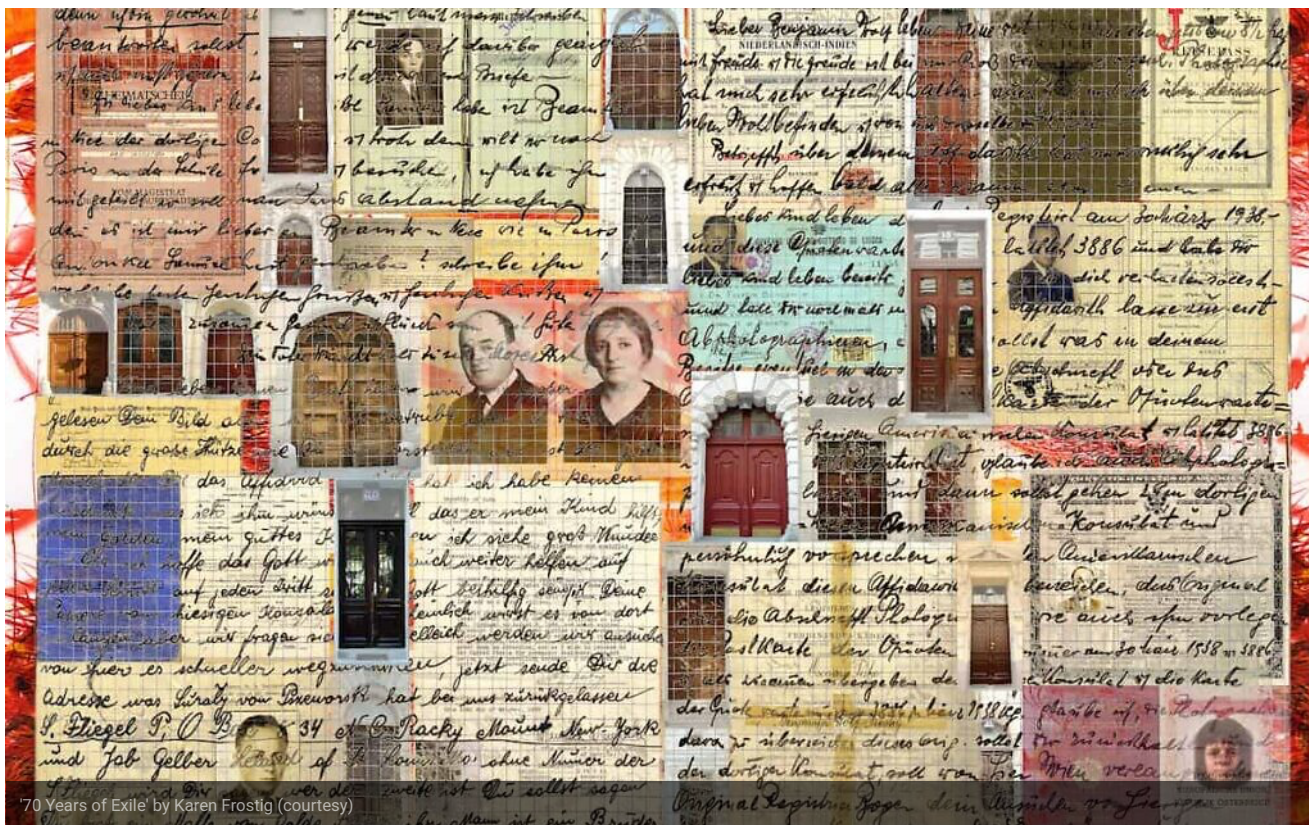


PROJECT AIMS TO FIND EVIDENCE OF SITE'S 'ERASED' MASS GRAVES

Obscure Nazi concentration camp in Latvia put back on map by art professor

Karen Frostig's 'Locker of Memory' project unites Jungfernhof survivors and descendants, officials in Latvia, around Holocaust 'memory work' including plan for on-site memorial

