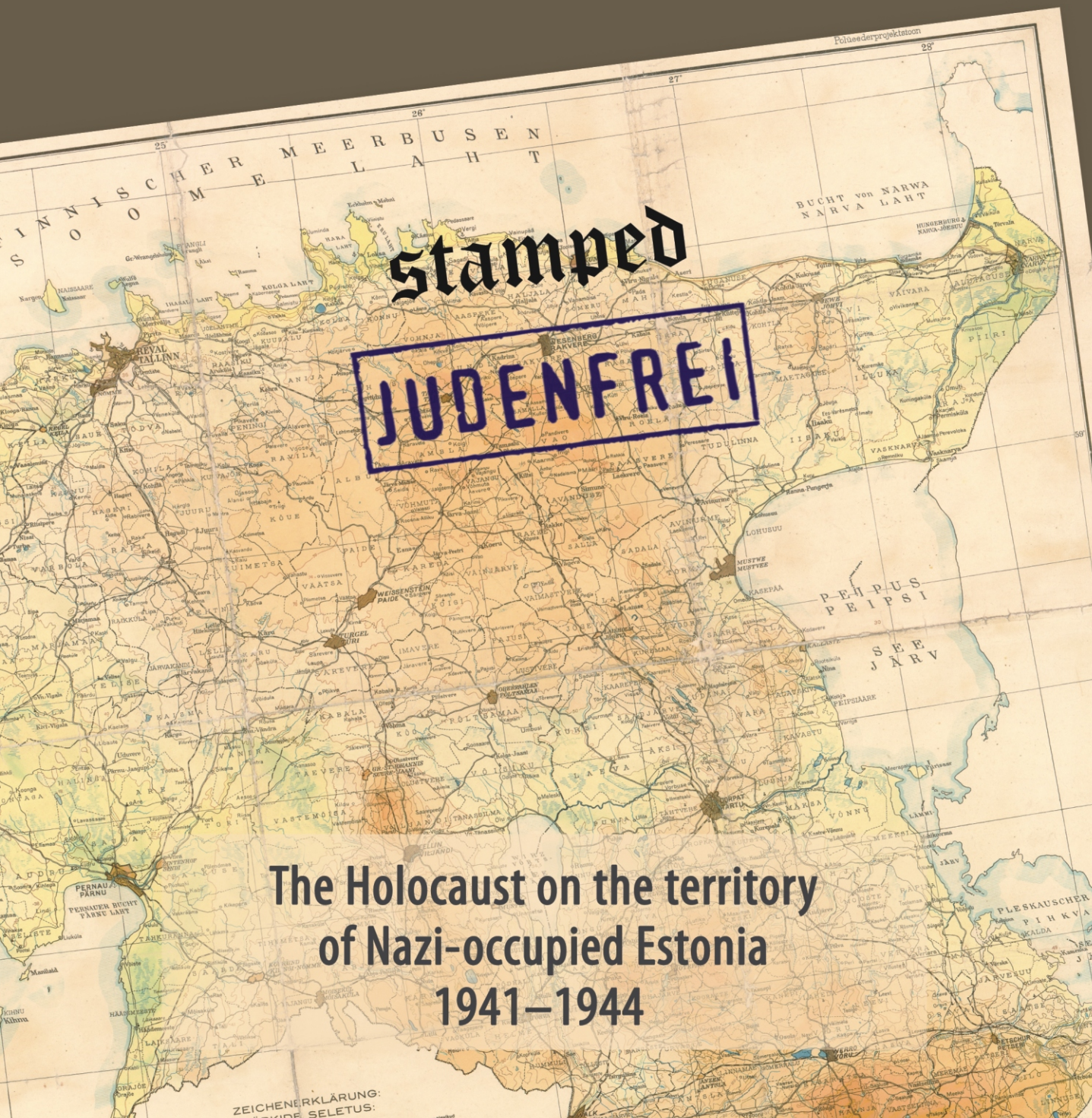

The Holocaust on the territory of Nazi-occupied Estonia 1941–1944

Stamped "Judenfrei":
The Holocaust on the territory of Nazi-occupied Estonia 1941–1944

The author thanks all participants in the project "Signs of Remembrance of the Holocaust in Estonia" and especially the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, the British Fund for Education on Topics of the Holocaust and the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism. Without their assistance, this publication would not have been possible.

The author expresses sincere thanks to the Estonian Jewish Museum, Mark Rybak, Cilja Laud, Aleksandr Dusman, Avi Dobrysh and Boris Lipkin for help with evidential and illustrative material. Photographs were also contributed by the Harju County Museum and Evgeniy Kapov-Kagan.

The Jewish Community of Estonia expresses its gratitude towards the Tallinn office of the Konrad Adenauer Fund for financial support in the publishing of an English-language version of the brochure.

Jewish Community of Estonia
Tallinn 2012

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Blot on the map

On the Jewish map of Europe – a map that commemorates the center of the Jewish people's history and culture – Estonia for the most part remains a white blot even to this very day. The local Jewry, which developed at a later period and had never been particularly populous, was unable to make a contribution to the treasure trove of national ethos comparable to the portion accounted for by other Eastern Jewish countries.

The name Estonia, however, will forever be written on the very blackest page in Jewish history together with the terrible word "Judenfrei" – "Free of Jews". This was first uttered in Nazi-occupied Estonian government relations in December 1941. The word was repeated publicly on January 20, 1942. At an infamous conference in Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin, it became a death sentence for the Jewry of countries seized by Nazis.

Even up until the beginning of the 1990's, the 20th century genocide of the Jewish population during years of World War II remained a topic that in the USSR was not so much stifled, as it was exceptionally unpopular. The downfall of communist ideology and beginning of free dialogue about events of the past caused a surge of interest in the occurrence termed the Holocaust – total annihilation of Jews by Nazis. This interest, unfortunately, is not always healthy. Victims of Nazi Germany's inhuman politics occasionally become a reason for political profiteering of the moment and its pseudo-historical justification.

The first published materials that spoke about the obliteration of the Jewish population within the territory of occupied Estonia saw the light of day in the 1960's. Proper academic research into the Holocaust became possible only with the Republic of Estonia's restoration of independence. The very first of these publications was a book written by Eugenia Gurin-Loov,

daughter of the director of the pre-war Tallinn Jewish Gymnasium, titled "Suur häving"[1]. Following the book were scientific articles published by historian Meelis Maripuu and research by Riho Västrik. Elhonen Saks, who popularized Judaism, published the story of the fate of the Jewish people during the years of World War II – including that of Jews on the territory of Estonia – in a form accessible to a broad reading audience. It is worth recalling the work of the Estonian International Commission for Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity as well as the research of Anton Weiss-Wendt with the Holocaust Center in Oslo.

