raciuniene and Roza Bieliaulskiene).

The first part of the course were lectures on the rich history, culture and traditions of the Litvaks. They were held in our museum’s Tolerance Center by teachers from America, Israel, Russia, Belarus and Lithuania.



At the Jewish cemetery in Kelme

Tours to the original places discussed about in the lectures formed the second part of the program. Vilnius, former Jerusalem of Lithuania, Kaunas and Telšiai, where long ago Jewish students would come together to study in the famous Yeshiva, were explored. Smaller places like Parkruojis, Kelme, Žiežmariai and others were also part of the program, aiming to get some imagination of the lost spirit of the “Shtetl”-culture.

Similar groups are not rare in the museum: sometimes students of local schools are visiting, mostly led by a teacher, sometimes those from abroad. A usual picture – students sit on the floor and listen to the teacher or our guide to fulfill the given task afterwards.

EVENTS

Lectures at Lithuanian schools about the rescuers of Jews



Viktorija Sakaite holding a lecture about the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust.

In cooperation with the Vilnius based NGO “House of Memory” and the “Genocide Center” the museum participates - in addition to our own efforts in the framework of our traveling exhibition “Jewish life in Lithuania” (and before that with the Ann Frank exhibition) - in another Holocaust education program for Lithuanian students.

In schools all over Lithuania a series of lectures, films, talks with survivors and other educational programs are organized.

Special attention is paid to reach small schools in the countryside to make them aware of the long history of Jews in Lithuania and its tragic end. A history which for some of them is totally new.

The joint project was launched in October last year. Up to now such seminars were undertaken already in 14 different schools of Lithuania.

Viktorija Sakaite, the coordinator of the project on behalf of the Jewish Museum, is the right person for the job. As a professional teacher she manages to attract the attention of the pupils. According to the entries in the seminars’ guest book, her lectures about the righteous of Lithuania, embedded in the general history of the annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry, are very much appreciated. By her way of telling she evokes the pupils’ interest in the topic and their wish to know more about it.

Entries like the following give strength to carry on and give hope and confidence that things can and will be changed:

An anonymous student of the Gediminas’ school in Klaipeda wrote:

“In the past I thought that the Jewish people is a very bad one, but during this seminar I started to understand that the Jews had to sustain unbelievable inhuman pain. It was an interesting seminar, I learned so much about the Holocaust ... I think, that seminars of that kind should be much more often.”

Conference: "Holocaust in Lithuania in the Focus of Modern History Education and Justice". Sept 2002

The conference was opened in the museums' Tolerance Center by our director Emmanuel Zingeris in his function as chairman of the "International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania" on the 23rd of September 2002. This date marks the anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilna Ghetto.

The conference was attended by high ranking international experts like Yehuda Bauer, Yitzhak Arad, Dov Levin and others. Our museum staff was actively involved in organizing and moderating the conference. Among several reports of our museum staff, Rachel Kostanian's book "Spiritual Resistance in the Vilna Ghetto" was presented to the international audience. The book awaited good success.

This year, marking the 60th anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilna Ghetto, an international conference on Jewish history in Lithuania will be organized anew.

Museum staff in different conferences around the world

On the occasion of the publication of the English version of Herman Kruk's diary of the Vilna Ghetto, the museums' traveling exhibition "Vilna Ghetto Posters" went to the YIVO (Yiddish Scientific Institute) in New York. Accompanying the exhibition, Rachel Kostanian was invited to present her last year's book "Spiritual Resistance in the Vilna Ghetto".

For us it was a special feeling of pride and honor to be present at the YIVO, as it was founded and had its headquarters in prewar Vilnius. Some of its members, who contributed so much to the golden era of the Yiddish culture, played a decisive role in establishing after liberation on the ruins of Yerushalaim d'Lita the Jewish Museum, our direct predecessor.

