

Der Bay

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The Yiddish Club Phenomenon: An Editorial

The Yiddish club, as we know it today, is a relatively new type of organization. There have been Yiddish groups before of intellectuals like di Yunge or fraternal groups like Der Arbeter Ring. However, organizations of laymen, specifically meeting to enjoy Yiddish—that is another matter. Yes, the premiere Los Angeles Yiddish Culture Club has been in existence for well over 70 years.

There was not a need for Yiddish clubs when everyone around you spoke Yiddish. In America we have no need for English clubs when almost everyone around us speaks some English.

Der Bay's database lists over 250 Yiddish clubs in the United States. There are probably close to double that number in the U.S. alone. All of the non-listed ones are small groups meeting in homes or temples. The exception would be seasonal areas like southeast Florida. Most of them go from Thanksgiving to Peysakh, or start after January 1. The Circle of Yiddish Clubs has somewhat of a handle on this group.

There are other wonderful clubs around the world especially in Israel, Australia, England, Spain, Uruguay, etc. Canada (Friends of Yiddish in Toronto), Winnipeg, Vancouver and Montreal but this editorial is meant to discuss only the U.S. Phenomenon.

Why is this so important? Why for the first time is the front page of *Der Bay* being used for an editorial. The column to the right sets out the rationale for the world-wide Yiddish club growth and the role of the IAYC.

The International Association of Yiddish Clubs (IAYC) was founded in order to have a forum where groups of Yiddish lovers could meet and share ideas, experiences and learn. It has been far more successful than any of the original founders could have ever dreamed.

The founding tates un mames realized that cooperation is the basis of success. Thus, from the beginning IAYC has echoed the theme that clubs must reach out to all other groups that foster Yiddish and support their efforts. Every club should have at least one member belong to the major organizations that foster Yiddish and report on articles in their publications.

In line with this The Ninth IAYC Conference will be held from Thurs., June 2nd to Sun., June 5th, 2005 in beautiful Minneapolis, Minnesota only a several hour drive from Lake Itaska the headwaters of the Mighty Mississippi River.

The Minneapolis Yiddish Vinkl co-chair, Roz Baker is coordinating the conference. Her committee is one of the finest that anyone has put together. This should result in another dynamic and vibrant event that will run as smoothly as the Mississippi itself.

Roz can be reached at: 612-377-5456 or the Publicity chair, Annalee Odessky at: annalee26@aol.com or 952-544-5423.

Greater Milwaukee/Chicago area people can travel by chartered Greyhound bus roundtrip for only \$100. Call Paul Melrood at: 414-961-1715 or e-mail majpaulww2@sbcglobal.net

The Kadimah & Yiddish Melbourne, Australia in the 20th Century

Alex Dafner - President *Kadimah* adafner@primus.com.au

The history of the *Kadimah* reflects much of the story of 20th century Jewish migration and settlement in Australia. Its fortunes wax and wane with the influx and decline of immigration in general and Jewish immigration to Melbourne in particular.

Over all it is a proud history of exemplary service and self-sufficiency, and a pioneering example of cultural autonomy, within an increasingly dependent multi-ethnic, multicultural society.

Above all, the *Kadimah* fulfilled the vital cultural, linguistic, intellectual and social needs of that, dislocated Jewish community. Sometimes it served as a platform for the expressions of struggle, much of it transplanted and reflecting the turbulent and tragic Jewish experience in 20th century Europe.

Founding of Kadimah

Kadimah, the Jewish National Library was founded in 1911 and first was located near the Victorian Parliament in central Melbourne. The founders were mainly newly arrived immigrants, Jews from Eastern Europe and Russia. The fact that the inaugural *Kadimah* Committee led by President Yehushe Rochlin, chose to launch this secular, cultural initiative *davke* on Boxing Day and near the bastion of Melbourne's establishment, illustrates their deference to the *arumike svive*. This was 60 years prior to the launch of *Multiculturalism* as a national social policy.

The 5,500 Jews of predominantly Anglo-Germanic background who lived in Melbourne at that time hardly welcomed their new brethren. Most of these *Veltleke folks Yidn*/ secular folk-Jews escaped the failed revolution of 1905. Like all *Grine* they embarrassed the previously settled and more established *Melburnians of Hebraic Persuasion*.

Right from the start of the founding of the *Kadimah* the factions wrangled over languages and the character of the new institution. English and Hebrew were at first the preferred languages of the majority, and Yiddish was looked down upon by many. So it was not surprising that the Hebrew name *Kadimah* (Forward/Progress) was chosen.

Just prior to WWI as the membership rose to over 200, the *Kadimah* decided to move to larger quarters. In 1915 it was relocated at 38 Drummond Street Carlton, where the cheap rents were attracting the new migrants. At the end of *the War to end all Wars* came a lull which saw *Kadimah's* activities almost

cease completely. Then in 1919, an ensuing struggle between the leftist supporters of the 1917 Russian Revolution and Zionist supporters of the 1917 Belfour Declaration on Palestine, led to significant defections and forced a merger with the pro-Zionist *Hatchia* organisation.