This publication is not an attempt to provide an exhaustive picture of the Holocaust on the territory of Nazi-occupied Estonia. It is, in essence, simply a brief guide to the details associated with the national tragedy of the Jewish population on a tiny corner of Estonian land. It is a guide not so much in a geographic-, but rather a historical context: the primary sites of the obliteration of Jews are a kind of "landmark" on the path of suffering and sorrow. The fates of those, who found within themselves the strength and the bravery to stand against the inhuman policies of the Nazi government blaze up as rare guiding flames along its wayside. Their names, with a single exception, remained unknown to readers up until now – unlike the names of the executioners, unfortunately.

One should not expect revelations and sensations from our story. One shouldn't anticipate zealous accusations. We simply attempt to follow the history and the background of the Holocaust in Estonian lands.

But even that is enough.

[1] *"Great Annihilation" in Estonian. The term was recognized by the author and consultants as a more precise translation of the Hebrew word "Shoah", which is traditionally translated into English as "Holocaust".*

One hundred years together

The historical experience of the Jewish nation's co-existence with the Estonia nation is not as grand as the respective experience in neighboring Latvia or, especially, in Lithuania; not to mention its background in the majority of countries in Eastern Europe. The formation of a stable Jewish population within the borders of the present-day Republic of Estonia began only during the second third of the 19th century. The right to stay on the territory, located outside of the boundary of the so-called Pale of Settlement, was granted solely to a separate group of Jews. For example: those serving a twenty-five-year term in the army as "Nicholas' soldiers", merchants of the First- and Second Guilds, those with five-year work experience and a license for practicing as an artisan and also individuals possessing higher education.

The sparse population of Jews within the territories of Estland and the northern section of the Livonian Governorate of the Russian Empire[2] was concentrated in towns. It is only indirectly possible to judge in what way the interrelations formed between Jews and other ethnic groups of townspeople. People still recalled with sympathy the cantonists – Jewish minors forcibly enlisted in the Tsarist army and brought to the governorates of Estland and Livonia for waging war – during the early 20th century. On the other hand, jokes told among the Estonian population at the time testify to the proliferation of notions of Jews as being stingy and cunning, but also often made fools of by resourceful peasants.

The Republic of Estonia in its very first official document drafted upon establishment in 1918 – the Estonian Declaration of Independence – demonstrated its favorable attitude towards

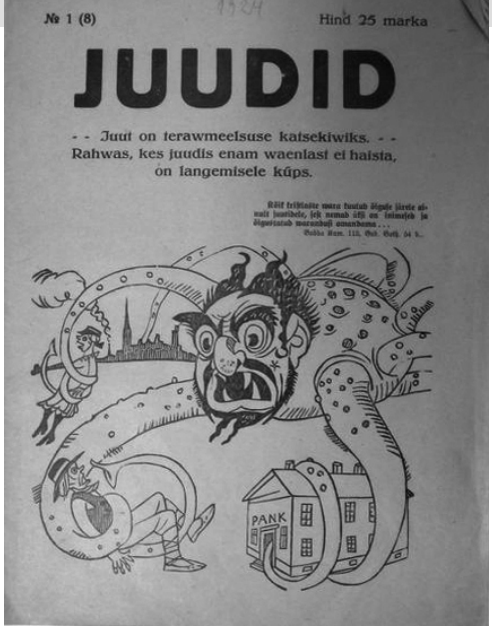
[2] *Corresponding to the northern area of present-day Estonia together with the southern part of the country, along with the northern area of present Latvia.*

Large choral synagogue on Maakri Street against the silhouette of pre-war Tallinn. Photograph from the 1930's.

minority populations living on its territory. The Law on Cultural Autonomy for National Minorities passed seven years later was met by Jews with elation – testament to this is the Republic of Estonia's listing in the Jewish National Fund's Golden Book: not a single government had ever before managed to achieve such a high entry. The first officials of the Republic were also well disposed towards the Jewish minority: the pre-war press tells of visits to various Jewish events and warmly worded statements addressing the Jewish people. Over the course of several years, pupils of Tallinn Russian Gymnasium lived marvelously under the same roof with students attending the Jewish Gymnasium, and local Jews were even united with local Germans in the fight to achieve the granting of national-cultural autonomy. When one encounters statements made at times even by authoritative researchers concerning alleged verbal orders not to accept Jews into the civil service in pre-war Estonia, these seem likely to rather be exaggerations. Yet it is impossible to confirm facts of the existence of anti-semitism on an everyday level. Among Tallinn residents belonging to the older generation surface recollections of how at the most stylish Tallinn café of those years – "Kultas" – it was secretly forbidden to serve Jewish customers. Even to this very day, the phrase "juudi jõulupuu[3]" – employed to describe something as conceited and expensive, garish and rich, but above all distasteful – crops up in the Estonian language. During the 1920–1930's, several attempts were undertaken to publish anti-semitic periodicals in Estonian; admittedly, not with a high print run. Certain circles of Baltic Germans also espoused anti-semitic ideas – the "good" example of Nazi Germany was in the public eye.

Taking the middle of the 1830's as a point of reference – the time that the first cantonist communities began arriving in the territory of the modern-day Republic of Estonia – one can

[3] *Literally "Jewish Christmas tree". The term "juudi pruut" ("Jewish bride") also has a similar connotation.*



The front cover of an anti-Semitic publication in Estonian. 1924.

say that co-existential experience between Jews and Estonians as well as other indigenous minorities in the locality had lasted for slightly over one hundred years by the beginning of World War II. This is an insignificant length of time in the scale of Jewish history. Its brevity as well as the small size of the Jewish population – which by the year 1934 was recorded at 4,434 people – contributed to the fact that neither sympathy nor antipathy formed definitively in terms of relations towards them from the side of the Estonian majority. It is possible to look for shortcomings in the notion of pre-war Estonia as a country, where conceptions of anti-semitism might have been completely unknown. Nevertheless, anti-semitic sentiments in the country were harbored by an unspeakably smaller collective of people than they were in neighboring Latvia and Lithuania.

Without pogroms and ghettos

It is possible to dispute incessantly over when exactly World War II first scorched Estonia with its breath. One date casts no doubt: for the Estonian Jewry, it began on July 22, 1941 – with Nazi forces crossing over Germany's border into the Soviet Union. Vilnius, the "Jerusalem of Europe", fell practically during the first days of war. Riga was captured by the end of the first week. Tallinn managed to withstand for more than two months: the Red Amy held onto its major naval base – which basically opened up the way to Leningrad – down to the last man.

June 22

By August 27th, when the forward detachments of the Wehrmacht descended upon the city from Lasnamägi Hill, the fate of the Jewry in Estonia was sealed[4]. The leader of the "Forest Brothers" of Southern Estonia, Major Friedrich Kurg, already gave an order coordinated with the German officers for the arrest of Tartu Jews and their internment until the organization of a concentration camp at the Kuperjanov Battalion barracks – from there, there was only one "exit" for Jewish inmates: the bullets of a firing squad on the edge of an anti-tank trench. Einsatzkommando 1a[5] under the command of SS Colonel Martin Sandberger had already arrived in Pärnu from Riga: the majority of male Jews were exterminated during the first days of occupation, but women and children were imprisoned in a warehouse. Six weeks later, mothers were sent to the firing squads; the children were poisoned. Only a certain portion of the Valga Jewry managed to avoid this tragic fate: the town, located at the intersection of major railway lines, gave them a chance for rescue for a very brief period of time.

