



From the Streets of the Ghetto to the World Wide Web

◀ Yad Vashem's Photographic Collection Uploaded to the Internet

by Dr. Daniel Uziel

“ Mendel pulls out his camera. No more flowers, clouds, nature, stills, landscapes. Amid the horror all around him, he has found his destiny: to photograph, and leave behind a testimony for all generations about the great tragedy unfolding before his eyes.”

This is how Arieh Ben Menahem describes the work of Lodz ghetto photographer Mendel Grossman in his book, *With a Camera in the Ghetto* (Hebrew). Ben Menahem was himself a photographer who worked as Grossman's assistant during the war. Grossman died in April 1944 in a German labor camp, but Ben Menahem survived the Holocaust and, thanks to him, hundreds of photographs the two men took in the ghetto made their way to Yad Vashem. In May 2008, Yad Vashem will upload a significant portion of its collection of historic photographs to the Internet, including those taken by Grossman and Ben Menahem.

Yad Vashem's photographic collection began with the gathering of individual and group photographs immediately after WWII. When the Yad Vashem archives opened in 1955, these collections were incorporated within. In 1983, a separate Photographic Department was established, with the purpose of collating, cataloging and researching historic photographs relating to the

Holocaust. These photographs represent an invaluable asset to historians, educators, writers, filmmakers and the public at large.

The photographic collection covers the entire range of fields relating to the lives of the Jews before, during and after the Holocaust, as well as Holocaust remembrance around the world. The photographs come from a variety of sources, including official archives, private collections, museums and various historic collections.

By uploading the photographic database, some 130,000 historic photographs will be made available to the public. (Thousands more cannot be included because of legal constraints, such as the right to privacy and copyright infringement.) Internet surfers will be able to conduct complex searches of the database by topic, name or geographical location. High quality scans of the photographs displayed on the site may be ordered, for a fee, via a link on the site.

The challenge of uploading such a large collection of photographs to the Internet was enormous. The weighty database was designed using special technology to provide a reasonable surfing speed, as well as a search engine that allows for complex searches. In addition, a user-friendly interface will allow surfers to navigate their way with ease. Every photograph in the database will

▶▶ By uploading the photographic database, some 130,000 historic photographs will be made available to the public.

When a photograph is selected for viewing, a Google map will automatically open showing the location of the places mentioned in the caption. ◀◀



The expulsion of the Jews of Hollerich, Luxembourg by local police, September 1942.



Children and their nursery school teachers in the Displaced Persons Camp in Vienna, Austria, 1947.

*Guenter Marcusa standing in front of the
Zionist training farm in Gros Breesen, Germany.
Marcusa kept a diary about the period he spent
at the farm (October 1942-February 1943),
until his deportation to Auschwitz.*



also be linked to existing information about its content and, when a photograph is selected for viewing, a Google map will automatically open showing the location of the places mentioned in the caption. Further links will enable expanded searches. Yad Vashem plans eventually to integrate the photographic collection with its other online databases, as well as those to be uploaded in the future.

“Over the last few years, Yad Vashem has invested significantly in the computerization of its various collections,” explains Dr. Haim Gertner, Director of the Archives. “This will allow the public at large direct and simple access to the vast collection of resources collected by Yad Vashem over the past half century. We are hoping that it will increase public awareness of the archives’ tremendous importance, and encourage people who have similar photographs and documents to confer them to Yad Vashem for safekeeping. Likewise, we are hoping that the public will join us in our ongoing efforts to decipher the pictures and identify the people in them, thus fulfilling the last wish of the Holocaust victims, including the Lodz ghetto photographer Mendel Grossman.”

The uploading of Yad Vashem’s Photographic Collection was supported by the Adelson Family Charitable Foundation and Nancy and Sam Shamie and Family (USA).

The author is Director of the Photographic Department in the Yad Vashem Archives.

