



Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum of Lithuania

Newsletter 8

Dear Friends of the Jewish Museum in Vilnius,

SHANA TOVA!! MAZL TOV!!

It is our great honor and privilege to congratulate you and your families, all Jewish people around the world, in particular in Israel with coming Rosh ha-Shana. We wish everybody peace and health and let your dreams be fulfilled. Isn't it a miracle that we can send you this Newsletter the eighth time? That we are in work for Jewish history, that we open new exhibitions and publish new academic books? All that is possible thanks to your hearty contributions and friendship. We thank you for that most sincerely. In this Newsletter you can read what could be achieved thanks to your support. As goes for plans and ideas for next year's activities, there are already plenty of projects in the pipeline, e. g. exhibitions about the fate of the Jews in Butrimonis and those of the Vilnius district and about the rescue of Jewish children. We also plan to bring lots of life into our wonderful



Presentation of the works of Rafael Chwoles in the new Tolerance Center.

NEW PREMISES OF THE TOLERANCE CENTER TO BE OPENED IN SEPTEMBER!

In September a very significant event for the museum, the result of the long year toil of our director, is planned to take place: The opening of the restored top floor of the building at Naugarduko street 10. The building, once a Jewish Theatre also called 'The Philharmonic', now a branch of the Museum called 'The Tolerance Center' is thus completed. A small event, a kind of pre-opening, has already taken place on the 23rd August, when a collection of the works of Rafael Chwoles, a well-known Vilna...

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'Philharmonic' – Tolerance Center, we continue to research the Holocaust in Lithuania and to publish books based upon the results. We will continue our educational programs as well as to give lectures on scientific conferences. May the next year be a successful one for the museum!

Director Emmanuel Zingeris
Vice-director Rachel Kostanian

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Permanent Exhibitions

Avrom Karpinowicz – memorial room

On the 2nd August 2004 our museum opened an exhibition – a memorial room - dedicated to the Yiddish writer Avrom Karpinowicz, a genuine Vilna character who left us on the 20th March this year. With this event we tried to pay homage to him in the very city he loved so much and which played such a big role in his oeuvre.

Thanks to the initiative of our director and the toil of Avrom's wife Sara Lapickaja, a Yiddish philologist, who not only provided us with many of his personal belongings without hesitations, but also played a vital part in organizing the memorial room. We managed to stage the opening less than 5 month after the writer's death. It took place at the museum's facilities at the former Tarbut Gymnasium, Pylimo 4, where the memorial room can be visited.

Many friends of Avrom Karpinowicz and people who remember him very well were present, and shared reminiscences about Avrom with the auditorium. The museum's director Emmanuel Zingeris, the chairman of the Jewish Community of Lithuania, Dr. Simon Alperavičius and deputy director Rachel Kostanian, were holding speeches and extended their condolences to his wife Sara Lapitskaja. During the opening ceremony also a song dedicated to Avrom called "Avreml" was played and Mendy Cahan, director of the Vilna Yiddish Institute, who annually is leading the program of the Vilnius Yiddish Summer Course and Markas Zingeris, writer, recited from Avrom's works in Yiddish and Lithuanian.



Mendy Cahan, reciting from A. Karpinowicz's work. Sitting from the left: S. Alperavicius, E. Zingeris, S. Lapickaja, R. Kostanian.



Avrom Karpinowicz – a short biography

Avrom Karpinowicz was born on the 29th May 1918 in Vilna. He studied at the Vilna Realgymnasium, where Moyshe Kulbak and Max Erik were among his teachers. Upon the outbreak of WW II he escaped to the Russian Soviet Republic, returned back to Vilna in 1944 and then made his way to Belgium. In 1947, however, he was arrested by the British as an "illegal" immigrant to Palastine, and was interned in Cyprus until 1949. It was during this time that A. Karpinowicz started to write. In 1949 then, Avrom Karpinowicz reached Israel and continued his literary career. Karpinowicz earned himself respect and admiration especially for depicting strange characters, outcasts of society, possessing a keen eye for these heroes of his books. A. Karpinowicz, together with Chaim Grade, is considered the most accurate portrayer of Vilna's Jews. In his famous work "Baym Vilner durkhoyf", he uses the language of the Vilnius courtyards. In addition to his literary work he became administrator of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, was a frequent contributor to several Yiddish magazines and was honored with several literary prizes. Karpinowicz died on the 20th March 2004 in Tel-Aviv, which become a second home to him, always saying that he is torn between the cities of Tel-Aviv and his beloved Vilne.

