

# SHIPS TO NOWHERE

**The Harriet and Kenneth Kupferberg  
Holocaust Resource Center and Archives**

**QUEENSBOROUGH** **CUNY**  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE



*Deliver me from the mire, and let me not sink; let me be delivered from  
them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. – Tehillim (Psalms) 69:15*



# SHIPS TO NOWHERE

EXHIBIT CURATED AND TEXT WRITTEN BY:

RABBI ISIDORO AIZENBERG

ARTHUR FLUG, Ed.D., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

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ELIZABETH MUNDLAK-ZBOROWSKI

ESTHER KATZ NÉE GOLDMEIER IN MEMORY OF

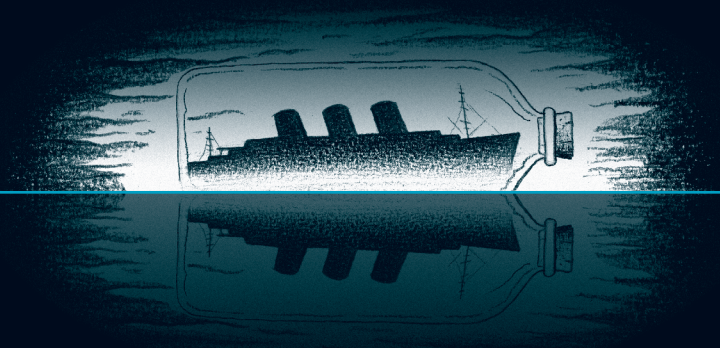
KAROLINA AND LOUIS GOLDMEIER

BJARTE BRULAND, HISTORIAN AND CHIEF CURATOR OF  
THE OSLO JEWISH MUSEUM

WILLIAM LANGE, CAP ARCONA

THIS EXHIBIT OPENED ON MONDAY, OCTOBER, 1, 2007, AT  
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The public is sufficiently familiar with the tragic hopelessness and homelessness of those of our fellow Jews who in recent months found themselves in "no-man's land." Less known but more painful incidents occurred during the past year on the high seas.

A considerable number of our fellow Jews, after they had gone through all the exacting rigors of applying for and obtaining visas and permits of entry... have been refused admission to the countries to which they were destined.

Even the issuance of an official visa does not close a refugee immigration case, for the home government takes to itself the freedom of changing its mind while the refugee is en route to the place of refuge.

"HEBREW IMMIGRANT AID SOCIETY (HIAS) ACTIVITIES IN THE UNITED STATES AND OVERSEAS COUNTRIES. ANNUAL MESSAGE AND REPORTS 1938," P. 12

Following the *Anschluss* (the annexation of Austria to Germany on March 13, 1938) and the November 9-10, 1938 Kristallnacht rampages, thousands of German/Austrian Jewish refugees sought to flee the ominous clouds of anti-Jewish hatred spreading over them. Many sought to immigrate to Palestine, closed to them by a quota system enforced by the colonial British administration. Others clamored to enter the United States where the immigration policy was similarly restricted by a quota or to Caribbean and South American countries equally averse to welcoming Jews. To make matters worse, the challenge facing refugees was not only to find a haven but to determine how to get there.

Maritime transportation was the only feasible option. Individual Jews and Jewish rescue organizations sought to enlist shipping companies and private ship owners for their transportation. While in many cases Jewish refugees were able to secure seaworthy vessels and reached their destination, many other ships did not meet the most minimal safety standards; other ships made it to their destination but the passengers were refused entry by local authorities, and yet other ships were sunk on the high seas and many lives were tragically lost. Our exhibit focuses on some of these ships.



# CARIBIA

On January 14, 1939 the German Hamburg-Amerika Line steamer Caribia departed Hamburg bound for the island of Trinidad. Among its 350 pleasure-seeking passengers there were 86 Jews hoping to find refuge in this British Caribbean colony. The German government's goal was to probably allow these Jews to leave without a fixed destination in order to demonstrate to the world that they were not the only ones who rejected them. Upon reaching Trinidad, the refugees were notified that its government had closed its doors to them on January 29. Many of the refugees despaired. Some even considered suicide.

From Trinidad, the Caribia turned northwest to the Venezuelan port of La Guaira. After four days of waiting for a permit authorizing the Jews to land that failed to materialize, the ship turned eastward to its next pre-scheduled stop, the Venezuelan port of Puerto Cabello, with the refugees still hopeful that visas would arrive. But they didn't. Unable to linger any longer, the Caribia turned north toward its next stops in Panama and Belize. The Nazi claim that they were not the only ones to reject Jews in their midst was about to be proven right. However, after two hours on the high seas, a cable signed by the Venezuelan president Eleazar López Contreras authorizing the refugees to land was received on board, and the ship turned back to La Guaira. The concerted efforts of the small Caracas Jewish community trying to intervene on behalf of the despairing refugees before the Venezuelan government had borne fruit.



THE CARIBIA



PRESIDENT LÓPEZ CONTRERAS



# KONIGSTEIN

Only a few weeks after the Caribia's journey, the Konigstein, another German ship, departed Hamburg with 165 German and Austrian Jewish refugees on board also making pre-scheduled stops in Caribbean ports. The first stop was the British island of Barbados. The response: entry denied in spite of eight days of pleading with the authorities. Next stops – British Guiana followed by French Guiana – entry denied again. On February 27, the Konigstein anchored in La Guaira. Following further pleading with President López Contreras, the Jews were granted the right to land. One of them was Erwin Sensel, a beloved and respected member of the Caracas community who recently celebrated his 100th birthday.