By **MATT LEBOVIC** | Today, 5:16 am

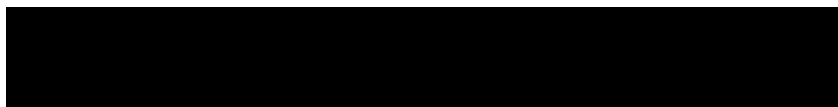


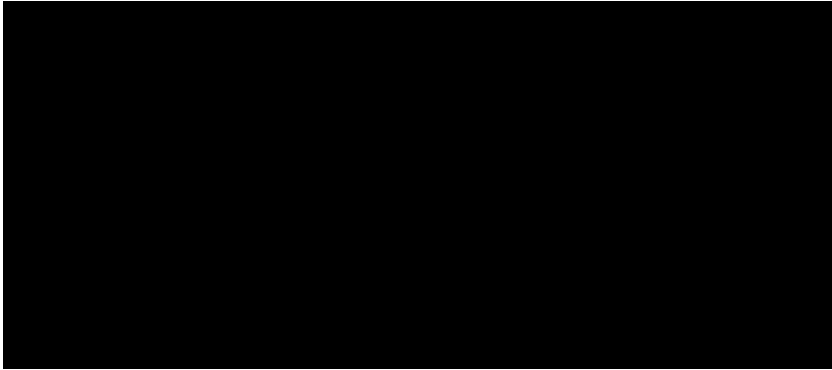
1 2 3 4

A lush park outside Latvia's capital will soon house a memorial to victims of Nazi Germany's Jungfernhof concentration camp, which operated on the site during World War II.

Beginning in late 1941, about 4,000 Jews were deported to the "improvised" Jungfernhof camp outside Riga. Nearly all of them were murdered or worked to death within several months, including the grandparents of Massachusetts-based public art expert Karen Frostig.

"There is nothing that remains at this site. No records, no photos," Frostig told The Times of Israel on the [heels of remarks she gave](#) at the United Nations for International Holocaust Remembrance Day in January.





When Frostig first visited the former camp in 2007, and again in 2010, the area “was filled with trash and there was no evidence that a concentration camp existed on the land,” she said.

During her 2010 visit, Frostig presented a Jungfernhof memorial proposal to Latvian officials. The plan was initially dismissed because Jungfernhof was considered too remote, but Frostig was not deterred.

**Get The Times of Israel's Daily Edition
by email and never miss our top stories**

GET IT

By signing up, you agree to the [terms](#)

Upon returning to Jungfernhof in 2019, the trash had been removed and the site converted into a public park. A large sign detailing 800 years of history at the site referenced “German and Austrian Jews assigned forced labor in agriculture,” said Frostig.



Former Nazi Jungfernhof concentration camp outside Riga, Latvia, 2007 (Karen Frostig/The Locker of Memory)

On March 26, 1942, more than 1,800 Jews were taken from Jungfernhof and murdered in the “Dünamünde Aktion,” which targeted children, the elderly, and the infirm. The massacre was carried out by Latvian auxiliary police — the “Arajs Kommando” — under the direction of German SS officers.

The names of “Dünamünde Aktion” victims and other Jews murdered at Jungfernhof will be inscribed on the memorial envisioned by Frostig, a “blackened steel, vertical cubicle developed as a memory locker, inscribed with 3,985 names,” including the names of 149 survivors.

‘The locker of memory’

Frostig’s vision — called “The Locker of Memory” — includes a garden and canopy-like element to be installed above the site’s mass grave, but nothing will be built or planted on the ground where 800 corpses were buried and later planted over on orders of the SS.



Karen Frostig, Holocaust memory activist and art professor at Lesley University (courtesy)

“The only way this is going to work is if the memorial is a meaningful and reflective place for people,” said Frostig. “And the public needs to interact with the process,” she added.

Since her last visit to the site four years ago, Frostig has united stakeholders in Latvia, Germany, and Austria — as well as Jungfernhof survivors and descendants — around the project.

“This project is about restoring history to an unremembered site,” said Frostig, an art professor at Lesley University outside Boston. “I want to keep the memory of what took place there previously, to keep it safe,” she said.



Moses Frostig
(1882-1941/1942)

Beile Samuely Frostig
(1887-1941/1942)

Karen Frostig's grandparents, who were murdered at the Nazi concentration camp Jungfernhof, outside Riga, Latvia (courtesy)

Currently, interactive tools for visitors to engage in self-directed learning include 3D maps of the region with Holocaust killing sites marked and information about the “transports” of Jews brought to Jungfernhof during the camp’s brief existence.

“It has to be participatory if we are trying to engage the next generation,” said Frostig, whose previous large-scale Holocaust memory project was [staged in Vienna](#) almost ten years ago.

So far, there has not been opposition to plans for the memorial, said Frostig. The park will remain a park, traversed by bicyclists and rollerbladers, and people walking along the adjacent river.



'70 Years of Exile' by Karen Frostig (courtesy)

“There is a willingness to work together, the Jewish community and Latvian officials both support the development of a permanent memorial at the site,” said Frostig.

‘Stories floating around in families’

Since last winter, Frostig has convened a group of Jungfernhof survivors and descendants. Meeting monthly with about a dozen participants, the group has helped steer Frostig’s thinking around the project.