When one of the shining lights of the East European Yiddish literary renaissance, **Perets Hirshbayn** arrived for a series of lectures in 1921, he was welcomed like a movie star and proved to be a harbinger of a new, dynamic, Yiddish dominated era. In 1926 the *Kadimah* broke away from *Hatchia*, again forming an independent organisation.

Kadimah Moves and Expands

By 1933, as Hitler came to power in Germany, the *Kadimah* blossomed into a fully-fledged cultural centre and built larger premises in Lygon Street, Carlton. The new building had a 400-seat theatre and library. It was renamed the *Jewish Cultural Centre and National Library Kadimah*. Its activities included lectures, recitals, concerts, debates, plays and dance evenings. A youth committee coordinated activities aimed at the growing number of younger members.

With the arrival of such Yiddish luminaries as the writer-poet **Melekh Ravich** and pedagogue **Josef Giligich**, the *Kadimah* published its first Yiddish book in Australia—*Der Oystralisher Almanach / The Australian Almanac*.

In 1938, a year later, the pioneer Yiddish writer **Pinkhas Goldhar** published his excellent *Dertzaylungen fun Oystralye/Stories from Australia* and the Yiddish weekly *Di Yiddishe Naves* began circulation under his editorship in 1939.

World War II

As news of the disaster in Europe reached Australia, the Melbourne Jewish community rallied, beginning with a *Kadimah* initiated protest against *Nuremburg Racial Laws*. The *Kadimah* continued its cultural activities, rallies, protests and solidarity meetings. The appeals, fund raising and attempts to speed up the immigration process became the prime concern during and immediately following the war years.

The war in Europe ravaged Jewish life everywhere, but local ideological battles continued. A spat over a 1944 *Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies* resolution supporting the declaration of a Jewish State in Palestine, nearly split the *Kadimah*.

Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration

Kadimah held the 1st Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration on April 19, 1945. With the new policy in 1948, the post war trickle of Jewish refugees to Australia turned into a stream of newcomers. Many were Holocaust survivors and refugees from the Soviet Union labour camps, making Melbourne the home of the highest number of such survivors per capita, after Israel.

Kadimah became the focal point of the cultural and intellectual life of the post-war Jewish community, centered in the Melbourne suburbs of Carlton and Brunswick. By 1950 there were 1000 members. Then a schism occurred. The leftist youth section was at odds with the *Kadimah* Committee. While the leftist *Bundist-SKIF* and centrist *Zionist-Habonim* youths still met at *Kadimah*. The 1953 protest rallies against the Soviet Union's persecution of Jews and the Doctors' Plot and Slonsky Show Trials, again galvanised the community around the *Kadimah*.

Theatrical Productions

The few surviving prominent actors and artists, such as **Yakov Weislitz** and **Rokhl Holtzer**, built on an earlier local Yiddish theatre tradition. They established a new ensemble and later renamed it the *Dovid Herman Teater by der Kadimah* after the famous director of the *Vilno Troupe*. By 1953 they were staging 5 separate productions a year and the *Kadimah* membership reached 1300. Melbourne's reputation as a new centre of Jewish and Yiddish life spread around the world.

From the early 1950's on well known performers, directors and lecturers, visited the *Kadimah*, as flying became a regular and affordable means of travel. They included: **Avrom Sutzkever**, **Shimon Dzigan**, **Sidor Belarski**, **Ida Kaminska**, **Prof Eliezer Naks**, **Dinah Halpern**, **Prof Klepfish**, **Shmuel Rudensky**, **Shmuel Atzmon**, **Nekhama Lifshitz**, **Michael Alpert**, **Prof Dov Noy**, **Prof Gershon Winer**, **Prof Avrom Novershtern**, **Prof Eugene Orenstein**, **Adam Gruzman** and more.

These luminaries packed the *Kadimah* auditorium. Many published their work in the *Kadimah's* literary journal *Di Melburne Blette/The Melbourne Chronicle*. The Yiddish section, like the current issue, has been under the editorship of writer-broadcaster **Moishe Ajzenbud**, and the English section has been edited by **Ron Abel**, **Serge Liberman**, **Arnold Zable**, **Yvonne Fein** and **Zoi Jufris**.

In the late 1950's and early '60's, as the Jewish migrant community became more prosperous, it shifted from inner city Carlton to the more middle class suburbs of Melbourne: First southwards to St

Kilda and Elwood, then southeast to Caulfield, Brighton and beyond. The *Kadimah* was abandoned by its former migrant patrons and had to follow by moving southeast and building the Leo Fink Hall in Selwyn St. The present location in Elsternwick has Melbourne's oldest operating picture theatre, *The Esquire (now Classic) Cinema*.