ERWIN SENSEL

4

Upon disembarking the 46 Jewish families, 18 children and 46 singles were welcomed by the local Jewish community and temporarily housed in “Mampote,” a coffee plantation, generously provided by Dr. Celestino Aza Sánchez. Only 156 people made it to “Mampote.” It is said that the other nine were Nazi spies that mixed themselves in with the general population.

GROUP PICTURE OF JEWISH  
REFUGEES IN “MAMPOTE”





# S.S. ST. LOUIS

While the Austrian and German Jews on the Caribia and the Konigstein were fortunate to have found a haven and forever remained grateful to Venezuela, the same fate did not await the refugees of another Hamburg-America luxury liner, the S.S. St. Louis, also destined to the Caribbean, this time to Cuba.

When the ship set sail from Hamburg on May 13, 1939, it had on board more than 930 Jewish refugees holding landing certificates to Havana. One of them was Julius Hermanns of Munich who, although he did not have the papers in hand, was informed by his brother Julius, a resident of Havana, to sail nevertheless since he held the original papers.

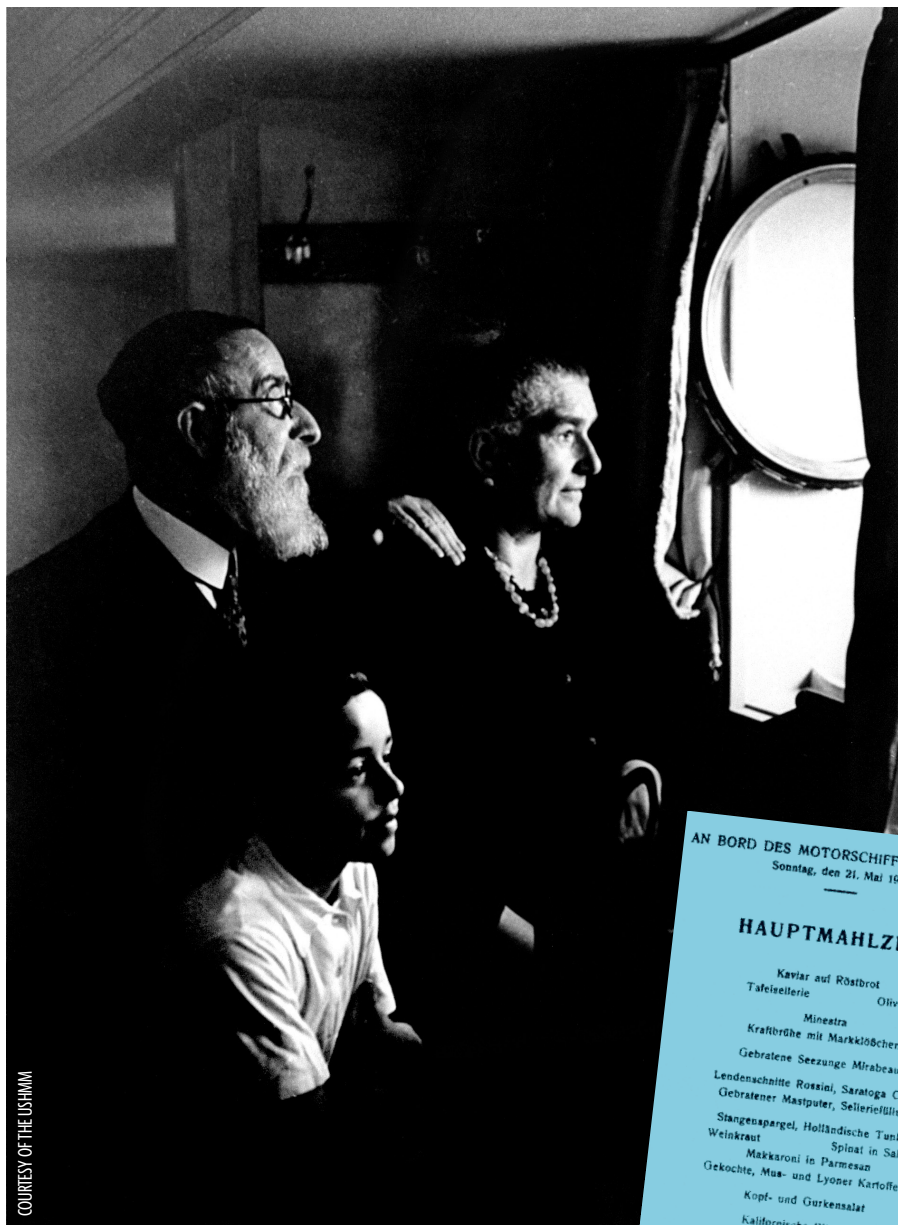


RADIO  
TELEGRAM  
FROM JULIUS  
KAUFMAN



SOLOMON KEHMANN & ISADORE LOEB BOARDING THE S.S. ST. LOUIS.  
GANGPLANK BEARS THE NAME OF THE LINE





THE GRAND RABBI WITH HIS WIFE AND SON  
LOOKING OUT THE PORTHOLE OF THE ST. LOUIS  
RETURNING TO EUROPE

However, during the two-week period that the ship was en route to Havana, the landing certificates granted by the Cuban director general of immigration in lieu of regular visas were invalidated by the pro-fascist Cuban government, including Julius Hermann's papers. When the St. Louis reached Havana on May 27, all but 28 of the Jewish refugees were denied entry by President Federico Laredo Bru, who further insisted that the liner leave Cuban waters.

The Joint Distribution Committee's efforts on behalf of the refugees to honor their landing papers were fruitless, and the ship was forced to return to Europe. While en route, the St. Louis got close to the Florida coast and was shadowed by US Coast Guard vessels making sure that no one jumped ship. Among the returning passengers was Grand Rabbi Luck Bauer, who served as the spiritual leader of the refugees on board.