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The new exhibition hall of the Tolerance Center

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...artist who left Vilnius in 1959 for Warsaw and then Paris (1969) but carried his hometown in his heart his entire life, was inaugurated. A number of guests were present at this event, among them the sister of Rafael Chwoles, Riva Maria, his two sons, Mila and Alexander and their family members, Prof. J. Budrys, director of the Lithuanian Art Museum, and V. Kavaliauskas, advisor of the prime minister. After the restoration of the theatre hall the building already offered space for permanent and temporary exhibitions, conferences, cultural and educational events. Now that the top floor of it has been restored, a completely new exhibition was compiled and will soon be opened to the general public.

The modern premises of the Tolerance Center give us for the first time the possibility to exhibit Jewish art and history at a large scale. Taking the stairs after the main entrance which head to the theatre hall, the visitors will enjoy the unique and never exhibited before pictures of synagogues in Lithuania by pre-war artist Gerardas Bogdanavičius. We extend our heartiest thanks to the Swartz family from California and the Austrian Embassy in Lithuania for making this possible. Heading to the main exhibition hall on the second floor the visitors will pass a long corridor in which 30 panels of our exhibition 'Jewish Life in Lithuania', comprehensively covering the history of the Lithuanian Jewry from its beginning to the present, are displayed, curated by Ruta Puišytė.

Entering the main exhibition hall on the top floor then, you already see most valuable artifacts: A door of an Aron ha-Kodesh, the Reader's desk and the Torah shield of the Great Synagogue of Vilnius. They are, as you can see on the picture above, presented before a huge grayscale image of the Great Synagogue. In the middle of this room in beautiful showcases traditional Jewish ritual objects are exhibited. However, most of the space is reserved for paintings of Jewish artists. The gallery starts with the pre-war works of artists from Kaunas, like Zale Bekeris, Maks Band, Mergashilski (art school in Kaunas). Adjacent to them paintings of artists from Vilnius, the initial ones dating from before the war (for example paintings created by Jakob Shur), followed by pictures made during the war by Samuel Bak and Esther Lurie, two ghetto survivors, and Rochl Sutzkever. In a separate hallway, works of great Jewish artists from Lithuania in the "Diaspora" are shown: works of Jacques Lipshitz, followed by Samuel Bak and the above mentioned collection of Rafael Chwoles' works. In the main hall paintings created during the last 10-20 years continue the chronology's development: Hadasah Skliutauskaitė, Dina Portnovaitė, Michail Pertzov, Saliamonas Teitelbaumas, Augustinas Savickas, Mina Babiauskienė, Bela Bindler, and Adomas and Alexandra Jacovskis. One wall displays unique colored wooden elements and dolls created by the Jewish folk artist Aaron Chait from Kelmė at the beginning of the 20th century. The composition is called the "Court of Salomon", and follows the biblical sujet.

'Wonderful', 'Fantastic' – so are the reactions of those who already had a chance to glance at the new exhibitions. Among the people who prepared the exhibition were Emmanuel Zingeris, chief curator, Juratė Razumienė and Alexandra Jacovskytė, exhibition design, Gajane Leonenko, management, and Roza Bieliaukienė, collection director.

Temporary and Traveling Exhibitions

Jewish Life in Lithuania – final report

The six-year long cooperation between the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and the Jewish Museum in Vilnius was marked in April 2004 by the completion of the educational project "Jewish Life in Lithuania" (for more details see Newsletter 5, 6 and 7).

The main target of the intensive preparation work (2001–2002) was firstly to produce a resource kit (traveling exhibition, an accompanying catalogue and video films) and then to make it available for the Lithuanian schools and public in general. The latter purpose was mainly reached through the major activities of the project: official



presentations and teacher training seminars. One of the project's advantages was its flexibility in finding various forms of teaching about Jewish-Lithuanian history, tolerance, Human Rights, intercultural understanding, etc. by means of concerts, friendship meetings of Lithuanian and Jewish pupils, video film presentations, lectures, work in groups, and discussions. Selecting a venue, the choice often fell on smaller, rather remote Lithuanian towns with a certain purpose to reach people there. In the period of 2002–2004 the project covered 17 venues, 7 of them were visited in the academic year of 2003–2004.