With a little renovation additional changing rooms, *The Classic* doubled as a theatre for performances of the *Dovid Herman Teater by der Kadimah*. For many years the *Hazomir* mixed Choir at the *Kadimah* held concerts and sang at *Holocaust Commemorations* and *Yom-Haatzmaut Celebrations*, first under founding composer and director **Boruch Kalushiner** and then **Ben Segalov** and **Adrian Bartek**.

Melbourne Yiddish Youth Theatre

In 1970 with the rejuvenation of Australian theatre a youth ensemble, the *Melbourne Yiddish Youth Theatre at the Kadimah*, began performing Yiddish translations of English language plays and classics. Whilst the older *Dovid Herman Theatre* wound down its run following the passing of **Yakov Weislitz**, **Shiah Tigel** and later **Yasha Sher**, the younger troupe continued with their productions of locally devised musicals until the late 1990's.

With the aging of Jewish migrant population, other initiatives of the *Kadimah* became a priority. In 1984 under the stewardship of **Rachel Lewita**, the *Wednesday Club* functioned as a gathering for senior members. The clubs included literary and cultural presentations, entertainment, lunch and games.

A Look to the Future

The National Library at the *Kadimah* the original *raison d'être* for the founding of the institution in 1911 is undergoing a cataloguing and modernisation process led by vice-pres. **Rachel Kalman**. The *Josef Giligich Foundation*, which fosters Yiddish education, has found a home in the *Kadimah National Library*. The *Kadimah Reading Circle* has its meetings at the library under the stewardship of **Jacob Dessauer**.

The *Kadimah Concerts with Friendship* organised by **Gersh Mikhman** and the annual *Concert in the Park*, which the *Kadimah* has co-hosted with *SKIF*, attract thousands. With 50 activities per year it is one of the most active organisations within the Jewish community in Australia.

The challenge for the future is to make the *Kadimah* relevant to the 2nd and 3rd generation Australian born Jewish offspring of those migrants who made this country and this institution a real *home away from the home that was so cruelly destroyed*.

Lessons from the Blind Community

By Philip *Fishl* Kutner

As one who is visually impaired and active in the Council for the Blind, there are similarities and lessons each can learn from the other.

One major difference is that Yiddish is a matter of choice—blindness is not.

What prompted this article is a newly published article revealing that the number of Federal Jobs for the disabled community has dropped 20% in the last 20 years. The reason this fact is so significant is that the Federal government has been held up as a model job resource for the disabled.

What has that got to do with our love for Yiddish? Nothing at all if all that we care about is sitting around reminiscing about our childhood days, and *leave it to the Khasidim*.

Whether it is political, social, environmental or Yiddish activism, it means put your effort and money where your mouth is.

Successful activism is like raising a child. You must be prepared to take action when danger lurks. A blind person must be especially aware when starting to cross a street and a speeding car suddenly comes around the corner on the left side.

Now for the major lesson the Yiddish community must learn—ACTIVISM. We have written several articles in the past suggesting how to stimulate interest and foster groups and organizations in their endeavors on behalf of our *mame-loshn*.

Learn to budget your time and money on behalf of your ideals and priorities. Yiddish does not need to take up a great deal of your time or money to truly benefit you or Yiddish. The entire *should list* below easily can be done for less than half the price of a daily Starbucks cup o' coffee.

A should list is:

- Attending a Yiddish group—*shmoozkrayz*, *leyenkrayz* or *shraybkrayz*
- Attending a Klezmer concert/play
- Joining a major Yiddish organization
- Purchasing a Yiddish book/CD
- Subscribing to a Yiddish publication

A wish list is:

- Attending a Yiddish class
- Attending a Yiddish conference/institute/sof-vokh

Highlights of KlezKamp 20

December 26-31, 2004
Kerhonkson, NY

Yiddish Theater Workshop: **Hy Wolfe**

Doyres in the Yiddish Theater: **Hy Wolfe**
Interviews: **Mina Bern, Shifra Lerer, David Rogow.**

Youth Theater Workshop: **Jenny Romaine**

Introduction to Yiddish: **Paula Teitetbaum**

Intermediate Yiddish: **Miriam Isaacs**

Advanced Yiddish: **Yitskhok Niborski**

Fun Dor tsu Dor: **Chana & Zalmen Mlotek**

How to Accompany a Singer: **Mlotek & Cooper**

A Century of Yiddish Recording: **Henry Sapoznik**

Wexology: Age and Aging in Yiddish: **Michael Wex**

Klezmorimlekh in Yankeeland: **Pete Sokolow**

Yiddish for Singers: **Paula Teitelbaum**

Mandolin Orchestra: **Jeff Warschauer**

Hasidic Dance Band: **Ken Maltz**

Fidl Kapelye: **Cookie Segelstein**

Intermediate Ear Band: **Pete Rushefsky**

Generations of Klezmerim in Yiddish Literature:
Miriam Isaacs: We discuss I.L. Peretz, Mendele
With the assistance of fiddler **Deborah Strauss.**

Di Prose fun Moyshe Nadir: **Yitskhok Niborski**

The Singer of a Different Tune: Esther Singer
Kreitman: **Anita Norich**

The Singers older sister wrote of religious life, the diamond business, and condition of women.