“There are three living survivors that come to every meeting,” said Frostig. “Their presence is so powerful.”



Jungfernhof aerial view during World War II (courtesy: The Locker of Memory/Karen Frostig)

Frostig's personal journey into Holocaust memory work was jump-started in 1991 when she found a small box in her mother's basement. Inside were documents related to her father's departure from Vienna after Germany's annexation of Austria in 1938.

After Frostig's father fled Vienna, he was unable to rescue his parents. This became a source of enduring shame and trauma for him, said Frostig, who also has letters from relatives trapped in Europe written to her father.

Growing up, Frostig knew that two passport photos on a wall were of her father's parents, "but no one ever talked about them, they hung in silence," said Frostig.



German Jews deported to Riga, Latvia, by the Nazis (USHMM)

In 1942, Frostig's grandparents were [among the](#) Austrian Jews deported from Vienna to Jungfernhof and several other sites in the region.

Frostig has no specific information about what happened to her grandparents at the camp, but three historians serving on the project team — Richards Plavnieks, Evan Robins, and Fred Zimmak — unearthed information including a chart listing prisoners in the camp who taught other inmates lessons in math, art, and music.

“There were 149 survivors, so there must be a lot of stories floating around in families,” said Frostig.



Road to former Nazi concentration camp Jungfernhof outside Riga, Latvia (The Locker of Memory/Karen Frostig)

According to testimony, the camp included a warehouse, barns, and prisoner barracks. There was no fence around the camp, so Latvian auxiliary police patrolled the perimeter to prevent escapes.

‘The earth and its richness’

Frostig's research trips to Riga have given her insight into Latvians' willingness to confront the past, particularly relating to World War II.

“People are starting to feel very affectionate about working on this,” said Frostig, adding that some people living near

the park were not aware of the site's role in the Holocaust.



One of the proposed visions for a memorial at the former Jungfernhof concentration camp outside Riga, Latvia (courtesy: The Locker of Memory/Karen Frostig)

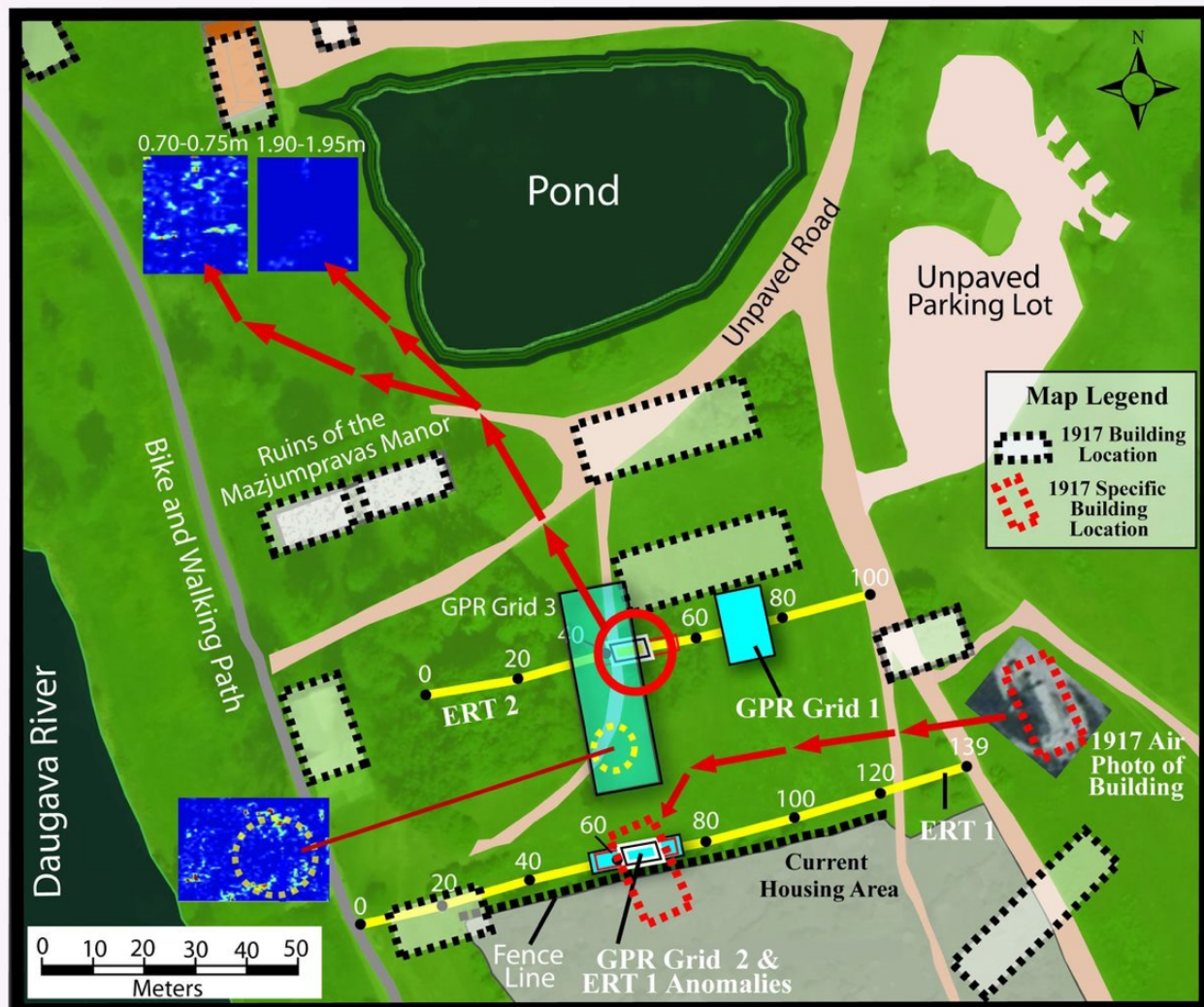
Even when people are aware, “some of them say it’s not their history, it was occupied,” said Frostig, who added that “many Latvians acknowledge a history of collaboration, and some do not.”