The Jewish community in the capital of pre-war Estonia was just as populous: around 2,200–2,300 Jews resided in Tallinn and the suburb of Nõmme, which at that time was

[4] *Soviet forces abandoned Tallinn on August 27–28, 1941.*
[5] *Einsatzkommando 1a – one of the sub-units of Einsatzgruppe A (see footnote 6).*

Tallinn Central Prison (Patarei), site of the demise of Tallinn's male Jews in autumn of 1941. Current photo.

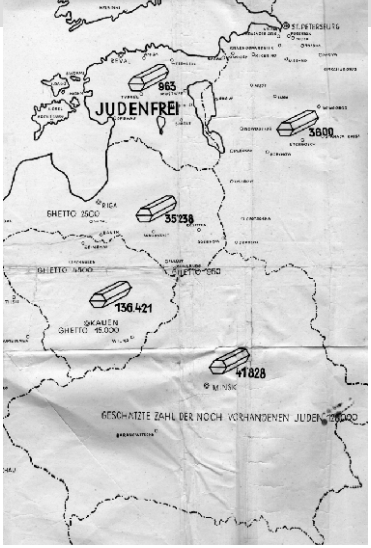
counted as a separate town. The Tartu community numbered close to one thousand people. Around two hundred and fifty Jews resided in Pärnu and approximately just as many in Valga. The Jewish populations of Narva, Viljandi and Rakvere numbered a few families. It must be mentioned that at the moment that Germany attacked the Soviet Union, the overall number of Jews in Estonia had been reduced by approximately 10%: more than four hundred people were sent away to remote regions of the USSR during the deportations of June 1941. This tragic circumstance turned into being a rescue for the majority of deported Jews: two thirds of them survived. Out of those that remained in the territory of Nazi-occupied Estonia, literally only a handful of individuals were lucky enough to survive. The number of Estonian Jews that fell beneath the grindstone of the Nazi machine of annihilation ranges between nine hundred and one thousand. Moreover, the majority of them comprised Tartu-, Pärnu-, and above all – Tallinn Jews. In regards to the Jewish population of Pärnu, the details are obvious: the Nazi army's blitz attack cut them off from the path to rescue. But why did those that had enough time for evacuation remain? There were various reasons. Some remained at home on account of age and sickness. Some remembered far too well the period of World War I, when relations between Jews and Germans were in the best way possible. There were also those that feared Bolshevists more than Nazis: the first year of Soviet rule dealt a blow to the Jewish population of no lesser extent than it did to the other national groups of Estonia. Tallinn rabbi Aba Gomer, who had permission to evacuate, made the decision not to abandon the city as long as there was even a single Jew left in it.

Not having changed in the very least their own viewpoint on the fate of Jews in occupied territories, the Nazis were still alert over the scale of bloodshed committed on the streets of Kaunas and Riga during the first days of their "liberation from Jewish Bolshevism". Understanding that similar acts might incite doubt in the souls of even an entirely loyal local population over their new masters' ability to guarantee the vaunted "German order", those responsible for "resolving the Jewish question in Estonia" took a few different paths. Instead of mass executions carried out in plain sight of ordinary persons – formal compliance to the "letter of the law", there was the arrest of "those posing a danger to the government", police "investigations" and the delivery of suspects and persons recognized as guilty to a place of

internment. After that, any trace of the individual needed to disappear from the surrounding world; inevitably concluding with the volley of a firing squad or the burst of fire from a machine gun. In accordance with the order given by M. Sandberger on September 10, 1941, "the definitive resolution of the Jewish question in Estonia" was entrusted to detachments of the Estonian national defense militia – the "Omakaitse", and not to a German punitive unit. However even any kind of "command from above", Omakaitse had arrested by August 28th a total forty-two "Jewish communists" in Tallinn and handed them over to police divisions or the political police. A brief "postponement" came for the remaining Jewish residents of the city as the entire body of the Third Reich's anti-Semitic laws was extended to apply to these persons: such laws included bans on Jews holding most professions, on using public places and transport, and an order for the mandatory wearing of distinguishing marks on their clothing – yellow stars. By September 20th, the lists of Jews remaining in the city were completed: Omakaitse and the police were able to set about their routine "work".

According to a report of Einsatzgruppe A[6] responsible for the immediate "solution of the Jewish question" on the territory of occupied Estonia dated October 12, 1941, "there is no place for the demonstration of spontaneous anti-semitism". This "phenomenon" was explained with insufficient working of the propaganda apparatus. This appeared two weeks after confirming the clarification: "having been investigated, no pogroms were noted in their wake". It cannot be ruled out that specifically this last circumstance forced the Nazis to not resort to the measure of organizing Jewish ghettos – these were often officially created for "shielding the Jewish population from the protests of the local population". Coping with the "tasks" before them, Nazis in Tallinn and across all of Estonia found it possible to go without the intermediate stage – ghettoization. Male Jews that were arrested were placed in Central Prison, better known to city residents by the name Patarei. Able-bodied women with children went to the concentration camp established in Harku. The subsequent fate of those and

[6] Einsatzgruppe A – the name of one of six special formations registered in the German army during the time of their invasion into territory of the USSR, intended for the elimination of "hostile elements" (foremost Jews). Einsatzgruppe were structurally divided into smaller 'Einsatzkommandos'. They were disbanded in 1943 and an attempt was made to destroy the traces of their criminal activities.



Map from the secret report "The elimination of Jews carried out by Einsatzgruppe A", which illustrates the number of Jews killed during autumn-winter 1941 in the occupied governments of the Baltic Countries and Belarus (in the so-called "Reichskommissariat Ostland"). The subscript on the lower part of the map reads: "Number of Jews that by preliminary estimation are in our hands by now – 128,000". 1942.

others was filled with grief and uncertainty. There is no doubt that they were done away with during the first months of Nazi occupation. Where this took place precisely is unknown to this very day. According to a guard at Patarei Prison, shootings were carried out right within the prison yard. A personal letter written immediately after the war cites the story of an eyewitness, according to whom women, men, children and elderly persons sentenced to execution were taken to a place at the edge of the city and shot. Some of the possible sites of this atrocity are the Männiku district or the vicinity of Lake Harku. According to one existing version of the events, the inmates of Harku Concentration Camp were transported to Pskov and executed there. One account that seems less plausible is the postulation that those imprisoned were relocated to the Riga ghetto and executed on Latvian territory.