The luxury on board the St. Louis could not obliterate the sad destiny awaiting the refugees. While sailing on its way to Antwerp where it finally anchored, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom

were cajoled into granting refuge to the St. Louis passengers.

Representatives of these countries, together with the Joint Distribution Committee's European Chairman, Morris Troper, prepared lists itemizing which of the four countries each passenger preferred to go to. Only those accepted by Great Britain found relative safety. The others were soon to be subject once again to Nazi rule following Germany's invasion of Western Europe.

"No one can say with certainty how many of the St. Louis passengers eventually perished. One estimate states that of the 907 who were returned to Europe only 240 lived." (*The Voyage of the Damned*, p. 303). Among those who died was Julius Hermann.



THE MENU OF THE S.S. ST. LOUIS FOR SUNDAY, MAY 21, 1939



COURTESY OF THE LEO BAECK INSTITUTE, NEW YORK

Another vessel destined for the Americas caught up in the Jewish refugee tragedy was the Navemar. This Spanish freighter left the port of Seville on the Guadalquivir River on August 6, 1941. It was one of the last ships to carry Jewish refugees before the connections between the United States and Europe were severed completely. Contrary to the Caribia or the St. Louis, the Navemar was far from being a luxury liner. With formal accommodations for fifteen passengers, 1,200 were jammed into her cargo holds, decks and even lifeboats.

#### SAUL SPERLING AND OTHER PASSENGERS

# NAVEMAR

One of the Navemar passengers dubbed his journey “the ship of hell.” Others labeled the vessel “a flowing Gurs” referring to the Gurs concentration camp in France. Five refugees died on board as a consequence of the ship’s appalling conditions. And yet, as an October 21, 1941 report written by Dr. Joseph J. Schwartz, the Joint Distribution Committee’s European chief stated, “I am quite certain that the people who were left behind in Gurs, in Berlin, in Vienna, in Prague, consider those who departed on the Navemar as the most fortunate people in the world and would exchange places with them at a moments notice without any hesitation.” Some of the refugees were allowed to disembark in Cuba; most did so in New York on September 12, 1941.



COURTESY OF THE LEO BAECK INSTITUTE, NEW YORK

#### VIEW OF PASSENGERS SLEEPING



## HUNDREDS DUE TODAY ON SPANISH VESSEL

5,473-Ton Freighter Started  
Trip With 1,200 Refugees

The Spanish freighter Navemar, of 5,473 tons, with normal accommodations for fifteen passengers, will arrive in New York this morning at the end of an unprecedented refugee voyage on which she has been transporting 1,200 passengers across the Atlantic. All but a few of those making the voyage, under conditions said to be worse than the steerage conditions of former years, are refugees from Germany and other Nazi-dominated nations.

Federal and city health officials completed plans yesterday for giving the ship and its passengers the most careful medical scrutiny possible before the vessel is allowed to go to her dock at Columbia Street, Brooklyn. They said the ship would not dock until late in the day, and it was thought possible that she might not be permitted to land passengers until tomorrow morning.

Customs and immigration officials said the ship now had 775 to 800 passengers, and possibly more. Several hundred were landed at Havana on Sept. 5 in a change of plans that originally called for bringing them all to New York.

The tiny ship also called at Bermuda on Aug. 30, at which time four of the passengers had died. Five were sent to Bermuda hospitals and several others were hospitalized in Havana.

## REFUGEES FROM NAZISM REACH A HAVEN



They wave from the decks of the Spanish freighter Navemar as it arrived here yesterday  
New York Times

## Ship, Packed Like a Cattle Boat With 769 Exiles, Here From Spain

Freighter Docks After One of Strangest  
Voyages of War—Six Died During Trip  
—No Unusual Hardship for Most

The Spanish freighter Navemar, packed like a cattle boat with refugees from Germany and Nazi-dominated lands of Europe, docked in Brooklyn late yesterday at the end of one of the war's strangest voyages, an odyssey in reverse.

There were 769 passengers lining the ship's rails or reclining on their soiled bunks and rickety steamer chairs down below when the ship finally reached her pier at Columbia Street at 4:30 P. M. Eleven hundred and sixteen had sailed originally on the ship, from Seville an Aug. 6 and from Lisbon on Aug. 16.

Of these eleven were landed at Bermuda and 330 at Havana. Six died during the voyage, four at sea, where they were buried, and one each at Bermuda and Havana.

Public health physicians who had charge of examining the passengers and who received the medical report of the ship doctor, said that all of those who died were elderly, and that the deaths were the result of old age as much as anything else.

After seeing the ship, with its improvised outside kitchen, the two "decks" of tiered bunks down below in the windowless holds, the hulls and shells of grapefruit, oranges, pineapples and other foods lying about the decks, officials expressed surprise that "casualties" had been so few.

### Meeting Held to Express Thanks

Passengers themselves said it was a miracle, and on the last day out of New York, as they neared the end of the voyage, a rabbi among the refugees conducted a meeting on the cluttered forward deck to express thanks for their fortunate journey.

The passengers said the voyage was "criminal" and "unbelievably cruel" and that they had been deceived from the very first as to the conditions they would be expected to bear. They slept on lifeboats at night, for the weather was fortunately good all the way, or on pallets along the iron deck, or on their deck chairs and in the bunks that had been built in the holds.

Hours after the gangway went up from the pier at 4:45 P. M. some elderly women were still lying in the bunks, exhausted, while others, the younger ones, struggled for positions at the ladderways leading to the "first class" quarters where public health doctors were conducting their examinations. The younger ones were principally middle-aged. There were not many young people on board, and only a few children. Nevertheless,

the general opinion seemed to be that what they had endured on the trip was far less than the tortures they had undergone in Europe.