To this day, Nazi collaborators are honored in Latvia, including the construction of memorials — [and large public demonstrations](#) — in honor of the Latvian Legion, the country’s Waffen-SS formation.

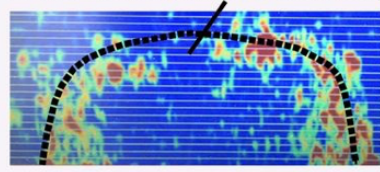
With an expansionist Russia at its border, Latvia is at a “turning point” in both confronting its past and demonstrating a commitment to democracy, said Frostig, who plans to visit Riga this summer.

Jungfernhof Concentration Camp Riga, Latvia

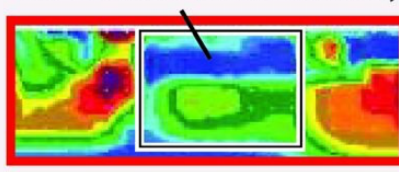
Participating Institutions: Museum of the Jews in Latvia, Christopher Newport University, Duquesne University, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, BGC Engineering, Inc.



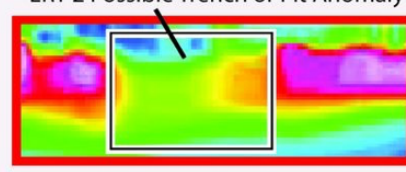
GPR 2 Possible Trench or Pit Anomaly



ERT 1 Possible Trench or Pit Anomaly



ERT 2 Possible Trench or Pit Anomaly



Cartography by Philip Reeder, Ph.D

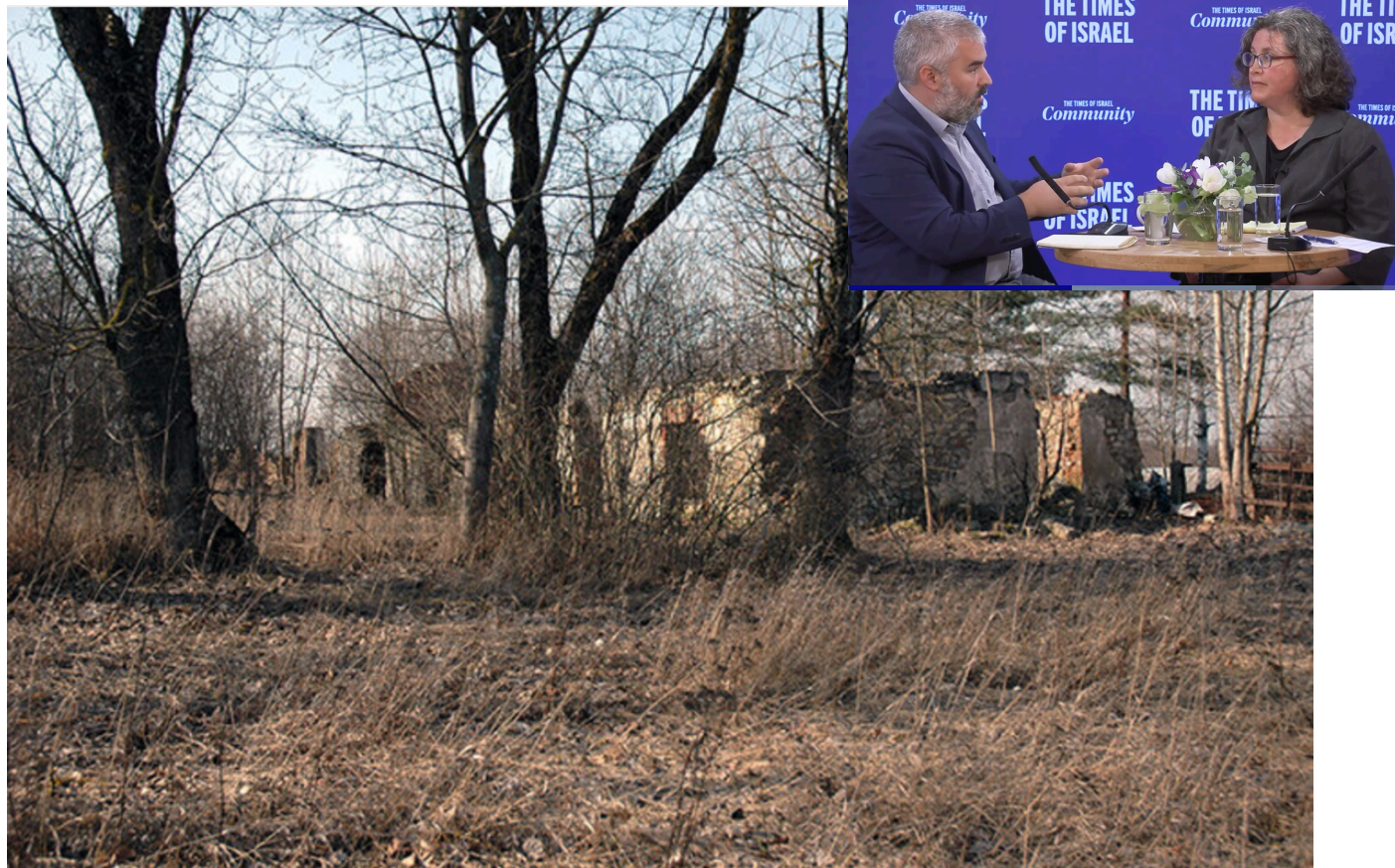
Electrical resistivity drone image for The Locker of Memory Project, at the former Nazi concentration camp Jungfernhof, outside Riga, Latvia (Philip Reeder/The Locker of Memory)

Working alongside researchers, Frostig hopes to identify Jungfernhof's mass grave, despite German attempts to erase

evidence of the murders. Using ground-penetrating radar (GPR), investigators already uncovered — and ruled out as a mass grave — the footprint of a barn.





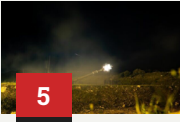