They were killed without any particular disdain or hatred. Calmly, routinely and in compliance with all necessary formalities upon the arrest and rendering harmless of "enemies of the state". Their "crime" became apparent with a single solitary word written accurately in the corresponding column of police interrogation forms.

This word rings with shocking straightforwardness and frankness, revealing the entire essence of the genocide committed by Nazis and their political allies.

The word – JEW.

Ticket to Raasiku Station

"...After the liberation of Estonia, still remaining here were 921 Jews (468 men and 453 women)," wrote SS Standartenführer M. Sandberger, a colonel of the German defense police, in a summary report signed with his own name in regards to the entire territory of the Generalbezirk of "Estland" in "Reichskommissariat Ostland" in the period from July 1941 through June 30, 1942. "Special procedures were employed with respect to all of them. Today, Estonia is free of Jews". That, which was first established by a SD document for internal use dated January 14, 1942, was confirmed once again.

Even in the eyes of his commanding officers in Berlin, M. Sandberger had nothing special to boast. A measly one thousand Estonian Jews was like a drop in the sea not only against the background of Poland's several-million Jewish population, but even in comparison with the thirty-four thousand prisoners of just a single Riga ghetto. The elimination of such a trifling number of "enemies of the Nazi state" was an unspeakably simpler task than the liquidation of the populous Jewish communities of Lithuania or Czechoslovakia. However, it was Estonia under Nazi rule that was destined for an even more sinister role than the status of the first area "purified of Jews" in the region of the future "Greater German Reich". The tiny occupied country in very Northern Europe was fated to become a grave for the European Jewry.

The first train carrying foreign Jews arrived at the Raasiku Station platform situated northeast of Tallinn on September 5, 1942. It dropped off the recent inhabitants of Theresienstadt – the Czech village of Terezín, transformed by the Nazis into the "ideal ghetto" for privileged prisoners: Jewish aristocracy, intelligentsia, veterans of World War I, the holders of war medals. The next train – this time holding affluent Jews from Frankfurt-am-Main and Berlin – arrived at Raasiku Station on September 29th. The transport was also befitting for the contingent. Instead of a row of heated freight wagons were comfortable compartment cars, in

Deportation of Jews from Germany. Train "to the East". 1942.

which passengers sat in seats according to tickets they had bought earlier. Baggage claim checks laid in baskets: those responsible for the "migration" promised placement in family camps where those fit for labor would work to benefit the Reich's industry and the elderly would receive necessary care.

The realization that a trap had been laid for them in place of what had been promised hardly descended immediately upon arriving at the station of destination. A selection process awaited passengers immediately after stepping off onto the platform. The young, healthy and work-capable were put on one side. Children, elderly persons and those looking unfit for hard physical labor were put on the other. The path of the first group led to a site created specifically for them, cynically named Jagala Camp "for education and work". The second was destined for another deception – the last in their life. Not trucks, but so much as blue buses with a reassuring appearance dropped them off in Kalevi-Liiva – a valley sprawled among sandy dunes with an ideal view and a former army base converted by the Nazis into a place of mass slaughter.

Unlike those held in ghettos and camps, people brought to Kalevi-Liiva were not counted. The executioners had no need for this here, at the remote military firing grounds. Surrounding woods silenced the crack of machine guns. Sandy soil soaked up the blood quickly. Czech Jews were replaced by German Jews. In the God-forsaken wilderness of Estonia perished the countrymen of Kafka and Mendelssohn, the acquaintances of Freud and Einstein, the habitués of literary salons in Prague and Berlin theaters – the very cream of the European Jewry. People, who until their final moment remained true to the country where generations of their forefathers had lived; people, who were unable to believe that a government force might wipe them out for the mere fact of their "wrong" national descent.

The guns fired from the autumn of 1942 until spring of 1943. One silencing, one coming to life again – depending on how often the next party of the doomed was delivered to the dunes of Kalevi-Liiva: the debilitated or sick prisoners destined for Jagala Concentration Camp; those who simply failed to raise their eyes to look at the camp authorities; the jews

The water tower in Raasiku remembers the "selection" of future victims of Kalevi-Liiva and Jagala Concentration Camp that went on in the years 1942–1943... Current photo.

from different corners of Europe; gypsies; Soviet prisoners of war. That devilish crack of rifles, before which living people stepped with bull's-eyes upon them, carried on up until a decision was made to reform Jagala Concentration Camp, which was initially not meant to be permanent. Prisoners capable of labor were sent to Tallinn Central Prison[7], from which they fell into the "Vaivara" camp complex and from there onward to camps in Germany and Poland. The rest were taken to Kalevi-Liiva. Reuniting for all eternity with their compatriots shot a year earlier, they became the last victims of the Valley of Death.

With the mastery of professional criminals, the Nazis succeeded in covering the tracks of their evildoing: the shooting pits were filled and leveled, and a young forest was planted above them. The events in Kalevi-Liiva of 1942–1943 were unknown for no less than two decades. The site of mass execution was discovered accidentally in 1961. The exact number of its victims has not been established definitively to this day. According to various estimations, it might hold between three- and six thousand.

They lay eternally among the dunes dotted by pines in Kalevi-Liiva, thousands of kilometers from their homelands. Together with their naive dreams and sincere delusions. With their unlived lives and unspeakable pain. Clutching in their hands a ticket to an unknown station.

The glory of Europe's Jewry of old is buried somewhere here: below the sands of Estonia.

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[7] In November 1942, eight persons were transferred from Helsinki to Tallinn's Patarei Prison – Jewish refugees, citizens of Austria and Latvia. They were handed over to the Germans by the Finnish authorities on the grounds that they did not possess Finnish citizenship. Afterwards, they were sent from Tallinn to the death camp at Auschwitz, where all of them except for one were killed.

In the "Vaivara" system

The beginning of the year 1943 was not too well for Nazi Germany. The encirclement and downfall of the army at Stalingrad under the command of General Paulus dispelled for good the myth of the German army's undefeatable nature. Spring brought along with it the downfall of yet another myth – the myth of Jews' "genetic inability" for physical resistance. The uprising that broke out on April 19th in Warsaw's ghetto restored the trampled honor of the Jewish people and terrified the Nazi leaders, first seeing for themselves "what the Jews are capable of when weapons end up in their hands".

The echo that sounded along the Volga and the Vistula resounded doubly on the territory of occupied Estonia. On March 16, 1943, Reichsstatthalter Hermann Göring gave a secret command for the restoration of Estonia's oil-slate production and processing industries: the loss of hope for controlling the Caspian oil fields left Germany looking for alternative sources of fuel. There was no lack of free workforce: on June 21st of that same year, head of the SS Heinrich Himmler ordered the immediate liquidation of all ghettos on the territory of Belarus and in the Baltic Countries, with the re-dislocation of surviving prisoners into labor camps. The first inmates were re-situated to the very heart of Estonia's slate basin, a tiny place called Vaivara, in early August 1943. The primary task of the camp set up at the site was to serve its nation as a "distribution point", from which inmates were sent to one labor camp or another. A number of them sprung up in immediate proximity to the mines and refining plants. Others, existing from a few weeks to a few months, were established for the purpose of building a certain strategic object: military defenses, a dirt road or a field military narrow-gauge railroad. A separate "branch" of the so-called "Vaivara" camp complex subject to the Main SS Economic and Administrative Department, was situated not far from Tallinn's Klooga Concentration Camp.

