

Preserving the Memories

by Efrat Komisar

■ The Yad Vashem Archives Division is responsible for the preservation of millions of documents from the period of WWII, including hundreds of personal diaries written during the Holocaust. One such diary was penned by Rabbi Uri Feivish Tauber, from 1941 to 1944, in Mogilev-Podolski. Born in 1911 in Cerepcauti, Romania, the rabbi was deported to Mogilev in October 1941, and stayed there until the city was liberated by the Red Army. The diary was recently presented to Yad Vashem by his widow Ruth Tauber, in the hope that it would be preserved for eternity.

soon became a center for Jews deported from Bessarabia and Bukovina, and was one of the five points of entry to Transnistria, the area in western Ukraine that Hitler ceded to Romania in return for its participation in the war against the Soviet Union. Tens of thousands of Jews passed through the city, but only about 12,000-15,000 of the deportees managed to remain, joining some 3,700 local Jews.

In July 1942, a ghetto was established in the city, surrounded by a wall and a barbed-wire fence. Living conditions were harsh, with overcrowding, hunger and poverty.

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Ruth Tauber

which opened in April 1942 and by August housed some 450 orphans. Rabbi Tauber was part of the orphanage staff, teaching Hebrew and Bible until 1944, when the orphanage was



■ *The diary of Rabbi Uri Feivish Tauber*

The crumbling diary was first handed to the Archives for restoration and preservation. Some of its pages had been damaged by acidity, were disintegrating, and were covered with adhesive tape, whose chemical components had caused further damage. The Preservation Laboratory team worked hard to save the pages (see box), and its complete restoration will now ensure the diary's accessibility to the general public.

Mogilev, a city on the Dniester River in the province of Vinnitsa in Ukraine, was conquered by the Germans on 19 July 1941. It

A typhoid epidemic caused many deaths within just a few months. The Jewish leadership established a central Jewish committee for the entire province, which created various welfare institutions, including three orphanages. The children's living conditions were extremely difficult: they existed in a wretched state, hungry and ill. Only after several months did their physical condition improve, allowing the directors of the orphanages to devote more time to their education. Rabbi Tauber joined in this educational activity at Orphanage No. 1,

closed, and the children sent to *Eretz Israel*. In a notebook given to him as a souvenir, the children wrote that he had been a "good father" to them. One woman, who had been a child in the orphanage, later related that the rabbi had given them hope that they would go to *Eretz Israel* after the war.

Rabbi Tauber began to write his diary—in German with Hebrew lettering—in October 1941. Inside, he tells of the daily hardships in the ghetto, stories he heard from various people, and events that occurred there: Jews

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in hiding; a child who saved his mother's life; the death of 15-year-old Poldi Lazarovitch, a member of the orphanage's journal "editorial board;" the bitter cold and the shortage of salt; a celebration on the first night of Hanukkah; and much more.

This personal document sheds light on the life of Jews in the Mogilev ghetto, as seen through the eyes of its author—a beloved teacher dedicated to his pupils. Its preservation will enable the public to enrich their knowledge of the events in Mogilev, and thus gain a more complete picture of Jewish life in this area during the war.

"I knew that if I kept the diary, it would disintegrate," Ruth Tauber explained. "The pages had begun to crumble and I didn't have the facilities to preserve it. I didn't want it to be lost forever. At Yad Vashem it is much safer than in my own home." In addition, she said, "In my house, in a drawer, nobody would see it, but at Yad Vashem others can read it and learn about everything that happened. That way, the diary will be a reminder for all time."

The author works in the Archives Division.



■ Rabbi Uri Feivish Tauber (top row, second from right, wearing a fur hat), in the orphanage in the Mogilev ghetto

The Yad Vashem Preservation Laboratory Interview with Laboratory Director Varda Gross

When was Yad Vashem's Preservation Laboratory set up and why?

The Preservation and Restoration Laboratory at Yad Vashem was set up in 1979 to address the preservation and restoration needs of the Museums' and Archives' Divisions, as well as to oversee the conditions of all artifacts and documents kept in our storage rooms.

Over time, with the redevelopment of Yad Vashem and its transformation into a world center of Holocaust commemoration and education, the Laboratory's prominence also rose due to its vital role in preserving original materials from the Holocaust and advising professionals worldwide on preserving and restoring all sorts of historically important items.

What special conditions does the Laboratory need?

The Laboratory, established through the generosity of the Danek and Jadzia Gertner Trust, is a separate unit located in the Archives building. It is divided into three sections: the chemical and wet treatment section; the dry and repair section; and the digital photography section. Each section was built in accordance with international regulations for preservation: controlled temperatures and humidity levels; northern daylight that enters via windows protected with ultraviolet filters; specialized

desk lamps containing magnifying glasses; large desks to work with oversized materials; and custom-built storage cabinets for chemicals and professional preservation equipment.

What kind of materials do you receive and how do you go about preserving it?

The materials brought to the Laboratory are always originals. They include documents, diaries, books, posters, maps, photographs, albums and drawings. The first step is to open a work sheet, where we document the item's condition at the time of receipt, as well as every stage in the course of its treatment. We also take digital photos at each significant stage of treatment, providing visual documentation of the whole process.

The material in the Laboratory is treated in several stages, depending on its condition: first we identify the physical and/or biological damage, such as mold, bacteria or glue stains, and then administer chemical treatment. Physical damage is repaired using special paper and glue, and necessary reinforcement carried out where the material has been cracked, torn or has any missing parts. Finally, we create proper housing for the treated originals. The whole process varies in length depending on the condition of the material: obviously, the worse condition the item is in, the longer the treatment will take.

After the process is complete, the material is returned to the storage rooms to be preserved for eternity.

What are the Laboratory's plans for the future?

In the coming years, we hope to continue rescuing original material that is in a state of deterioration, thus contributing to the preservation of Holocaust remembrance and minimizing Holocaust denial. In addition, we plan to establish a network of scientists in the field of preservation, to aid us in our research (for example, to identify the types of ink used during the war), and to help us enhance our treatment and preservation techniques in the future.