How Did They Say That in English? **Anita Norich**
We'll compare multiple translations.

Survivors: Stories of Chava Rosenfarb: Faith Jones
Chava discusses her works with **Goldie Morgentaler.**

KlezKamp (Living Traditions)

45 East 33rd St.,

NY, NY 10016

www.livingtraditions.org Ph: 212-532-8202

One Man's Vilna: Part II

by Britt Albritton

Lithuanian food is excellent. The only place where I drew the line was at *deep fried pigs' ears*. (So help me. I'm not making this up!) You can have an excellent meal in Lithuania for as little as \$4.00. Everything seems so cheap there. The official exchange rate is 4 Litas to one dollar. The banks give 2.8. Lithuania converts to the Euro in 2007.

I must mention a couple of amazing facts that are immediately apparent when one arrives in Lithuania: Obesity is to all intents & purposes virtually non-existent in Lithuania! There are simply NO fat people. Everyone looks slim, trim, and athletic. Nikita S. Khrushchev, former premier of the Soviet Union, is quoted as having said, "The Swedes are the healthiest, happiest, best-looking, most robust people in the world". He might well have said the same thing about the Litvaks.

There are no special auto tags or reserved parking spaces for the handicapped. There may be a lot of *hoykers & hinkers*, but I didn't see any. But one thing I saw too many of for such a prosperous country: panhandlers. I don't just mean the old babushkas that hang around churches on Sunday, or like the nuns in Italy who display laminated beggars' permits, I mean young punks in their teens and 20s. Granted, some of them look pretty flaky, but there are too many of them.

Another thing you must see to really believe: In the *Altstadt* (Old Town), with traffic every bit as dense as any city in the United States, there are neither traffic signals nor traffic policeman! Pedestrians and motorists are so very well synchronized that the need for traffic control devices has been totally eliminated. Pedestrians rule. That's it. NO honking of horns, no shaking of fists, no flipping of birds, no all-night serenades of emergency vehicle sirens and horns.

One night for a couple of hours during the Olympics, there was a noisy procession of horn-blowing cars—some with kids actually standing on tops of cars. I found out the reason was that Lithuania had just defeated the US basketball team. Not exactly Halloween in Detroit, but pretty noisy for a while.

As an ex-career military man, I have been stationed all over the world. Wherever you go overseas, the Americans re-create their own country: American PXs, Commissaries, Armed Forces Network Radio and TV (Except in Moslem countries), theaters - the works. All-American!

Not in Lithuania! They joined the EEC and NATO, but I doubt I'll live to see the day that the Baltic countries are Americanized. The only change that NATO membership has brought about in Lithuania is that I saw a report on the internet that the prostitutes there are charging NATO troops *three times* the rate they charge their regular customers.

K O V N O

Prominent among the outings arranged by the Vilna Yiddish Institute was a visit to Kovno (Kaunas). About a hundred kilometers from Vilna, it is a clean, prosperous city. We were in two tour busses, and had lovely weather. Upon arrival in the city, we were conducted on a long walking tour through the center of town in a beautiful tree-lined esplanade—long enough to be exhausting for an old gaffer. After a rest and a lunch of pink borscht and potatoes, we boarded the busses and headed back down the road towards Vilna. But after 15-20 minutes we detoured to an isolated park-like area situated atop a long, sloping hill. From there one had a panoramic view of the city and the white birch forests of the surrounding countryside.

Standing starkly against the afternoon sky were three massive monuments which almost defied description. Intuitively I realized that we had arrived at the place for which Kovno will ever be stigmatized as the killing field for thousands & thousands. At some distance from the massive concrete monuments was a brick structure which had the appearance of a medieval fort, surrounded by barbed wire. I learned later that this was the infamous *Fort Nine*. It is one of a ring of twelve forts built by the Russian Tsars over two centuries ago. It was the final stop for many thousands of doomed people transported from all over Europe.

I broke away from the assembled group which was about to enter the fort and walked towards the massive structures. The center one is several stories high. These are memorials erected by Lithuania, dedicated to the people who were murdered in the thousands.

But the thing that made the deepest, and most devastating impression on me was a very long trench, almost the entire length of a football field, and about 20-30 ft wide, and 20-30 ft deep. This trench was where thousands of people breathed their last. Cut down by MG fire like rows of mowed wheat, the dead and dying lay at the bottom of this trench.

As I stood there alone, staggered by emotion at this scene as I had never experienced before, a lone individual approached me from behind and laid his hand on my shoulder. I turned, and for a moment we gazed into each other's eyes in silence. He then turned and walked away. No words were spoken.

For you who may think that this little incident was fabricated for dramatic effect, I am sorry for both of us. I can only swear that every word is true. You have to take it or leave it.