Barracks at Kiviõli Concentration Camp. 1943–1944.

By autumn of 1943, the network of camps in the "Vaivara" complex was strung throughout northeastern Estonia and the vicinity of Tallinn. These camps could not be compared in scale to the death factories erected by the Nazis in the territory of occupied Poland: their task was not physical extermination, but rather the use of cost-free slave labor. Yet the horror unfolding within them was no less appalling. The Vaivara way station forever remembered the cries of mothers of the Vilnius ghetto: mothers, whose children were lured by way of deception into two heated freight cars standing in a row and, right before the eyes of their parents, sent off into the unknown – as it turned out later, to the infamous concentration camp at Salaspils. Extending along the coastline, the old postal route between St. Petersburg and Reval (Tallinn) preserved the arduous advance of prisoners: those that no longer had the strength to drag themselves from Vaivara to Ereda Concentration Camp were shoved by guards off of the flagstone cliffs into the sea. Consumed by typhoid fever, dying from beatings, perishing due to exhaustion and the inhuman conditions of confinement; several thousand primarily Lithuanian Jews met their deaths amid the slate quarries and spoil piles of Ida-Viru County.

The scrapping of the network of camps in the "Vaivara" system began in spring of 1944 when Red Army units once again crossed the border into Estonia. It may seem unbelievable, but it was at that very time that the last "Jewish transport" arrived in the territory of the Nazi-occupied country: "Convoy 73", headed from a transit camp in the Paris suburb of Drancy to Lithuania. The majority of its prisoners – predominantly French Jews – were exterminated in Kaunas' Ninth Fort. About three hundred inmates exhausted by their arduous path were conveyed to Tallinn. The last ones selected in the Central Prison were sent to "Education and Work Camp No. 2" located not far from the military airport in Lasnamäe. The Red Army's approach made the Nazis seriously worried about covering up the trail left by their crimes: a group of the "Convoy 73" prisoners was thrown into the work of exhuming and incinerating the corpses of victims executed over the three previous years. To this day, it has not been determined where exactly this "special operation" was carried out.

The Holocaust on the territory of Nazi-occupied Estonia 1941–1944

● Sites where Estonian Jews were killed

▲ Site of mass execution of Jews brought from Europe

■ Concentration (so-called "work") camps

1 - Kohtla-Järve
2 - Kohtla (Goldfields)
3 - Kukruse
4 - Jõhvi
5 - Ereda
6 - Viivikonna

Displayed on the map is the present-day Republic of Estonia within borders as they exist currently


Tallinn
Lagedi
Jagala
Kalevi-Liiva
Kunda
Aseri
Sonda
Rakvere
Kiviõli
1
2
3
4
5
6
Narva-Jõesuu
Narva
Vaivara
Auvere
Kuremäe
Putki
Soska
Pärnu
Viljandi
Tartu

Jewish prisoners at Kiviõli Concentration Camp (the network of camps in the "Vaivara" system). 1943–1944.

Starting from the first day of August 1944, the Port of Tallinn worked exclusively in evacuation mode. Realizing that they would not be successful at holding Estonia, the Nazis attempted to remove from the country everything that held even a fraction of a cent in value. Among these things were also their slaves: prisoners of the "work" camps. Lying before those who, in spite of everything, had survived within the territory of Estonia – officially proclaimed "free of Jews" two and a half years earlier – was a harrowing trip by sea to Stutthof as well as to other camps located on German territory.

Klooga. The burnt offering

In comparison with other camps established in the "Vaivara" system, Klooga did not seem to be the absolute worst place. "A good camp" is how its prisoners joked about it with the grim humor of the doomed.

It is hard to say that it was for one primary reason. Perhaps it was the reputation of the summer-holiday settlement along the seaside. Perhaps it was the existence of living quarters that were more or less fit for living. Perhaps it was the internal regime by which working at the factories subordinate to the camp were not only prisoners, but also civilians – thus leaving even the slight chance of exchanging a valuable item preserved by some miracle for a crust of bread or a few potatoes. According to survivors, the camp authorities issued prisoners for jobs on farms from time to time: the "farm hands" were prepared to complete any task for a bowl of stew.

The first prisoners to pass beneath the sign affixed above the gates reading "Todt Organisation Enterprises Klooga" ("O.T. Betriebe Klooga") on September 8, 1943 were around six hundred and fifty Vilnius Jews. Three weeks later, a further seven hundred and fifty persons were placed in the camp and after them came five hundred women from Kaunas' ghetto. By the end of July 1944, the number of prisoners reached 2,300[8]. The inmates' forced labor was utilized by the "O.T." trust, which was involved in building military objects and equipping them with concrete components. The local private limited company "Klooga Woodworking Enterprise" was likewise not immediately included in the network of companies subject to

[8] *During different stages of Klooga Concentration Camp's existence, local peasants were also interned there – Russians and Ingrians (Izhorians) "evacuated" by the Nazis from combat zones in Leningrad Oblast. They were removed from Klooga at the moment the camp was liquidated.*

Entrance to Klooga Concentration Camp. 1943–1944.

the SS. At the same time, the lumber workers also used women in the sewing workshops, working for the needs of the Wehrmacht. Guarding the camp was the 3rd Company (which consisted of Estonians) of the 287th Police Battalion.

It isn't worth pausing at length on the conditions of prisoners' internment in the "good camp": accounts of the survivors of Klooga have been published in many languages – both in the Soviet Union and in Israel. The title of one more exhaustive collection of accounts speaks for itself: "White Nights and Black Days". The accounts were compiled by a native of Vilnius – Mark Meir Dworzecki, who held a doctoral degree in history and personally endured every corner of hell found in the "Vaivara" system. Giving testimony to the daily camp system is also a poem written by one camp prisoner (published in Appendix 3). Yet the horror of the camp's day-to-day occurrences – the daily humiliation, beatings and harassment that became causes of death – pales in comparison to the cruelty of the crime that put an end to the story of one of the most terrible places on the territory of Estonia.

Klooga's black day arrived on September 19, 1944. A high-ranking SS official arrived at the camp early in the morning informed the camp administration and the commander of the 20th Estonian SS Division training regiment quartering not far from the barracks that the evacuation of prisoners by land or by sea was no longer possible. For the prisoners, this meant a death sentence. But just as a thousand times before and hundreds to follow, the Nazis once again decided to resort to delusion. The camp inmates, standing in rank on the parade ground, were informed that evacuations were to begin. To ready for this, a group of three hundred stronger men was supposedly required for chopping firewood. With baffling cynicism, the Nazis gave orders for a meal to be made for the prisoners – including for those sent to "gather firewood". These men were truly sent to fell trees: those that remained in camp saw the unfortunate inmates hauling logs on their shoulders. Only the firewood was not being readied for locomotives' furnaces – it was meant for the gigantic bonfires, upon which those same prisoners were fated to lie.