Dalija Epstein and Rachel Margolis contributed to an international conference of the "Institutum Botanicae" in Vilnius, dedicated to the Jewish biologist Jakov Movshovitch, who was a prisoner in the Vilna Ghetto, survived and became professor of biology in Poland.

Roza Bieliauskiene held a lecture about "Jung Vilne", the famous pre-war Yiddish artist group, at the conference "Jewish Culture and history: Example Vilnius" organized by the Simon Dubnov Institute and the Institute of Culture of Eastern and Central Europe (Leipzig/Germany).

Ruta Puišyte participated in the Moscow conference "Holocaust Education in today's Russia", reporting about the four years of cooperation with the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam in the field of Holocaust education in Lithuania.

Arkadij Bliumin presented an historical paper about the situation of Lithuanian Jews in the Stalin era: cultural, social and religious aspects 1944 – 1953 at the yearly Judaica Conference in Moscow, organized by the "Jewish agency of Russia" in cooperation with "Joint".

Rachel Kostanian gave a lecture about the role of the Vilna Gaon Jewish State museum in researching the history of Lithuanian Jewry in the framework of a lecture series about the history of Eastern European Jewry at the Vilnius University Yiddish Institute.

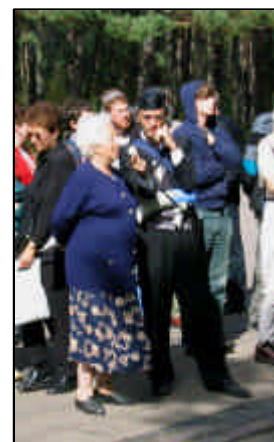
Rachel Kostanian participated in an international conference in Berlin "Questions of Holocaust research", reporting about the work results of the museum.

Ruta Puišyte took part in seminars of the Holocaust education organization "Facing history and ourselves", in Berlin and Prague.

To give you a better insight into the work and the character of our museum, we decided to introduce a new series of articles to our newsletters. Each year we will present you a member of our museum staff - the people who are standing behind all our achievements. We are starting this series with Rachel Margolis, expressing our deep gratitude for her outstanding engagement.

RACHEL MARGOLIS

Today she is not a museum staff member in the common sense. After emigrating to Israel some years ago, Rachel comes back every year to spend the whole summer in the museum to continue research, to tell the museum visitors her captivating life story, the Ghetto, the heroic partisans, ... Apart from her experiences, she simply impresses her surrounding by her strong and at the same time obliging character. Among others the people from the Yiddish language summer course, organized every year by the Vilnius University Yiddish Institute, will remember her - a real Litvak - as a person fully dedicated and talented to give further the knowledge to the young generation.



Rachel Margolis guiding

Born in Vilne in 1923, she came to the Ghetto in September 1941 from a hiding place. She gave up her faked Polish identity, which she had already in the pocket to join her Jewish fellows in the rows of the Ghetto partisans to fight the Nazis. After the end of the war she was one of the few who survived to stay in Vilnius. She studied biology and became professor at Vilnius University. In the late 80s she highly contributed to the establishment of “her” museum – the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum. Rachel also made some highly important contributions to historical science by editing the daily notes of Kazimez Sakovich, an eyewitness of the shootings in Ponar/Paneriai in Polish. Later it was translated into Hebrew and now an English edition is in process.

In her wish to publish her “Memoirs” she has our enthusiastic support and we will help her wherever our possibilities allow us. We want to express to her our deep thanks and are already looking forward to see her again next summer. Her presence and help are indispensable.

For the following year, concerning exhibitions, our main efforts will be:

- Finishing the work on our new exhibition “The fate of Vilnius area Jews during 1941-1944” – the opening is planed for June next year, if proper finance can be achieved.
- Advanced work on the exhibition “The Jews of Butrimonys” – as and exemplary case of a Jewish “Shtetl” in Lithuania (on the same condition).
- Establishing an exhibition of A. Bagdonavicius' paintings of Lithuanian synagogues. Here our greatest thanks goes to family Swartz (USA) and to the Austrian Embassy in Lithuania.
- Further reconstruction of our older exhibitions, especially the “Catastrophe” and our exhibition at the mass killing site in Ponar-Paneriai.
- Continuation of our traveling exhibitions, especially “Jewish life in Lithuania”, together with its educational program.

