

Jewish Community of Latvia



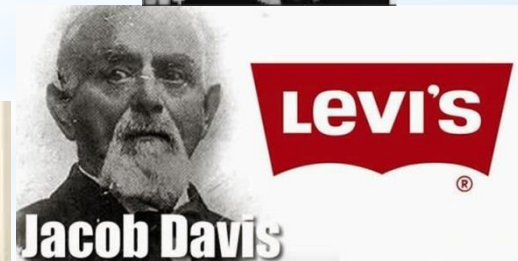
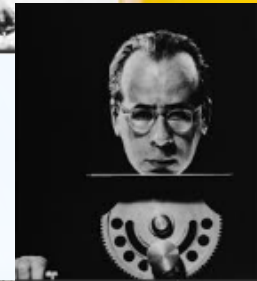
A bit of history

- Jewish life started in what is now Latvia in 16th century
- Before 1st World War – 180 000 Jews
- Before 2nd World War – 93 000 Jews
- 73 000 Latvian Jews perished in the Holocaust
- 400 survived under Nazi occupation
- Today the Jewish community of Latvia is 12,000 – 15,000 strong



Famous Jews from Latvia

- Painter Mark Rothko
- Rabbi Avraham Isaak Kuk
- Photographer Philippe Halsman
- Inventor and businessman Jacob Davis
- Philosopher Isaiah Berlin
- Engineer Leon S. Moisseiff



Jewish community of Latvia today

- The biggest Jewish community in the Baltic States
- The 2nd biggest community in North-East of Europe
- 34 Jewish communities and organizations in 9 cities (Riga, Liepaja, Ventspils, Jelgava, Daugavpils, Rezekne, Ludza, Jekabpils and Jurmala)
- 10, 000 members actively participating in the community life
- In 2003 the newly elected head of Riga Jewish community Arkady Suharenko united more than 30 Jewish organizations under the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia and became the chairman of the Council
- The Board of Trustees was set up (now 60 strong) to lead Jewish life in Latvia

ACHIEVEMENTS OF COUNCIL OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF LATVIA 2003-2016

Commemoration of the Holocaust

- There are more than 200 mass murder sites in Latvia
- Since 2004 the Council has located and marked more than 60 previously unknown mass graves all over Latvia
- Setting of monuments is still in progress

Largest Memorials

- Rumbula forest in Riga – 25 000 Jews killed
- Bikernieki forest in Riga – 20 000 Jews killed
- Skede by Liepāja – 2 750 Jews killed



Monument to saviors of Jews during the Holocaust in Latvia

- Unveiled in 2007
- It is the first such monument to saviors in Europe
- Names of 270 Latvian residents etched on stone columns to commemorate those who risked their lives to save 400 Jews



Jewish Education in Latvia

- Shimon Dubnov Jewish secondary school, 1st Jewish school in the former USSR, was opened in Riga in 1989
- For many years the school didn't have appropriate premises and was housed in two separate buildings
- As a result of successful negotiation with the Riga City council the Riga Jewish school received a new building in 2010 and after a capital repair now attended by 257 pupils
- A new Jewish kindergarten “Motek” housed in the same building welcomed kids in 2013



Riga Synagogue Peitav-Shul renovated in 2009

- During the Holocaust it escaped the tragic fate of other Riga synagogues
- It was one of very few active synagogues in the USSR
- Synagogue was not renovated since its construction in 1905
- The synagogue underwent major restoration supervised by the Jewish Council in 2009



Welfare Center "Hesed"

- It cares for more than 1,800 elderly people (around 900 Holocaust survivors among them)
- More than 200 families in need with more than 370 kids
- More than 50 people (kids and adults) with disabilities
- More than 28 single parents
- All these activities are supported by our partners JDC, Claims Conference and Baltic Jewish Forum



Jewish community center in partnership with JDC

Provides activities for community members of all ages:

- Programs for preschoolers, kids and teenagers
- Programs for students, youth and young families
- Networking for young professionals and Social Entrepreneurship Accelerator
- Programs for the middle-aged
- Safe & Jewish - useful skills and knowledge
- Camps, seminars, festivals, educational programs
- Programs for strengthening Jewish identity, Shabatons, Jewish holidays



Museum "Jews in Latvia"

- Founded in 1989 by the Holocaust survivor historian Margers Vestermanis who currently is the curator of the museum
- The mission of the museum is to preserve the rich cultural heritage of Latvian Jewish community from its origins in the 16th century to the present day
- Museum organizes lectures, seminars, conferences, symposia for general public as well as workshops for local history teachers



Restitution

- Of the total of 320 Jewish religious and communal properties in 1940 only 35 have been restituted under the 1993 law
- A comprehensive law on restitution and reimbursement failed to be adopted by the Saeima (Latvian Parliament) in 2006
- After a long struggle 5 properties were restituted in February 2016
- Long neglected by the owners they all need substantial investments to be restored and renovated
- And from day one they all require maintenance and payment of taxes



Objectives for 2016 - 2020

- Continue the restitution of Jewish religious and communal property
- Restore and renovate the restituted property
- Strengthen the Jewish school and kindergarten
- Continue with Holocaust memorial sites
- Relocate the “Jews in Latvia” museum to a new building that has to be restored
- Collaborate with other Jewish communities around the world and support Israel
- Strengthen Jewish identity and facilitate participation of all Jews in the Jewish community life

Thank you for your attention!