The ship itself, known to New York harbor in former years as an ordinary freighter with passenger quarters for fifteen persons, had been converted into a sort of transport by the Spanish Government. Seven persons traveled in the cabins, one paying according to unverified report \$1,200 for his bed. All the others were in what the ship's personnel termed third class. They paid from \$400 up.

### Physician Deplores Conditions

Dr. Harry White, acting chief of the quarantine station on Staten Island, who boarded the vessel early when it dropped anchor off Rosebank, said that conditions on the ship were worse than anything in his memory, including the days of large-scale emigration twenty years ago and prior to the last war.

He was "one who was surprised at the apparent health of those on board. Forty-one passengers were held for Ellis Island by Dr. White and his corps of immigration and public health aides. They were held for ailments such as non-dangerous fevers, bad colds and questionable affections that required further diagnosis. But he said there was no quarantinable disease on the ship.

In Bermuda one passenger was taken ashore suffering with what may be typhus, but the doctors said there was no proof as yet, and they doubted that it would be true, since none of the other passengers had any symptoms.

Several of the passengers gave what they thought was the answer to the seeming good health on the ship. They said that all but a handful were refugees from Germany, France, Switzerland, Russia, Rumania, Poland and other countries, and that they had "good spirit" and had become so used to punishment in recent years that they were willing to undergo one last period of hardship before landing in the United States.

They had left behind them concentration camps, hunger, physical punishment, oppression and terror, and, as one German from Berlin said, "it has been terrible and almost unbearable, but I guess it hasn't been so terrible as what we came away from."

There were 400 men, women and children from Germany alone. Most

Continued on Page Twenty-seven

## 769 EXILES HERE ON JAMMED SHIP

Continued From Page Nineteen

of these lived in Berlin, and the others were from near-by German centers and had been herded into the Reich capital for the train trip to Seville, Spain.

### Left Berlin in Special Train

They left Berlin in special trains that departed over a period of six days, all carrying food for the train journey as far as the Spanish city, and each carrying the equivalent of \$4, all they were permitted to take out.

In the Berlin party was Paul David, 48, a former manager of a wholesale concern in Berlin, who was accompanied by his wife and daughter, Ingeborg, 15.

"The conditions on the ship were awful," he said. "There was only one pipe at which the passengers could get cold drinking water and one for hot water. We paid \$414 each for our tickets and \$8 in addition for tax. The stewards and other crew members did not treat us well. Perhaps it is their way, perhaps it is because they are untrained for this sort of thing. After all, this is just a freighter, and none of us had any idea what we were coming to when we started for Seville.

"The very best you could say is that as freight we were treated satisfactorily, but just freight, not passengers. We were stacked down in the cargo holds and there

we traveled, coming up now and then to stand in the sun or sit on the deck or on our traveling chairs that we brought with us.

"The food was very bad, especially at the beginning, although later it improved after they stopped serving the fish that made every one sick."

Mr. David was one who said he felt that with all the suffering on board most of the passengers felt happy and satisfied.

"We could only stand this trip because it meant out salvation," he said. "It was just an intermezzo, although a bad one. It will be forgotten here."

### "Grand Trip," Says Captain

In contrast to the sentiments expressed by many of the passengers was a statement made by Captain Manuel Martinez, master of the freighter. Speaking through an interpreter after he had reached the pier Captain Martinez asserted:

"It was a grand trip. The passengers seemed to be very well satisfied with the treatment they got."

Although he seemed to regard the crossing as quite ordinary, Captain Martinez admitted that he had "never carried so many passengers on a cargo ship."

A petition was submitted to the United States Consul at Havana by sixteen of the passengers who charged that they "had been lured on the boat under false pretenses," it was said.

The petition asked for an "official investigation" and asserted that a great number of passengers contemplated legal action against the operators of the ship, it was said.





# STRUMA

If the Navemar was “a flowing Gurs,” the Struma was the ship that never made it. On December 12, 1941, a Greek boat with a Bulgarian captain under a Panamanian flag left Constanta, the Romanian seaport on the Black Sea, bound for Palestine. On board were 769 Jewish refugees who, after paying an exorbitant price to travel on a renovated ship, found themselves on a dilapidated cattle boat.

That the voyage on the Struma for over 600 people with one bathroom and no kitchen was “not a pleasure trip” is a gross understatement. But nothing would have ultimately mattered had its passengers made it to their destination. After breaking down several times, the Struma made it safely in three days to Istanbul.

*Sipahi 57  
Comandant 50  
Haker 50  
Leid 60-126-240  
Bărbăni 40  
Femele 30  
Saklayon 25  
Bajamaden 24  
Yemik 24  
Erdi 20  
Tayip 24  
Birin Kalm 24  
Birin Kalm 20  
Vigancu 15  
Hammerli 17  
Hale Kalm 14  
Koyu Kalm 11  
Koyu Kalm 11  
Gogu 9  
Tibi 14*

**Instrucțiuni de călătorie**

Din momentul când ați pus piciorul pe vaporul „STRUMA”, pornind spre o viață nouă, orice deosebire de rang și de clasă dispăre. Sunteți cu toții EVREI, porniți spre țara voastră, spre o viață nouă.

**Drum bun.**

**Bun sosît în Palestina!**

Citind acest prospect de călătorie, sunteți invitați să vă familiarizați cu gândul că nu faceți o călătorie de agrement.

