

Zekelman Holocaust Center Opens New Exhibit

By JN Staff - 01/19/2022 8:00 PM



Mikhal Kovner, a member of the Paper Brigade, sorts documents at YIVO. (Courtesy of Moreshet Archive, Anielevich Memorial Holocaust Study and Research Center)

“The Book Smugglers: Partisans, Poets, and the Race to Save Jewish Treasures from the Nazis” is on display now through May 31, 2022.

Would you risk your life to save a book? That is the underlying question of “The Book Smugglers: Partisans, Poets, and the Race to Save Jewish Treasures from the Nazis” on view at the newly renamed Zekelman Holocaust Center (HC) now through May 31, 2022. The exhibition was curated by Holocaust Museum Houston and based on the book of the same name by Dr. David E. Fishman.

“The Book Smugglers” is the nearly unbelievable true story of ghetto residents who rescued thousands of rare books and manuscripts by hiding them on their persons, burying them in bunkers and smuggling them across borders. Set in Vilna, Lithuania — also known as the “Jerusalem of Lithuania” for its robust Jewish culture rich with art, music, literature,

poetry, theater and opera — a small group of partisans and poets risked everything to save Jewish cultural treasures.



Dr. David E. Fishman

Prior to WWII, literature and art enabled Vilna residents to rise above their everyday persecution and enjoy a world of beauty in sound and color. Cultural activity compensated for the Jews' difficult political and economic situation. Once Vilna's Jews were forced to live in a ghetto, the "Paper Brigade" was formed by a group of 40 intellectuals, writers, educators and activists to save Judaica for the next generation.

Together, they rescued Jewish artifacts, books, scrolls, photographs, works of art, diaries and literature from the hands of the Nazis by either smuggling them into the ghetto or hiding them in plain sight.

"This is truly an incredible tale of heroism, resistance and friendship and of unwavering devotion — including the readiness to risk one's life to save literature and art," said Rabbi Eli Mayerfeld, CEO of the Zekelman Holocaust Center.

"Dr. Fishman thoroughly researched this astonishing account by reviewing Jewish, German and Soviet documents, including diaries, letters, memoirs, and by interviewing several of the story's participants."

The exhibition consists of approximately 100 artifacts and reproductions on display, including panels with paintings and drawings, photographs, poetry, diaries, testimonies and music representing the Jewish heritage of Vilna. Featuring themes of resistance and persistence of cultural identity, the exhibition focuses on the complicated history of Vilna, life before

WWII, contributions of five members of the Paper Brigade and the results of their heroic mission.

Details

In honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day on Jan. 27, Dr. David E. Fishman will discuss the incredible story of his book and the exhibit. This program will be presented virtually at 7 p.m. To register to attend the virtual lecture via Zoom, visit tinyurl.com/mtynzzj8.

To order a copy of Fishman's book, visit <https://tinyurl.com/yckwyz2c>.

Additionally, on Jan. 27, the HC will feature a second-generation Holocaust survivor speaking at noon. Space is limited and reservations are required. At 1 p.m. there will be a docent-led public tour of the museum. Reservations are required. For more information, visit www.holocaustcenter.org or call (248) 553-2400.

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