While evaluating the project Ruta Puišytė, its curator, said: "One of the important factors in making the seminar work fruitful was to gain a certain level of confidence by the trainers thus encouraging the seminar participants to rise hot and sometimes uncomfortable questions uncovering people's stereotypes, prejudices and fears. One of the positive results from the cooperation with the local partners in the Lithuanian towns (Raseiniai, Ziežmariai, Biržai...) was discovered soon after the first visits and became characteristic to the entire work. It happened that a local partner's attitude towards the project, at the beginning characterized by some hesitation and doubts concerning the meaning of the work, later turned to a positive surprise and the wish to cooperate in the future. This fact was accepted as a high evaluation of the project and the work of the people involved in its implementation."



Opening in Šilutė in April 2004. From left R. Miknys, History Institute of Lithuania, R. Puišytė, Jewish Museum. N. Hinterleitner. Anne Frank House.

Druskininkai

- On the 1st June at the museum's summer branch in Druskininkai 2 exhibitions were opened:
 - ⇒ The life and creations of Jacques Lipshitz.
 - ⇒ The life of Natan Katz's family, survivors of the Šiauliai ghetto.
- On the 8th August an exhibition about Joseph Schmidt, one of the greatest opera singers Vilna ever had, was opened.

Tolerance Center

- From 22nd September 2003 until 19th November the exhibition "I still see their faces" was displayed at the Tolerance Center. It is an exhibition comprised of photographs of Polish Jews.

News from the department of rescuers

With reference to the information accumulated in the department of rescuers and after complementary investigations 21 people who have rescued Jews during World War II have been recommended for the State Award "Cross for the saviors of the perishing" during this period. 19 rescuers have been honored with this award post mortem, two of the honored are still living.

On the 9th April 2004 a memorial plaque dedicated to Ona Šimaitė, employee of the Vilnius University Library, rescuer of Jews from the Vilna Ghetto hiding Jewish books and documents as well, Righteous among the Nations, has been unveiled in the Simonas Daukantas courtyard of the University of Vilnius. On this occasion an exhibition dedicated to the memory of Ona Šimaitė has been arranged in the museum's Gallery for the Righteous Gentiles.

The 3rd book in the series: "Hands bringing life and bread" has been prepared for printing and is expected to appear in September 2004. This publication continues to

tell the stories of those Lithuanians, who, regardless of the ferocious terror, saved those doomed to death. Apart from these, visible activities, the non-visible but nevertheless meticulous research work has been continued, contacts and correspondence with those rescued have been established and the archives have been complemented, in close cooperation with Yad Vashem and others.



President A. Palauskas and the rescuer V. Beinravičius



New publications

Bibliographical Index 1990 - 1991



At the museum's book presentation, the Jewish Community, September 2004.

The set of bibliographical directory books was prolonged this year. Following the first index covering the period of 1985 – 1989, this second index, covering the years 1990 and 1991 has appeared. In this index the reference to every article concerning Jewish issues (grouped by content), which has appeared during this period in the Lithuanian press, can be found, which makes it an especially valuable tool for research. Each reference consists of a short and precise summary of the articles' content



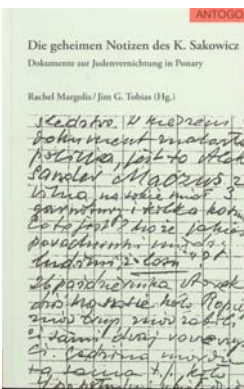
in English, Lithuanian and Russian. The book was compiled by I. Guzenberg and L. Šaraškina, consists of 225 pages and can be ordered for 15 \$ at our museum.

Shoa: Holocaust in Lithuania, Part II

This year the second part of “Shoa. Holocaust in Lithuania” appeared. It comprises more than 50 articles concentrating on four major topics: Lithuanian Jews in the battle against Nazism, the rescuers of Jews, thoughts on the ‘theory of two genocides’, and finally reprinted statements of public, cultural, academic and political figures about the Shoa in Lithuania. The idea to the book comes from our senior staff member Josifas Levinsonas, who is also the editor of both books. It has 343 pages, is written in Lithuanian and can be ordered at our museum for US \$12.