Viața în comun a 600 oameni, într’un spațiu restrâns, în condiții

(ABOVE) “TRAVEL INSTRUCTIONS” THAT ACCOMPANIED A REGISTRATION DOCUMENT ISSUED TO DAVID STOLIAR, BORN IN KISHINEV, A PASSENGER ON THE STRUMA. THE ROMANIAN TEXT READS:

FROM THE MOMENT WHEN YOU SET YOUR FOOT ON THE SHIP STRUMA, STARTING ON A NEW LIFE, ANY DIFFERENCES IN RANK OR CLASS WILL DISAPPEAR. YOU ARE ALL JEWS SETTING OUT FOR YOUR COUNTRY, FOR A NEW LIFE.

BON VOYAGE!

WELCOME TO PALESTINE!

READING THIS TRAVEL PLAN, YOU SHOULD GET USED TO THE IDEA THAT THIS IS NOT A PLEASURE TRIP. THE LIFE IN COMMON OF 600 PEOPLE IN A CONSTRAINED PLACE IN CONDITIONS OF... [TEXT BROKEN OFF].

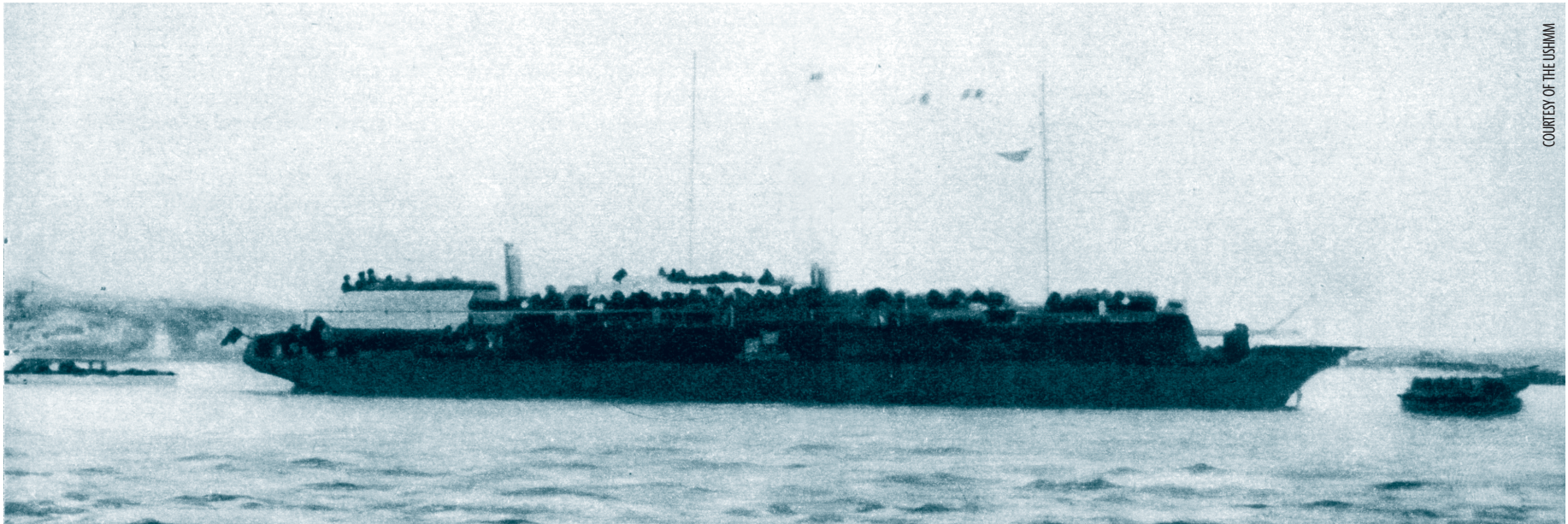
COURTESY OF THE USHMM



NEWSPAPER CLIPPING (ABOVE) WITH THE PHOTO OF THE LIVOWSHI FAMILY, WHO WERE AMONG THE 760 JEWS ON BOARD THE STRUMA



The Turkish authorities, however, would not allow the passengers to land, forcing the Struma to be anchored offshore in a quarantine section of the port. The boat's engine kept breaking down. On top of this, the refugees were informed that there were no British immigration certificates waiting for them in spite of the inflated price that they had paid for the tickets, a price that was to include the entry certificates.



VIEW OF THE STRUMA IN THE ISTANBUL HARBOR

Because the Struma was not allowed into Palestine, nor allowed to stay in Turkey, nor to return to Romania, it remained anchored and isolated for ten weeks. Finally, Turkey forced the Struma back into the Black Sea. Its engines not working, Turkish tug boats towed the ship six miles from the coast and left it there without water, food or fuel. After a few hours of drifting, the boat exploded and sunk.

“Who sank the Struma? And how? These questions have been exhaustively examined, and the known facts point to a mistaken attack by a Soviet submarine.” (Dalia Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust*, p. 153)



The poster above reads: Tel-Aviv Municipality. City announcement #6  
**MOURNING FOR THE STRUMA VICTIMS**  
 The national organizations and the Tel Aviv municipality have decided to designate today, Thursday the 16th of Adar 5702, a day of mourning for the entire Yishuv (population) in light of the great tragedy that befell the Jewish people with the death of the clandestine immigrants who died on board the "Struma" in their quest to reach the national homeland and the closing of the gates of the land.  
**WE DECLARE A WORK STOPPAGE**  
 In all walks of life, businesses, factories and transportation from 12:00 noon till 7:00 p.m. From that time on the population is also requested  
**TO REMAIN IN THEIR HOUSES AND NOT STEP OUTSIDE**





David Stoliar, now a rich businessman (far left), first heard of the existence of the Struma through the advertisement (above) in a Romanian newspaper. It seemed that the only problem in getting to Palestine was the limited number of places left. Stoliar bought a ticket (left). The Struma, grossly overcrowded, crawled into Istanbul. The British, unwilling to risk Arab hostility to further Jewish immigration at this crucial time, refused to clear the boat for Palestine. She was towed out of Turkish waters and was sunk, probably by torpedo, on February 24, 1942 (below). Jewish terrorists accused the British High Commissioner of murder (far left)