I had heard and read and even visited some of the notorious camps—if *camps* is the word—Sobibor, Auschwitz, Maidanek, Mauthausen, and the others—but Kovno was not one of those—by any stretch. The site at Fort Nine was nothing more, or less, than a killing ground. One of the many plaques was given by citizens of Munich, Germany.

Any doubts as to whether the German civilian population at large were aware of what was being done to the deportees *nach Osten* were resolved by the frank admission on this plaque which began, "Wir, die Mitwissende..." "We, who also knew...", went on to express regrets for the transport of more than 800 Jewish citizens of Munich to Kovno, executed immediately upon arrival.

One wonders. What kind of person does it take to commit such acts as were carried out at Kovno and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. What could motivate those who made up the so-called *Eks*—the killing squads? By what process were decent, honest, moral educated people transformed into murderers without a shred or vestige of conscience?

In WWI, as evinced in the memoirs of many people, German soldiers rendered every humanitarian service they could, including food distribution, to the Jewish population. A letter from the German commanding general was addressed << *To My Dear Jews!*>> Of course, they were looking for Jewish support against the Russians. It's amazing when one contemplates the *volte face* in a nation's attitude that took place in such an amazingly short time: 1918-1939. Adolf Hitler became Chancellor in 1933. By what miracle of black magic could a nation's attitude towards a people hitherto regarded as equals be so radically reversed *in just six short years!*?

A manifest impossibility!

(Footnote: I strongly recommend *The Hidden History of the Kovno Ghetto* a publication of the US Holocaust Museum. Bullfinch Press Little, Brown & Co., 1999)

A footnote to Kovno: Outside the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum at Pamenkalnio Gate (pronounced: GAteh) (St.) 12, there is a monument commemorating *Chiune Sugihara*, a Japanese diplomat based in Kaunas (Kovno) who is credited with saving 6,000 Jewish lives during WWII by issuing them papers needed in order to leave the country. Sugihara is a virtual unknown in the West. Unlike the Swedish diplomat, Raoul Wallenberg, he was on the wrong side, but he is well known and revered in Lithuania.

Regarding the *numbers-game* concerning people killed by the Nazis in WWII: I refuse to become involved in hair-splitting over precise numbers of victims at various places during the holocaust. I have seen differing numbers on monuments in the sane place. It depends often on who placed the monuments. At Kovno there are monuments and markers from France, Germany, the USSR, and they don't all agree. For my part, it suffices to show that large numbers of innocent people were tortured and killed by the worst kinds of criminals. Any hairsplitting dishonors the memory of those who lost their lives.

About the Author

A retired career Air Force officer, Lt. Col. Albritton served a combined total of 27 years active duty in the United States Navy and the United States Air Force. During service in the Navy, he served in the Mediterranean Fleet and was in the area during the campaign for Israel's independence in 1948. After attending college he entered active duty in the Air Force and served in Korea and Japan during the Korean conflict. From the Far East, he was assigned to the National Security Agency (NSA) at Ft. Meade, Maryland. Under the Dept. of Defense, the National Security Agency directs the cryptologic services of the United States. While at the Agency, Col. Albritton completed requirements for and was awarded a Master's and a Doctor's degree from the University of Maryland. Following a tour of duty in Alaska, he was assigned to Hqs., Tactical Air Command, Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, and subsequently to Hqs., Military Assistance Command, Saigon, Republic of Viet Nam. After return to the National Security Agency, he retired from active duty. After retirement from military service, he was an Asst Prof in the field of International Relations at the University of Maryland's European Division, Heidelberg, Germany. Col Albritton's interest in the Yiddish language goes back many years, beginning with private instruction in Erlangen, Germany. After return to the states, he resumed study of Yiddish at the Baltimore Hebrew College, as well as the Israeli-sponsored *Ulpan* study of Modern Hebrew. He currently reside in Gulfport, Mississippi

One Man's Vilna: Part III (Final)

by Britt Albritton

A question I have been asked many times—even by one of my instructors at Vilna, "what is the *why* of your interest in Yiddish? It is a language used in Jewish old folks' homes and by slapstick borscht belt comedians. Aside from a perceived renaissance of the language, my primary interest is and has been in the vast literature in the language, much of it yet to be translated.

When I was a young man in college, the idea of Yiddish and Judaica in a university curriculum would have been preposterous. Today these subjects are not only available in the best of colleges, they are increasingly popular. Even in Israel, where for a long time there were bumperstickers which demanded, *Help stamp out Yiddish!* there has been a major change in attitude.

The Israelis were embarrassed to find it necessary to turn to New York for textbooks on Yiddish. There were none in Israel. I saw for the first time ever in Vilna a Hebrew-Yiddish, Yiddish-Hebrew dictionary in the possession of a young lady from Israel. "Fresh off the press", she said.