The secret notes of K. Sakowicz, Documents about the annihilation of Jews at Ponar



On the 11th of July 1941 the Polish journalist Kazimierz Sakowicz heard for the first time shots from the woodland directly adjoined to his house in Ponar. There, from the end of June 1941 until July 1944, approximately 100,000 people had been murdered, among them about 70,000 Jews from Vilnius and its surroundings as well as numerous Soviet prisoners of war and Polish people. Since then Sakowicz recorded all his observations – not only did he monitor from the attic how day after day lorries drove up with those doomed and how they've been beaten to the site of their executions, but moreover made enquiries with railway employees directing the trains to Ponar or with farmers, buying articles of clothing from Lithuanian perpetrators – on small slips of paper and calendar sheets, which he put in bottles and buried them in his garden. There they were discovered by local people and handed over to Jewish survivors in July 1944 after the liberation of Lithuania.

Following the liquidation of the Jewish Museum in 1949, they lay for decades in the Central Archives of Lithuania, marked with a stamp's imprint 'illegible'. Only thanks to the committed efforts of Dr. Rachel Margolis, who encountered these documents while working on the museum's first exhibition 'Catastrophe', this most important and at the same time horrendous testimonial of the Holocaust has been snatched away from oblivion. Rachel Margolis (Holocaust survivor and Jewish resistance fighter) deciphered the yellowed pages in troublesome detail work in 1988, so that they could be publicized in 1999 in the Polish original. Now, 4 years afterwards, the first complete and commented edition of the diary of K. Sakowicz in German is available. It had been sold out in one month. The translation into English is ready in Yad Vashem waiting for funding from the Yale University.



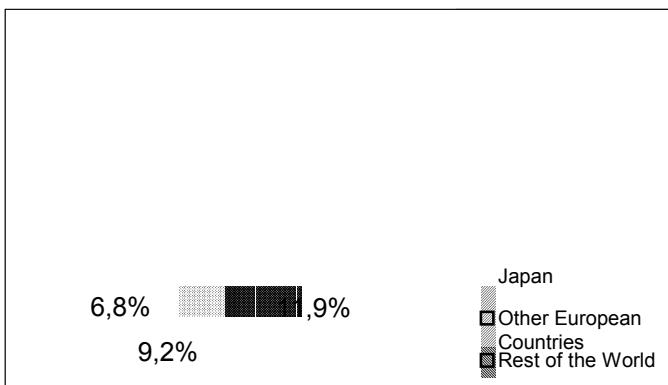
Award to Emmanuel Zingeris

This year Emmanuel Zingeris, the director of the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, was awarded the German “Verdienstkreuz erster Klasse” for his contribution to the improvement of international understanding between peoples and the preservation of Jewish heritage.

Visitors' statistics

During 2003 more than 12,500 visitors came to our museum!

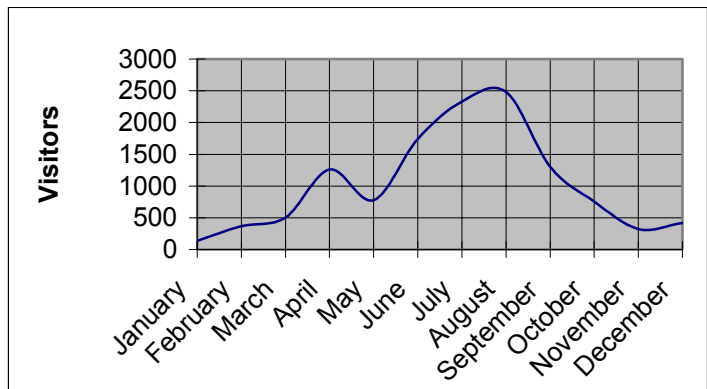
In this year's newsletter we wanted to make you familiar with the results of the visitors' statistics, as we consider them interesting not only for internal purposes of the museum. They are based on the entries made by our staff in the three branches of our Museum: The Holocaust Museum (Green House), the exhibitions located in Pylimo 4 and the branch of our Museum in Ponar. Visitors to the Tolerance Center are not taken into account, as it was being renovated throughout most of the year 2003.



In total more than 12,500 people from 44 different countries from all five continents have visited our museum in 2003! The visitors to our museum come from various backgrounds. As tourists account for the most part, we are frequently visited by historians, politicians or other public figures, students and pupils from Lithuania, people searching for their roots or seeking for advice or specific information. Investigating the distribution of our visitors according to their home countries we find that two thirds of our visitors are from just five countries: the USA, Germany, Lithuania, Israel and the UK. The

unequivocal highest percentage of our guests comes from the United States, Germany coming in second. Visitors of Lithuania itself, mostly pupils and students amount to just 12 %. We also had visitors from such far away countries as New Zealand, Indonesia or Uruguay.