IDENTITY CARD OF DAVID STOLIAR

PORTRAIT OF DAVID STOLIAR (LEFT) WITH SIMON BROD, THE JEWISH AGENCY REPRESENTATIVE IN ISTANBUL WHO SECURED HIS RELEASE FROM PRISON

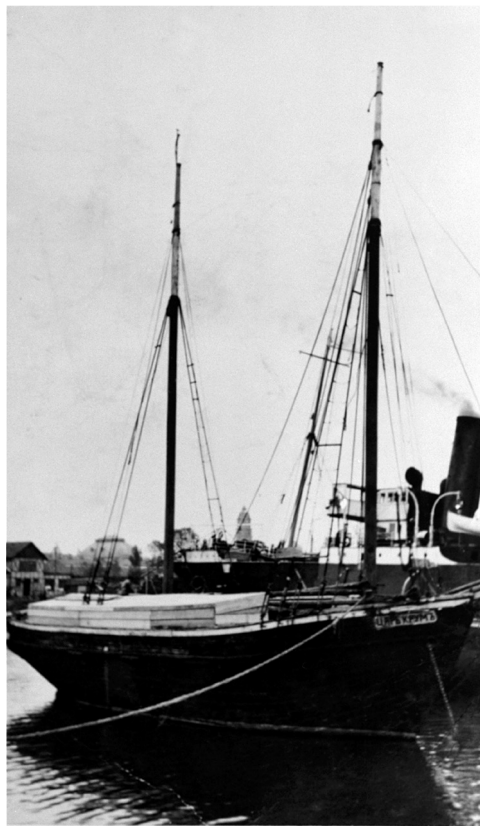


COURTESY OF THE USHMM

All the 760 passengers aboard the Struma drowned, except one: David Stoliar. He was rescued from the wreckage by Turks operating a nearby lighthouse. Taken to Istanbul, he spent a brief period in a Turkish military hospital and later kept in prison before being granted an immigration certificate for Palestine where he arrived in April 1942. The following year he enlisted in the British army.



# SALVADOR



THE SALVADOR

PORTRAIT OF ADELA VARNA, A  
BULGARIAN JEWISH REFUGEE  
JUST PRIOR TO HER DEPARTURE  
ABOARD THE SALVADOR



COURTESY OF THE USHMM

The Struma tragedy was the most dramatic to befall the transport of Jewish refugees to Palestine, although by far not the only one. Just a year before the departure of the Struma, on December 3, 1940, the old and decrepit Bulgarian boat, Salvador, under the command of a Bulgarian captain and a Uruguayan flag, left Varna, Bulgaria, laden with refugees. Most were Bulgarian Jews, with a few Eastern European and German Jews. As was the case with the refugees on the Struma, the Jews on the Salvador were part of the “ha’palah,” (resolute ascent) the clandestine immigration operation run by the Zionist leadership aimed at bringing Jews to Palestine, flaunting the British Mandate authorities’ quotas on Jewish immigration.

As one can appreciate just by looking at the Salvador, the boat had no cabins or bunks, no compass or weather instruments, no life jackets, and a capacity of about 30-40 people. And yet 325 Jewish refugees were packed into its crammed quarters.

Three days after its departure the Salvador entered the port of Istanbul requesting to remain there until a savage storm blew over. A week later the Salvador was towed outside the Bosphorus and left there. A few hours later another snow storm broke out. No matter how hard the captain tried, the Salvador was tossed onto rocks and sank. Three hundred and three corpses were washed on shore including 66 children. The few survivors were sheltered for a time by the Jewish community in Istanbul. Some of them had to return to Bulgaria and others eventually reached Palestine.



# HILDA ATRATO LIBERTAD COLORADO

Along with the Struma and the Salvador there were many other ships harnessed by Zionist leaders working against time trying to rescue fellow Jews. The Atrato, the Colorado, the Libertad and the Hilda were some of them. All of these vessels were ill equipped for their purpose and desperate refugees crowded their decks well beyond their capacity.

The Atrato made seven journeys back and forth from European ports in Italy, Romania and Bulgaria, almost on a monthly basis, from November 1938 to May 1939. Enormous efforts and fine-tuned strategies were devised to avoid the British naval patrols going up and down the coast of Palestine guarding against the “illegal” immigrants. While the Atrato successfully avoided the patrols on most of its journeys, the British took hold of the ship during its last journey on May 29, 1939. They towed it to the port of Haifa and held the refugees for a long time in a detention camp before being freed.



THE HILDA

The Libertad had left the Bulgarian seaport of Varna in June 1940 with 390 Jewish refugees. Once on the open sea, the Libertad faced a fierce storm that almost drowned the vessel. Its engine broke and a distress signal brought a tugboat from the port of Burgas that towed the ship to port. It was clear that the ship was in no condition to travel. And yet another Bulgarian tugboat with police on board pulled the ship outside Bulgarian territorial waters. The pleading passengers persuaded the Bulgarians to tow them to Turkish waters. The Turkish authorities were no less inconsiderate than the Bulgarians, and towed the Libertad back into the open sea. The Libertad finally made it to the coast of Palestine on July 18, 1940. As if the suffering had not been enough, the refugees were detained by the British and interned for a year in the Atlit detention camp in a small town south of Mt. Carmel until freed.



THE LIBERTAD

# PENTCHO

The odyssey of another ship, the Pentcho, did not end tragically for its passengers as it did for the Jews on the Struma and the Salvador. But the suffering they endured is little known. Suffice it to say that the refugees embarked on the Pentcho in Bratislava (on the Danube, Czechoslovakia) on May 18, 1940 and did not arrive to Palestine until May 28, 1944, a four-year journey.