One of the oldest, if not the oldest in Europe, the University of Vilna is not surprisingly located in the old town part of the city. Established by Jesuits in 1570, it was closed for nearly a century. When it reopened it offered courses in over 60 subjects. At a time when both Arabic and Russian were taught, Lithuanian was prohibited! (By the Russians, who were then in control). After several name-changes it became the University of Vilnius and has remained so ever since.

American students notice immediately the absence of typical U.S. college features which they take for granted: ultra-modern student centers featuring shopping emporia and swimming pools, frat and sorority houses, mega athletic facilities with humungous stadia, and risqué student-published campus newspapers.

The Vilna school operates at a bare minimum: Academics only! There is a small book and souvenir shop. Yiddish books are available only at a special library, which operates on short hours. There are no Yiddish books in the bookstore.

Lithuania has been a traditional crossroads for warring armies, most recently the particularly brutal conflict between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The Litvaks have become adept at

coping with radical changes imposed by the various occupying powers—some of long duration, some short.

They have enjoyed some triumphs of their own, one being the defeat of the Prussian Teutonic Knights at Gruenwald (aided by Polish allies). The high water mark came during the era of the combined kingdoms of Poland-Lithuania which stretched all the way from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

Lithuania was the last European country to convert to Christianity, in the 1300s. Some say this is the reason for the easy accommodation of other religions, especially the Jewish. One of the more interesting revelations to me was the history of the Karaites, a Turkic sect which adopted the Jewish religion back in ancient times. They have traditionally been recognized by rabbinic authorities as members of the Jewish faith with all rights & privileges.

A colony of Karaites has been in Lithuania for centuries, residing in the picturesque lake country at Trakai, location of the imposing *Fortress in the Lake*. These people were the palace guards for royalty. Imagine this, if you will: An SS Colonel requesting the assistance and advice of a Jewish Rabbi in determining whether the Karaites were racially related to the Hebrews. The Rabbi explained that while indeed the Karaites practiced the Jewish religion, they are not racially akin to the Hebrew people—they are of Turkic origin. Thus, the Karaites were saved by the Rabbi from certain extermination by the Nazis!

The SS Colonel believed what the Rabbi told him. "After all", he figured, "Would a Rabbi lie?" The Rabbi did not indeed lie. What he told the SS Colonel was true. Do you think the Rabbi would have lied if indeed the Karaites and Jews were Semitic brothers?

Each of the succeeding occupying powers in Vilna brought their church with them: The Russians the Orthodox, the Germans the Lutheran, The Poles the Roman Catholic, and the Jews the synagogues.

Thus Vilna has by far the densest population of magnificent churches of any city I have ever seen. There are approved plans to rebuild and restore to original condition the old synagogue in Vilna, with its fabled *shulhoif* at its original location.

For the Jews who knew it, the *Vilne fun amol* no longer exists.

"On its site stands a place identified on the map as Vilnius, capital of Lithuania, a constituent republic of the Soviet Union. Like Troy, the Vilna I knew—the Vilne described in the Jewish annals—now lies buried beneath the debris of history, beneath layers of death and destruction. When the Soviets first occupied Vilna in 1940, they Sovietized it, destroying its historic identity and its Jewish particularity. The Germans who followed destroyed Vilna altogether, murdering nearly all of its 60,000 men, women, and children. Since then, nothing has remained of Vilna's Jewish culture and spirit. Hardly anything has remained of its buildings—the sticks and stones of Jewish architecture. What little the Nazis left standing, the Soviets, who returned after the war, erased. A visitor to today's Vilna can no longer find a trace of what had been "the Jerusalem of Lithuania".

Since Lucy Davidowicz wrote these pessimistic words, there have been increasing signs of a Jewish renewal in Vilna and Lithuania. There is hope among the Jewish people I met there, and I hope that my modest participation in the 2004 9th Annual Yiddish Language Program at the University of Vilna has contributed, at least in some small way, to the rebirth of the Jerusalem of Lithuania.

About the Author

A retired career Air Force officer, Lt. Col. Albritton served a combined total of 27 years active duty in the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Air Force. During service in the Navy, he served in the Mediterranean Fleet and was in the area during the campaign for Israel's independence in 1948. After college he entered active duty in the Air Force and served in Korea and Japan during the Korean conflict. He was assigned to the National Security Agency. While at the Agency, Col. Albritton earned a Master's and a Doctor's degree from the University of Maryland. He was assigned to Hqs., Tactical Air Command, and subsequently to Hqs., Military Assistance Command, Saigon, Republic of Viet Nam. After retirement from military service, he was an Asst. Prof. in the field of International Relations at the University of Maryland's European Division, Heidelberg, Germany. Col Albritton's interest in the Yiddish language goes back many years, beginning with private instruction in Erlangen, Germany. After his return to the states, he resumed study of Yiddish at the Baltimore Hebrew College, and the Israeli-sponsored *Ulpan* study of Modern Hebrew. He resides in Gulfport, Mississippi.

Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish

A Review by Fishl Kutner

Prof. Dovid Katz aptly attacks the much-debated problem of Yiddish survival. Opposite camps have their proponents within and outside of academia. Unlike using non-factual and emotional arguments, the case for this viewpoint is based on past and present facts and a projection set in sound, logical principles.

While current thinking refers to Yiddish as an amalgam of German Hebrew / Aramaic and Slavic languages, Prof. Katz goes back prior to the common era. He first analyzes and then traces the roles of Hebrew and Aramaic up to the migration to Central Europe.

The laymen's mundane use of Aramaic and the scholarly, priestly use of Hebrew are then developed. This led to the Jewish migration into southern Europe and a northeasterly flow with the concurrent adoption and incorporation of Germanic terms.

Prof. Katz aptly analyzes the seesaw chronology of the Jewish fate from the Dark Ages through the Renaissance. Each location first accepted and often welcomed the Jews, but soon imposed various dicta imposing heavy taxes, imposing laws banning certain trades and types of commerce and even geographic prohibitions.

While some of the material presented is fairly well-known by readers of *Der Bay*, it is the manner in which it is presented that makes this book exceptional. Here are a few such quotes:

"Israeli Hebrew is a language that was artificially constructed by Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Zionists around a hundred years ago."

"Throughout history the traditionalists have been challenged by secular outbursts. They tend to occur during the first few generations of creative intermingling with tolerant, multicultural non-Jews." Katz gives examples of Philo of Alexandria, Maimonides, Spinoza, Freud, and Einstein.

"The rise and spread of Hasidism occurred during the lifetime of the greatest Ashkenaz scholar, the Gaon of Vilna, Eyliohu ben Shloyme Zalmen 1720-1797"

"The modernizers in East Europe in the early 1800s onward developed a literary tradition both Yiddish and Hebrew with such modern European genres as the poem, short story, novel, drama, periodical, newspaper, etc."

"The most brilliant Yiddish scholar of the 1900s, Ber Borokhov 1881-1917, single-handedly fashioned Yiddish studies as a field of academic research. He also was the founder and major theoretician of Labor Zionism."

"Traditional Judaism will never be accepted by modern Jews. The traditional kind of Judaism (ultraorthodoxy), which is winning the contest to become the future of American (and Diaspora) Jewry, believes in much more than the 613 commandments in rabbinic tradition..."

"Yiddish will be the future language of the bulk of Diaspora Jewry because speaking it is part of the Jewish civilization of the Hasidic movement...not because of Mendele, Sholem Aleichem, Peretz or any other Yiddish icon. Secular Yiddishism could only work as a real civilization in its native homeland of Eastern Europe."

Maps, photos and diagrams are interspersed throughout the book and add a significant dimension for the reader. Especially noteworthy is the diagram *The Big Bang* that created Yiddish. It graphically shows the interrelationships among Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish (Western and Eastern). However the half dozen maps, while excellent in content are a little difficult to read.

While some may discredit readability formulae, they nevertheless can be useful as an indicator of reading difficulty. Of those reviewed in the literature, this reviewer prefers the Fry Readability Curve.

This text was found to be in the long-word range, but off the chart on sentence-length which places it well in the above freshman college level. One consideration is the knowledge of terminology used. Thus a person with a good background in Jewish history would find this material reading at a lower level than one with a poorer Jewish background.

Prof. Katz has been a prolific writer, and this most recent book fits right in with his other masteries of Yiddish text. It is highly recommended.

Katz, Dovid, *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish*, Basic Books, 430 pp, ISBN0-465-03728-3, 2004 hardcover, List \$26.95 www.basicbooks.com

W.C.: 800-922-2558 Less 10% for members + \$7 s&h
Publisher: 800-345-5359 Mention 20% promo.
=24.31 includes s&h, + your state tax.

Oystsugn fun briv in der redaktsye

I received dues for another new club #101 Heritage Hills Yiddish Conversation Group
Contact: **Harold Penn, e-mail: hlpenn@aol.com**
641B Heritage Hill, Somers, N.Y. 10589
Seymour Graiver, IAYC Treasurer, Bayside, NY

Most of the members of our NSJC Seniors' Yiddish Club, children or grandchildren of immigrants heard and spoke Yiddish in our homes during early childhood. However, we abandoned it during the busy years of school, making a living, and raising families. Now we are on a sentimental journey back to mame-loshn. **shirlprof@aol.com**
Shirley Rosenfeld, Coram, NY

The purpose of Kreytman's Page is to make her known. I would be grateful if you could give me the reference when it appears in *Der Bay*. It will be included in the page. We were unwilling to allow her talent not be known by a wider readership.
Alicia Ramos González, Granada, Spain
<http://www.ugr.es/~aramos/kreytman/>