If we look at the allocation of the total amount of visitors over the year, you see that the number of guests in the tourist season is much higher than in all other months. Whereas in the winter months visitation to our museum is quite low, it rapidly increases in June and then reaches a peak in August. The current statistics for the on-going year 2004 already show a sharp rise of the number of guests to our museum. The Jewish Museum will continue trying to attract more visitors, so that more and more people can learn about the history and culture of Lithuanian Jewry. We are confident that we can absorb a large part of the in general increasing influx of visitors to Lithuania after it's joining the European Union.



Yiddish Course

For the 7th time the Yiddish Course took place in Vilnius in August 2004. 80 participants from all over the world followed the offer of the Yiddish Institute in Vilne to learn or improve their Yiddish language skills. Like every year, the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum was involved in the program. Our vice-director Rachel Kostanian, Dr. Rachel Margolis, and Roza Bielauskienė, head of the museum's collection e.g., held lectures and made guided tours through Jewish Vilne, the former ghetto, and to Ponar. The Museum's Tolerance Center hosted several cultural events, for example a musical evening featuring Maria Krupowecz performing songs of the Vilna Ghetto, accompanied by a string quartet from the Vilnius Drama Theatre.



Commemorating the escape from Ponar

On the 15th April 2004 the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum organized a commemorative event on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the escape of the ghetto prisoners, who had been forced to burn the corpses at Ponar. The event was attended by employees of the Museum, members of the Jewish Community of Lithuania, members of the local administration, pupils from the Jewish school, students and lecturers of the agricultural college. Speeches were given by S. Alperavičius, S. Lėšvaitis, professor of history, F. Brancovska, ex-ghetto inmate and member of the Partisan Organization, and R. Bieliauskienė and R. Kostanian representing our Museum. Pupils of the Jewish school read fragments from the works of I. Erenburg and V. Gorsman. In spring 2004, the head of the museum's branch in Ponar, A. Karosas, while putting in order the pit where the 80 imprisoned people, who had to burn the corpses, lived, discovered a tunnel. This was built by the imprisoned starting from behind a small kitchen in the bunker they lived in, and was 30 meters long, being 60 x 70 in the cross section. They had to bring out in their pockets 24 cubic meters of sand. They spent three months on building the tunnel. Finally, on the 15th April 1944, about 40 of them went through. About twelve of them survived, the others were executed. For maintenance of the tunnel funds are needed immediately, otherwise everything collapses.



Conferences – Seminars –

Employees of our museum have continued to write articles for newspapers and magazines, attend seminars, give lectures: Genrich Agranovskij, Roza Bieliauskine, Dalija Epšteinaitė, Rachel Kostanian, Ona Biveinienė, Irina Guzenberg, and Viktorija Sakaite wrote articles on various topics touching the history and culture of Lithuanian Jewry.

Employees of our Museum were also well actively participating in conferences around the world. E.g., Rachel Kostanian participated at the International Task Force Conference in Rome (June 2003), and at the Conference of the Association of European Jewish Museums in Berlin (2003), discussing there various projects connected to Holocaust education. Ruta Puišytė took part in seminars and workshops on Holocaust education in Berlin, Sedlčany (Czechia) and Vilnius.

Lectures too were frequently given by employees of our museum: Neringa Latvyte-Gustatienė for instance took part in the International Judaica Conference organized by “Sefer” in Moscow, and presented her paper titled: “The peculiarities of the Holocaust in the Lithuanian province: Trakai region” there. R. Kostanian lectured about the Jewish Community in the Interwar Period at the Potsdam University. Several academic lectures at this year's 2nd World Litvak Congress (23rd–30th August 2004), were given by employees of our museum: Aistė Niunkaitė – on a unique woodcut artistic collection, Genrich Agranovski – on the known Strashun family, and Dalija Epšteinaitė – on a famous Jewish biologist Jankel Movshowitz.