This small riverboat carried over 500 Jewish refugees rescued from the Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald concentration camps in Germany and from the Sosnowiec ghetto in Poland. Their journey: a month on the Danube; weeks of wandering in waters between Bulgaria and Rumania; only five months after leaving Bratislava allowed to proceed to the Black Sea; engine malfunction near the Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean Sea; ran aground on nearby deserted islands; on October 18 an Italian warship found the refugees and landed them in Rhodes; in January 1942 they were transferred to the south of Italy. Finally, in April 1944, Moshe Sharett – who would later become Israel's first foreign minister – visited the Jewish Legion in Italy and persuaded the British commander in Ferramonte to grant immigration certificates to the stranded refugees.



COURTESY CLAUDESTEIN IMMIGRATION MUSEUM

THE PENTCHO





*The tragedy brought about by the sinking of a fleet of ships carrying prisoners, sunk in the Neustadt Bay area on May 3, 1945, has gone down in history as the "CAP ARCONA" catastrophe. Well over 8,000 people... lost their lives in this part of the Baltic as a result of starvation, exhaustion, murder or the British aerial attack on the tonnage theoretically remaining to the German army. The majority of these people were prisoners from the concentration camps Neuengamme, Stutthof and the secondary camp established for Auschwitz.*

WILHELM LANGE, CAP ARCONA: DOKUMENTATION



As the war was ending it became increasingly vital for the Nazis to dispose of their most important “witnesses,” the prisoners in the concentration camps, most of them Jews. Among them there were a few thousand who were force-marched and packed on three ships that were no longer seaworthy: the Cap Arcona, the Thielbeck and the Athen anchored in Lübeck Bay. The Nazi aim was to sink the ships and drown the prisoners. Since the Germans had not identified the ships as prisons for refugees, the RAF bombed them unaware of the despairing human cargo on board. Most died in a matter of minutes. 450 people survived.

*“The tragic deaths of so many who had suffered so much for so long were quickly forgotten... The unfortunate victims who perished at the close of history’s worst conflagration were quickly lost in the fleeting euphoria of peace.”*

*“The Friendly Fires of Hell”* by Robert J. White-Harvey in *The Jerusalem Post*, April 18, 2007

Wilhelm Lange attributes the British bombing to what may be called the worst friendly fire incident in history. On the other hand, Benjamin Jacobs, a survivor wrote:

*“Declassified records released by the British Royal Air Force in 1975 conclusively proved that the ships were indeed sunk by the RAF. Why is still a mystery.”*  
Benjamin Jacobs, *The Dentist of Auschwitz: A Memoir*

# CAP ARCONA



אין פייער און אין וואַסער האָבן זײַ דעם טויט געפונען  
א בילד פון דער טראגישער היטלער־שיף „קאפֿ אַר־קאָנאַ“ איף װעלכער ס׳זײַנען אומגעקומען טויזנטער יידן

A WOODCARVING BY B. FRIEDLER PORTRAYING THE TRAGEDY OF THE SHIPS. THE YIDDISH TEXT READS:  
“THEY FOUND THEIR DEATH IN FIRE AND IN WATER. A PICTURE OF THE TRAGIC HITLER-SHIP “CAP ARCONA”  
WHERE THOUSANDS OF JEWS DIED.”

ATHEN THEILBECK



# DONAU

# BREDVEIT MONTE ROSA

Some of the Ships to Nowhere were stranded in the seas; other ships almost arrived to their destination only to be turned away helplessly wandering the seas with their desperate human cargo on board in search of a port; one of the ships was torpedoed and sank; other ships saw their engines break down on the high seas lacking any navigation instruments on board; and yet other ships also transported Jews straight to the Auschwitz death camp.

18 On November 26, 1942, three ships, the Bredtveit, the Donau and the Monte Rosa carried hundreds of Norwegian Jews first to Stettin (Szczecin) and then to Auschwitz where they all perished.

On November 2000, Oslo unveiled a memorial to this tragedy. The sculpture by British artist Anthony Gormley, commissioned by the Oslo Jewish community and the Norwegian parliament, is located on the south side of the Oslo Fjord, near the point on the harbor from which the ships sailed. It is composed of eight empty chairs to reflect the thought of "absence."