Es shraybt dir Amanda (Miriam-Khaye) Seigel fun Brooklyn, NY (kh'hob gevoynt in Minneapolis). Gedenkst mikh fun der konferents in Milwaukee efsher? Ikh hob gehat tsures mitn vebzaytl "der bay" - ven ikh hob prubirt "shikn" informatsie vegn a kontsert farn kalendar, hob ikh nit gekent, un ikh veys nisht far vos. Efsher kenst mir gebn an eytse?
Miriam-Khaye Seigel, Brooklyn, NY
amkseigel@yahoo.com

Celebrate Hanukkah at the *Funky Khanike Freylekh*, Saturday, Dec. 4 from 5 to 8 PM At Congregation Nahalat Shalom. Features: Yiddish dancing by Rikud Dance Troupe to exciting music of a 16-plus piece intergenerational Community Klezmer Band, and stories with Lynn Gottlieb. **Penelope Mainz, Albuquerque, NM Nahalatshalom@earthlink.net**
Ph: 505-343-8227, Website: www.nahalatshalom.org

Ikh bin geven a lererke fun yidish far zibitsn yor un hob genitst a sakh fun di temes vos ir rekomendirt. Efsher vel ikh amol shikn mayne mayses fun Pinkus Revern (Paul Revere), Di kleyne Royte Furendike Mantl, un mer....
Frances A. Buratt, Woodmere, NY

After volunteer political campaign activity, I am ready for translation projects. As a graduate of Arbeter Ring Lerer Seminar, author, translator, and chair of the Baltimore IAYC Conference, my background is varied. I am a Yiddish scholar. Your project will be in competent hands. **Sylvia Schildt Baltimore, MD 410-298-4765 or creativa@charm.net**

I want to thank you for recommending me to Helen Schechtman at the Chicago Yiddish Institute. We gave 3 programs at their 15th Annual Sof Vokh. The performances garnered a great response. Helen & Leonard were great hosts. My performances of *Mayn sheyne meyd* have been very successful at Yiddish clubs. **Debby Davis, San Diego, CA**
Editor's note: Debby is the leader of the Second Avenue Klezmer Orchestra. 619-275-1539

Besides teaching 2 levels of Yiddish at Ohio State University, I have 3 independent small groups. I am available for presentations in: Yiddish, English and Spanish; story and poetry reading in Yiddish; private classes and conversations in Yiddish; and translations in Yiddish, English and Spanish.
Moises Mermelstein, Columbus, OH 614-846-4824
mermelstein.2@osu.edu

I look forward to each issue. My wife, Mimi, brings them to her mame-loshn meetings each time and they all enjoy it. The Yiddish Folk Chorus of South Florida is resuming rehearsals on Thurs Dec 9th. Let me know if you need any further information.
Hy Perlstein, Boca Raton, FL Hymimi01@aol.com

I have found new Yiddish pen pals on the Internet.
Miriam Kravitz, Bronx, NY

We use *Der Bay* in our Yiddish Circle at the La Jolla JCC. My sister-in-law in New York has recently joined a Yiddish group, and I am sure she'll enjoy receiving *Der Bay*. Enclosed is my contribution for her subscription. **Sylvia S. Kirsch, La Jolla, CA**

Ir bamerkt, mistame, ven mayn transliteratsye gefint zikh in The Yiddish Vinkl in the English Forward. Ikh badoyer vos mayn mame-loshn klas iz azoy farklemert gevorn in Penn Sourh Senior Center. **Goldie A. Gold, New York, NY**

I'm sending a copy of my article *Uncovering Yiddish in Seattle's Jewish Past*. It was published in the Washington State Jewish Historical Society's newsletter. **Murray Meld, Seattle, WA**
murmelo4@aol.com

The Minnesota State Historical Society had a great exhibit of the lives of Jewish settlers on the prairie in the upper northwest entitled: *And Prairie Dogs Weren't Kosher*. They might still have it. They have extensive archives, memoirs, and footage of interviews with descendants of these early settlers. These settlers often waited a year for a shoykhet to come to town to slaughter a cow so they'd have meat for the winter. **Joan Levin, Chicago, IL**

I'm looking for any information of Chelm 1939-44—especially photos from the town. I live in Chelm and I am preparing the website about Chelm's history 1939-1944. I shall describe Chelm's army groups (7 ppl, 2 PAC), September '39, Russian and German occupation, Nazi terror, Chelm's ghetto, Stalag 319, AK, AL, Bch, etc - the whole story of Chelm in WWII.

Now I am preparing part of the website about Chelm's ghetto and *liquidation-aktzion*, and looking for information about Chelm's ghetto—maybe a witness story. My priority is to find photos from Chelm (during WWII).

I decided to make the website about Chelm 39-44 because only few people in Chelm know anything about it. On TV there are all the time programs from the Warsaw Uprising, but not many people remember that during WWII in Chelm about 90.000 people lost their life.

Nobody remembers that in WWII there was Nazi terror in the Chelm ghetto, and about 18.000 Jewish Chelmians just *disappeared* during 4 years. The website will be open for everyone to remember the past.