Klooga.
September 1944.

The first shots rang out from the forest at half-past twelve in the afternoon. Soon afterwards, thirty armed SS officers appeared in the camp. Seizing the next party of the doomed, they disappeared – and gunfire was again heard from outside the camp fence. Unrest increased among the prisoners. At some moment, the Germans lost control over the situation: panic broke out in the camp. A few dozen prisoners managed to take advantage of the opportunity: scattering in all directions, they were able to hide themselves in the cellars and the attics of the workshops. Alas, even this chance for escape was in no way certain: realizing that they already had nothing to lose, the Nazis immediately unleashed carnage within the camp. A farm shed filled with injured and those already perishing from bullet wounds located not far from the entrance to the camp was doused in petrol and set alight. They lit gasoline-soaked bonfires on the shore of the lake outside of the camp boundaries: rows of logs alternating with rows of corpses.
The unbearable stench of burning bodies descended upon Klooga – as witnesses recall, it was palpable for several days.

Unfolding before the eyes of the forward units of the Red Army entering Klooga on September 23 was a picture incomprehensible to the mind of a normal person. The butchers, running off in haste, did not have time to finish their "work" completely. Piles made from stacks of logs soaked in petrol and corpses of executed prisoners that were not set alight loomed not far from mounds of ash littered with partially scorched corpses and burned-out pyres. Horrified front-line photo-correspondents recorded the images on film. Mounds of shoes and kilograms of hair in the barracks at Auschwitz, mountains of corpses piled up by bulldozers at Bergen-Belsen – all of those were still ahead. Here in Klooga, humanity viewed for the first time what the "new order" proclaimed by the Nazis meant in reality. Here, in a tiny summer-holiday site not far from Tallinn and hitherto unbeknownst to anyone, the biblical term "Holocaust" received its figurative, present definition. Here, the emotionally-neutral term that for the duration of a thousand years meant, basically, one form of sacrifice carried out at the Temple in Jerusalem – a sacrifice fully consumed by fire; here, 'holocaust' acquired a different, new meaning: sinister, inhuman and godless.

"How could you allow something like this to happen, God?" Elviine Hinsberg asked indignantly in late September 1944. The young Estonian girl, who worked as an accountant in an enterprise office located within a camp, was arrested by the Nazis for providing aid to prisoners – but she survived. An unwitting witness to what unfolded during the Klooga tragedy, she dedicated a poem to the event – meriting the title of being the first to address the Holocaust in Estonian literature.

It isn't necessary to rack one's mind over where and with whom God was at Klooga. Rather, it is worth considering a question that is more banal and practical: where was man? At Klooga, at Vaivara, at Kalevi-Liiva, in the yard of Patarei Prison, in the barn at Pärnu, on the edge of the firing trench in Tartu?..

However, this question has been posed many times. The first time was in relation to Auschwitz, and then concerning innumerable other places.

There is no answer to this very day.

Name and memory

The liberation of Klooga Concentration Camp put an end to the history of the Holocaust on Estonian lands. After some seven months, the grimmest page in the history of the Jewish people was turned once and for all. Late on the night of May 8th, a treaty for the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany was signed in the Berlin suburb of Karlshorst. Its leaders were put before an international tribunal in Nuremberg.

Two waves of trials of those responsible for executing the Nazis' genocide policy were carried out in Estonia: during the first post-war years and in the 1960's. On the North American continent, US authorities arrested and sentenced to the highest degree of punishment the primary slayer of Estonia's Jewry – the aforementioned commander of Einsatzkommando 1a M. Sandberger. However, by a strange confluence of circumstances, the butcher of the Jewry in Estonia managed to escape punishment: he was initially pardoned and in May 1958 the criminal – who was also an accessory to the mass killings of the Jewish populations of Riga, Pskov and Verona – was... freed. As of early 2010, he was the oldest high-ranked SS officer surviving to our day. He died on March 30, 2010.

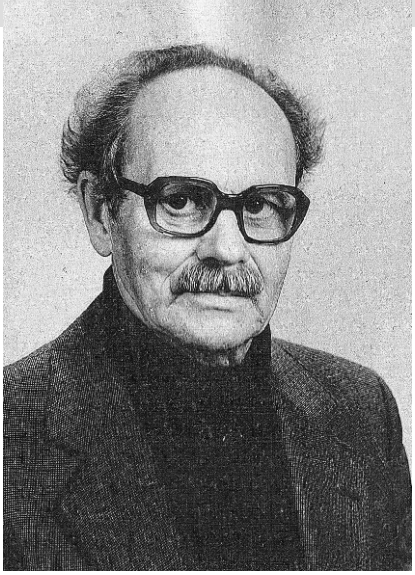
Retribution caught up with his Tartu "colleague" more quickly: F. Kurg was shot during his detention by Soviet penal authorities during the first few years following the war. The slaughterers of Pärnu's Jewry, the killers of Kalevi-Liiva and the masters of the "Vaivara" camp system were sentenced to death. A few of these men were sentenced in absentia:
by escaping to the West on the eve of the entry of Soviet troops into Estonia, some managed to disappear among the millions of refugees and immigrants. Left unpunished were dozens of those that informed on their neighboring Jews by sending corresponding letters to the police – at times anonymously, but at times even signing with their initials or full last name.

Professor Uku Masing – righteous among the nations.

The first and last names of the utter dregs of society that actively collaborated with the occupying forces in the policy of a "final decision of the Jewish question" are, for the most part, known for certain. Among them are Germans, Estonians as well as Slavs. It is possible to acquaint with these names in specialized literature. The author does not wish to repeat them yet again, for even simply recalling the butchers on the same pages as the victims is not fitting for remembering the latter. Those that earned greater remembrance are the men and women that found within themselves the strength and humanity to resist the machine of extermination erected by the Nazi government. Until just lately, unfortunately, much less was known about these persons than about those that sullied their nation's image with the very lowest acts. To mention even a few of the righteous people by name means to not allow human gratitude to extinguish.

The title of Righteous Among the Nations – the highest honorary title given by the government of Israel – was bestowed in 1964 upon Uku Masing, a theologist and lecturer at the University of Tartu, and his wife Eha Masing, who both assisted in saving Isidor Levin, a future professor at St. Petersburg State University. Also renowned is the name of their countryman and professor Paul Ariste, who managed to save the interior elements of Tartu Synagogue from destruction by registering them for preservation at the Estonian National Museum.