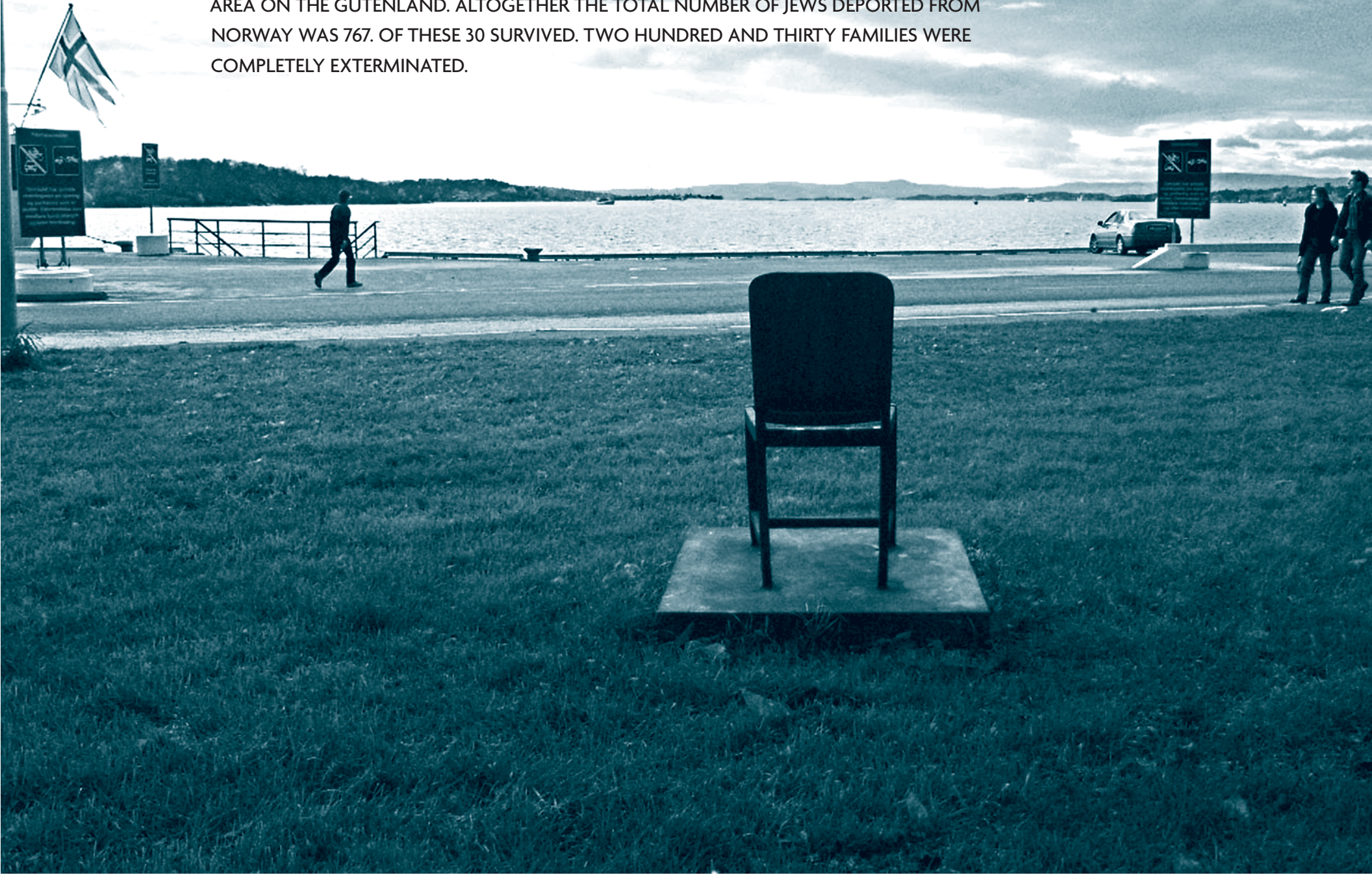


EMPTY CHAIRS BY ARTIST ANTHONY GORMLEY



*A nearby plaque bears the following inscription:*

ON 26 NOVEMBER 1942, 532 NORWEGIAN JEWS WERE DEPORTED FROM THIS AREA ON THE CARGO VESSEL DONAU. THIS WAS THE FIRST STEP ON THE JOURNEY TO THE DEATH CAMP AUSCHWITZ. ON 25 FEBRUARY 1943, A FURTHER 158 JEWS WERE DEPORTED FROM THIS AREA ON THE GUTENLAND. ALTOGETHER THE TOTAL NUMBER OF JEWS DEPORTED FROM NORWAY WAS 767. OF THESE 30 SURVIVED. TWO HUNDRED AND THIRTY FAMILIES WERE COMPLETELY EXTERMINATED.







## SUGGESTED READINGS

Zé'ev Venia Hadari and Zé'ev Tsahor, *Voyage to Freedom:*

*An Episode in the Illegal Immigration to Palestine.*

A comprehensive study of the moving force behind the organization for "Immigration B," (the Mossad Le'Aliya Bet) to Palestine.

Shai Horev, *S'finot b'Terem Shachar* (in Hebrew)

*(Dawning Ships: The Story of the Clandestine Immigration Ships)*

A two or three page comprehensive narrative about every ship that transported illegal Jewish immigrants to Palestine.

Benjamin Jacobs, *The Dentist of Auschwitz: A Memoir*

A survivor's personal account of the Shoa including surviving after the bombing of the Cap Arcona

Wilhelm Lange, *Cap Arcona* (in German)

Thoroughly documented account of the tragedy

Dalia Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939-1944.*

A scholarly study of the clandestine immigration to Palestine, including valuable information on the role of the ships that transported the illegal immigrants.

Sarah A. Ogilvie and Scott Miller, *Refuge Denied: The St. Louis Passengers and the Holocaust.*

A scholarly work bordering on detective work trying to trace the St. Louis passengers' experiences.

Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan Witts, *Voyage of the Damned.*

A comprehensive story of the S.S. St Louis story.

## VIDEO

"Caribia & Koenigstein, Ships of Hope"

The story of the arrival in Venezuela of two ships filled with Jewish refugees.

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Eduardo J. Martí, Ph.D., President of the College

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TELEPHONE: 718-281-5770 • FAX: 718-631-6306 • E-MAIL: [HRC@QCC.CUNY.EDU](mailto:HRC@QCC.CUNY.EDU)  
WEBSITE: [WWW.QCC.CUNY.EDU/HRCA](http://WWW.QCC.CUNY.EDU/HRCA)

### EXHIBIT CURATED BY

Rabbi Isidoro Aizenberg

### TEXT WRITTEN BY

Rabbi Isidoro Aizenberg

### DOCENTS AND VOLUNTEERS

Ellen Alexander	Hanne Liebmman
Julius Grill	Linda Ramirez
Esther Katz	Joachim M. Schorr
Jane Keibel	

### DESIGNER

David Arroyo,  
*Director of Publications,*  
*Office of Institutional Advancement*

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For information, contact: Dr. Arthur Flug, Executive Director.



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