The following books are planed to be published next year:

- The smaller Ghettos around Vilnius
- “Hands bringing Life and Bread – Vol. 3”
- “The Jewish theme in the Lithuanian press 1990-1991 – a bibliographical index” - Vol. 2

Other plans:

- further efforts, especially in the field of fund raising, to contribute to the rescue of the 13 last – and world wide unique – baroque wooden synagogues of Lithuania. Many thanks here to Samuel Gruber (USA) and Dora Boom (Holland) for their engagement.

This year we could again welcome thousands of visitors from all over the world. There were Litvaks showing their descendants – or finding out for themselves - where their roots are, ordinary tourists, just interested to get to know more about Jews in Lithuania and their fate; journalists - sometimes TV-crews - often making reports in connection with the coming Lithuanian EU membership; historians, researchers for personal reasons, school groups making workshops in the museum, politicians, students...

Here some of their comments on the museum :

“I am enormously impressed by all that you are doing – and reading the newsletters on my way home, I realized how much you have done that we didn’t talk about!”

Suzanne Bargett, Imperial War Museum (London) 20 June 2003



Workshop of a school class in the museum

“I am deeply impressed and full of admiration for those people, who, which such simple means, can tell the history of the Vilna Ghetto and the annihilation of the Jews so excellently.”

*Feliks Tych, director of the Jewish Institute in Warsaw,
& Lucija Tych 06 June 2003*

"I think a lot of all of you ... you and the whole museum's family will be in my heart for the rest of my life, I can say that my stay in Vilnius has definitely changed my life and so I will never forget you"

Sepp Brudermann, Austrian volunteer at the museum in 2000/2001

“My 10+4 trip to Lithuania and the museum. I continue to admire the work of Rachel Kostanian and her coworkers do here. They are so dedicated.

May they continue to live and do well”

Howard Margol, Atlanta, USA

We want to thank all our last years' supporters – without you our work would not have been possible:

Claims Conference, Jewish American Fund, US Holocaust Memorial CNCL, Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, Anna Kremer, Gladys Mayers, Leone Rosenberg, Ray Shapiro, Samuel Dworkin, Uri Schneider, Debbie Berliner, Burusi de Mich, Ella Lidsky, Morrice & Lorna Swartz, Phyllis Morgan, Anton Herzog, Saul Isroff, Avril Deance, Garsu Pasaulis, Glenda Fawbert, E. & H. Page, Abel Levitt, Nathan Katz, D. Gordimer, W. & A. Schmelling, B. Hichelman, G. & Sh. Sandler, American Fund for Lithuania, Jack Perlov, V. Bernstein, K. Stanford, J. & J. Braverman, Joan Levin, Solon Beinfeld, Freddie Bloch, N. Saltiel, Leonore Tiefer, Mary Ann Tuft, Bernard Rubin, Robert Bronstein, Ann Rabonowitz, Association Töchter reden, ... (please forgive us if we have overseen somebody while checking our lists)

We also are thankful for those people who donated books, enabling us to keep our scientific level up to date:

Department for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (Oxford University), Sima Skurkowitz, Olga Zabludoff, Yad Vashem, Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington), The Library of Congress, Wilhelm Rosenbaum, Peter Sheena Levitt, Prof. Charskava, Theodore L. Smith, Imperial War Museum (London), Meir Rudner, New Jersey Department of Education, Tsadik Kaplan, Museum of Šiauliai, Simos Skurkowitz, Dr. Josef Guri, Transworld Publishers, Nacronall Yiddish Book Center, The Jewish Museum (N.Y.), City of Bozen/Bolzano (Italy), Susanne Plasseraud, Marzynyenko N.M.

Shalom!