Bert Neitsoff, a relative of famed Estonian violinist Robert Peenemaa, served during the years of Nazi occupation as a sergeant-major with the Security Police. In August 1944, he arrived at a village where a woman by the name of Broche had hidden herself since autumn of 1941 with the parents of her Estonian husband. Neitsoff informed them that the police received an anonymous tip-off, the author of which indicated that a female Jewish city-dweller resided in the village three years earlier, and he also told them that he had destroyed the malicious letter. Broche was saved thanks to the actions of a man serving in the punitive forces of Nazi Germany.



Guido Pant: a Tallinn Jew saved by his school acquaintance serving at Patarei Prison.

Yelena Yemelyanova, the wife of non-Jew, managed to survive Nazi occupation on an Estonian farm: her husband's former classmate destroyed all documents referencing the woman's Jewish descent. An Estonian doctor "confirmed" that two infants born to a patient were not those of the woman's Jewish husband that fled to the Soviet front line, but rather those of an Estonian lover – thus saving the children from execution.

The fate of Tallinn resident Guido Pant reads like pure fantasy: a Jew by way of his father, Pant was forcibly enlisted in the Red Army, switched to the side of the enemy with a number of fellow Estonian soldiers and was sent by the Germans from a prisoner-of-war camp to Patarei Prison due to the fact that he concealed his Jewish descent – yet he survived: a former schoolmate simply erased the acquaintance's name from the records.

An Estonian jeweler in Nõmme attempted to hide the daughter of his Jewish colleague, but she was handed over to the Nazis. At times employees had tried to write a letter to the police in defense of their arrested Jewish colleagues – alas for naught...

"Among the farmers were many simple people that aided prisoners with food in exchange for something or doing so at no charge," writes M. M. Dworzecki in his previously mentioned book "White Nights and Black Days". "Some left packages in places agreed upon beforehand. This brought with it danger to the person's life on many an occasion. A curious fact is that fourteen Jews escaped from the camp in Ereda. They hid in the forest for the duration of fifty-six days and survived. It does not seem possible that they held out so long without help from locals." Confirming the words of the Israeli researcher are the accounts of Leida Remmelgas and Helgi Marusink, who lived not far from Ereda Concentration Camp during their childhood. As the former recalled, her mother left food in a pail and lowered it to the waterline in a well from which prisoners brought water during their work hours. The latter remembers going into the forest together with her mother and bringing Jewish fugitives from the camp clothing and provisions.

Losing her mother at Kalevi-Liiva but surviving Jagala Concentration Camp herself, Berlin native Helga Verleger kept alive the memory of an Estonian guard named Uibo at the camp: the man held a sharply negative attitude towards the Nazis and planned to flee together an imprisoned female Jew; however, he was given up by his fellow guards and executed together with the girl. Local Sillamäe historian Boriss Lipkin has also gathered accounts of help given to camp inmates in the "Vaivara" system by the local population according to the resources they had available to them. There is no doubt that there might have been even more such accounts, had purposeful research into the history of the Holocaust on Estonian lands begun not with the fall of Soviet power, but instead straightway during the post-war years.

An unbiased view of the history of the Holocaust confirms: there was no one killer nation – every nationality had its own butchers and its own righteous persons. There were government killers: those, which implemented as government policy the criminal idea of prosecuting and executing people based on their ethnic descent. No Estonian state existed during the years that comprised World War II: it was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 and a year later was occupied by Nazi Germany. The question of who really helped to save the good name of the free pre-war Estonia – those serving as collaborators to the Nazis, staining the name of themselves and their countrymen with the blood of innocent victims, or those that did what was within their power to help the victims – is one that probably does not have two different answers.

Specifically those persons, who wrote anonymous tip-offs; who stood armed on the edge of firing trenches; who took part in the liquidation of the Jewish people in Estonia or beyond its boundaries – those persons are damned to eternal oblivion. An oblivion that is likewise greater and more terrible than the very loudest curse.

Eternal thanks goes to those, who found within themselves the strength to remain human during years of inhumanity. The gratitude lives not only in memory of the Jewish people – it is there, in the souls of all the living. Just as wise men of the Talmud spoke many centuries before us – "whoever saves a life saves the entire world".

* * *

...Seventy years ago, almost no one knew of the tiny area of summer cabins on the periphery of Estonia called Klooga. Only the Estonian Jews of yesterday were familiar with it, those that by the will of fate left their native lands: during the pre-war years, those studying at the Tallinn Jewish Gymnasium traveled there on picnics and excursions.

For already over half a century, "Klooga" has been one of the first words to meet visitors to the Hall of Remembrance at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial complex in Jerusalem. The six letters in Latin script – five in Hebrew, respectively – were forever recorded on the same line composed by sinister words such as "Auschwitz", "Majdanek", "Treblinka" and "Sobibor". The titles of other sorrowful places on the map of Estonia – Vaivara, Kalevi-Liiva, Ereda, Jagala – are less well known. Not one sensible person could wish upon them that horrible reputation, which they gained together with Klooga during the years of World War II. Yet if people allowed that, which took place in the world from 1939 to 1945 to happen, then it is impermissible to forget them. Even more so – it is criminal. Just as in the case of hundreds of other such places that cover the European map with deep pockmarks.

It is unnecessary to constantly reopen the wounds of the past, especially in order to serve the political interests of the present. To remember how and why they were entered into the collective memory of one nation or another is essential. Merely remembering supports the perhaps weak, but nevertheless reassuring guarantee that the crimes once committed will never be repeated.

Tallinn, Autumn 2008; 2009

Appendix 1

List of places connected with events of the Holocaust in Estonian territory

A) Places associated with the extermination of Estonian Jews in summer-autumn 1941:

Tartu
Concentration camp on the territory of former Tartu Exhibition Grounds
Anti-tank trench at the entrance to the city

Pärnu
"Betti Barn" near Vana-Pärnu Bridge
The former synagogue at Laatsareti Street 2
Mass graves in Raeküla and Reiu forests

Tallinn
Tallinn Central Prison (Patarei Prison)
Women's camp in Harku
Mass grave in Männiku district near Viljandi Highway

B) Places associated with the extermination of Jews from the Old Reich (Germany and its borders on September 1, 1939) as well as from France, brought to the territory of occupied Estonia:

Vicinity of Tallinn
Camp at Jagala and firing squad site at Kalevi-Liiva

Tallinn
Tallinn Central Prison (Patarei Prison)
Camp located not far from former airfield at Lasnamägi

C) Places associated with the extermination of Jews brought to the territory of occupied Estonia from the ghettoes of occupied Lithuania, - camps of the "Vaivara" system:

Vaivara (two camps – at the railway station and near a mineral oil factory)
Klooga
Narva-Ost (camp near Narva jute plant, presently on the territory of the Russian Federation)
Hungerburg (Narva-Jõesuu)
Ereda (together with a separate "labor team" in Kohtla)
Goldfields (camp near Kohtla mineral oil factory)

Jõhvi	Auvere
Kunda *	Aseri
Kiviõli	Soski (Soska)
Lagedi	Putki
Viivikonna I* and II*	Kurkuse
Sonda	Kuremäe*

*(Conflicting accounts exist concerning presence or absence of Jewish prisoners at camps marked with *)*

Appendix 2

Memorials and markers on the territory of present-day Estonia in memory of the victims of the Holocaust

The erection of monuments to the victims of the Holocaust was not officially welcomed or supported by either local- or government officials in the post-war Soviet Union. The Baltic region was no exception: monuments set up at places of mass executions did not indicate the victims' nationality. The euphemisms "Soviet citizens" or "anti-fascists" as well as "citizens of foreign governments" were used instead of the word "Jews".