- Blake Singer, an artist from the USA gave a concert at the 10th June 2004.
- On the 27th June 2004 - a meeting with the members of the Israeli Vilna Jews Association.
- On the 9th November - an evening “Vilnius – Jerusalem of the North” dedicated to the culture of the Litvaks, attended by members of the International Business Club.
- On the 25th January the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum in cooperation with the Italian Cultural Institute arranged an evening of remembrance of the Holocaust. As part of the program the films: Life is beautiful (R. Bengini, Italy) and “Crime against neighbors” (S. Biržinis, Lithuania) were shown.
- On the 20th February - a Jazz and Poetry evening. Flemish and Lithuanian poets, among them Sigitas Geda, Gintaras Grajauskas, Dirk van Bastelaere, Miriam van Hee and Gert van Istendael met.
- On the 23rd September 2003 the Cultural Ministry and the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum organized a commemorative evening. On this day we mourned the 60th anniversary of the



liquidation of the Vilna ghetto. The former President of Lithuania, Rolandas Paksas, and representatives of government, embassies, the Jewish Community and our museum took part in the ceremony, and gave speeches. The program included the unveiling of the sculpture of Jacques Lipshitz, which had been donated to the Tolerance Center by the Regina Resnik Blatas and Beate Klarsfeld Foundation and a concert. Around this very significant date for our small community, also other activities of mourning took place, in which the Museum participated. During the scientific conference Roza Bieliauskienė and Arkadij Bliumin, head of the history department held lectures.



Visitors



Mr. Rivlin, Speaker of the Knesset

How does one ever comprehend the enormity of what the Jews, Lithuania, the world and humanity lost in this awful period? Thanks to the museum for helping to keep the story alive – ensuring that it is told for generations to come. Will humanity ever learn? This precious little jewel will help;
Elaine Smaltes, Australia, 17.06.04

This year we could welcome more than 12,500 visitors from all over the world. Among our visitors are ordinary tourists as well as historians, people searching for their roots, school pupils, students, politicians or public figures, etc. We offer our visitors to write down their impressions in our guest book. Here is a selection of their comments:

The Green House is a vital element of Vilnius and must remain even as the city around it changes; *Hope and Hans Stege, USA, 25.08.04*

This has been a most enlightening and shattering experience, which I will never forget. You have done a wonderful thing for Jewry, by keeping this history alive for all. Thank you!; *Shirley and Jarnoca Jacobson, Australia, 18.08.04*

This is a spellbinding exhibition that we will publicise in the way it deserves. With best wishes, *Jonathan Joseph, President of the European Council of Jewish Communities, 30.08.04*

We would like to thank all our last years' sponsors without whose generous donations, we wouldn't have been able to fulfill our tasks:

Claims Conference, Pinner & Northwood, Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, Boris Rositsan, UBS Zürich, Gladys B. Mayers, Chorin Rosental, Cecil & Ruth Sigal, Leona Z. Rosenberg, Gene H. Le Pere, American Foundation, Ester Margol, Ray Shapero, American Fund for Lithuanian – Latvian Jews Inc., David Goa, Roger Simon, Howard Erdman, Rory MacFarquhar, Daniel Shmukler, M. Notelovitz, Gordon Schochet, Nicholas Lane, Glenda Fawbert, Helga Tröscher (Evangelische Kirche), Carl F. Boran, Harald Grobstein, Harry S. Margolis, Eric & Hedy Page, Solon Beinfeld, Ella Karabanov, Emanuel Rosenthal, M. Daniels, Graeme Levin, Jack Kobak, E. Kremer, Jane Spector Davis, Michael Bart, Laurel Corons, M. Greenberg, Susan & Ronald Diner, Dora Blum, Leonard Stock, Mr. Pogos, Beba Leventhal.

We also deeply appreciate our friends who helped us by sending us books:

Rena Kohn, T. Butkauskas, Jewish Museum Berlin, Howard Erdman, Association of Lithuanian Jews, Aleks Faitelson, Holocaust Resource Center & Archives Queenbrough, G. Smoliakov, Jim G. Tobias, Yad Vashem, Hana Borochowitz-Golany, University Wroclawski, Baltos Lankos, Sandra Bark, Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, Corine Farber, R. Šikšmėnė, Audronė Vaintraubas, Oxford University Press, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Stiftung Topographie des Terrors, Moshe David Khayat, M. Landau, Gene H. Le Pere, Lietuvos tūkstantmečio leidinys, Edita Werner, Judith Goldstein, Roza Riaikkenen, El. Zilber, Hirsch Smoliakov, Sara Ginaitė, The Jewish Museums of New York, Greece, Barcelona, Prague, and Serone.