During Soviet times, some monuments were situated within the territory of the then-ESSR at the site of the mass grave of executed prisoners of Klooga Concentration Camp, at the site of the shootings at Kalevi-Liiva and at Metsakalmistu Cemetery in Tallinn. In 1973 the Jewish religious community of Tallinn with great difficulty received permission to put up at the Jewish cemetery in Rahumäe a plaque in memory of the victims of the Holocaust.

After the restoration of Estonia's independence in August 1991, ideological obstacles on the path to immortalizing the victims of the Holocaust disappeared. A new monument in Klooga built according to a decision made by the government of the Republic of Estonia was opened on September 1, 1994 by the prime ministers of Estonia and Israel. New slabs with text recalling the nationality of victims were erected alongside the monuments put up during Soviet times (the old monument at Klooga, the monument at Metsakalmistu). Thanks to help of the embassies of Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland, the text on the monument at Kalevi-Liiva was updated in 2002 and an informational panel showing the layout of the mass graves was erected.

In 2003, the US government represented by the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad and the government of the Republic of Estonia represented by the Minister of Culture concluded an agreement concerning the perpetuation of the memory of victims of the Holocaust on the territory of Estonia. The British Fund for Education on Topics of the Holocaust and the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism likewise joined the project "Signs of Remembrance of the Holocaust in Estonia". Employees of the Estonian National Heritage Board performed landscaping and greenery work.

The first five plaques and markers at sites of former Nazi concentration camps were erected in 2005 in Vaivara, Illuka, Kiviõli, Klooga and Ereda within the framework of the "Signs of Remembrance of the Holocaust in Estonia" project. Three more markers were added in August 2009 at the former camps in Kohtla-Nõmme, Aseri and Soska. In autumn of that same year, a memorial stone in memory of 34 Jewish children executed by the Nazis was opened in the Jewish section of the Pärnu City Cemetery.

As of the spring of 2010, the following monuments and signs of remembrance in connection with events of the Holocaust had been erected on the territory of the Republic of Estonia (listed by city and district):

Tallinn
Memorial plaques on the wall of Tallinn Central Prison (Patarei Prison).

Tallinn
Memorial at Metsakalmistu Cemetery to the French Jews as well as to Jews from Lithuania and Poland executed on the territory of occupied Estonia.

Tallinn
Memorial at Rahumäe Jewish Cemetery to executed Estonian Jews.

Vicinity of Tallinn
Site of execution of victims of Klooga Concentration Camp – monument erected during Soviet times upon the place of burial of prisoners exterminated during liquidation of the camp. In 1994, a monument to the victims of the Holocaust on the territory of occupied Estonia was opened nearby.

Vicinity of Tallinn
Monument to those executed at Kalevi-Liiva.

Tallinn
"Convoy 73" memorial near the wall of former Patarei Prison.

Tartu
Memorial to the victims of Nazism erected during Soviet times at the site of a shooting trench on the edge of the city.

Viljandi
Memorial tablet at Jewish cemetery.

Pärnu
Memorial stone in the Jewish section of Pärnu City Cemetery in remembrance of 34 Jewish children killed by Nazis.

Ida-Viru County

Memorial to victims of Ereda Concentration Camp and memorial tablet at the site of the camp.

Memorial tablet at the site of Vaivara Concentration Camp (at the railroad).

Memorial tablet at the site of Kohtla-Nõmme Concentration Camp.

Memorial tablet at the site of Aseri Concentration Camp.

Memorial tablet at the site of Soska Concentration Camp.

Memorial plaque at the site of Kiviõli Concentration Camp.
Memorial plaque at the site of Illuka Concentration Camp.

Tartu
Memorial tablet at Jewish cemetery in Tartu to the Jews killed in the city during 1941–1943.

Appendix 3

Poem written by unknown prisoner at Klooga Concentration Camp

Discovered after the camp was liberated. Translated into Russian by Isaac Bakhmat. Illegible sections marked with multiple periods. Taken from the collection at the Estonian Jewish Museum. Translated from Russian into English by Adam Cullen retaining the orthography and punctuation of original text.

"Page on white cartridge paper/in black pencil/.
May 4, 1944

I see a bullet ...../?/
It catches up with me at the fence,
So isn't it all the same,
Whether I'm alive or dead?
I nevertheless lose not faith
In surviving and glimpsing freedom
I grab onto a thread/a rope/hope
Surely even a miracle can be achieved
Loaves of bread lie beyond the wire and grow moldy
..... there they feed the horses.
Yet we stare at the sky in utter exhaustion
Black as the layers of earth.
Hunger grips in its strong vise
Extracts the last strength
Like beneath a massive, heavy sledgehammer
The Jews die of hunger.

Opposite side:
May 10th

Arduous battles underway at the fronts
A stream drips from an inflamed gland /?/
*But among us – may all take cholera**
A mouse burrow/hole/ in a dark abyss
The days drag on like lazy turtles
As rust, it eats into the body
*May all bend in a long fever**
*May ..... their head into the ground**

**Untranslatable Jewish sayings about despair, spite etc –*
Note from I. Bakhmat.

Page on white cartridge paper/in black pencil/

We fall like autumn leaves from a strong wind,
We lay like ears of corn at the foot of a harvest hand,
We dry up like petrol in ...?.. on trodden roads,
We wither like grass in the heat, craving the rain.
It happens that a tree falls with branches ...?...
Roots protruding into the air like broken ? legs ?

Opposite side:

A shaken Jew ? with frozen eyes
Lies bloated from hunger
Stretched out on the ground /?/
We extinguish there ..... like candles /?/
No one mourns the orphan with the funeral wail
One after another die...../?/
We set like stars in the morning sky
No one remains to speak,
So that all might know of our great sorrow"

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GENERALBEZIRK
ESTLAND
EESTI
KINDRALKOMISSARIAAT
1:400 000
1 cm = 4 km
22°
23°
24°
59°
MOON
MUHU
SUND
VÄIN
KASSAR- WIEK
KASSAARE LAHT
SOELA VÄIN
MATSALU LAHT
ARENSBURG
KURESSAARE
HAPSAL
HAAPSALU
KERTEL
KÄRDLA
Worms
Vormsi
Moon
Muhu
Abro
Abruka
RIGAER BUCHT
LIIVI LAHT