With most Holocaust memorials situated in urban centers, “the earth and its richness” at verdant Jungfernhof have been a source of fascination and inspiration for Frostig, as she forms her own tactile connections to the site where her grandparents were murdered.

“The earth in that place is very special, embodying our deepest memories of an unimaginable past, as it sustains us toward healing,” said Frostig.



Former Nazi concentration camp Jungfernhof, outside Riga, Latvia (The Locker of Memory/Karen Frostig)

MOST POPULAR

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|---|---|
|  <p>1</p> |  <p>2</p> |  <p>3</p> |  <p>4</p> |  <p>5</p> |  <p>6</p> |
| <p>Two men hurt in terror shooting in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah</p> | <p>Senior Hamas delegation seen in Saudi Arabia ahead of expected rapprochement talks</p> | <p>Israel grinds to a halt as siren wails to commemorate 6 million Holocaust victims</p> | <p>Halina Birenbaum survived the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. She saw heroism elsewhere</p> | <p>Israeli politics are in chaos. Are its enemies poised to take advantage?</p> | <p>Iran threatens to destroy Tel Aviv and Haifa, as Israel marks Holocaust memorial day</p> |
|  <p>7</p> | | |  <p>8</p> | | |
| <p>Ben Gvir, ADL trade barbs over 'Jewish racism' section in latest antisemitism report</p> | | | <p>Palestinian woman stabs Israeli in Gush Etzion, is shot by soldiers</p> | | |

Conversation 1 Comment

25 Viewing

Discussions are moderated for civility. Read the guidelines [here](#).

[Log in](#) | [Sign up](#)

What do you think? 😊 📷 GIF

Sort by **Best** ▾

ML

Thanks for this project and this excellent article.

mort Laitner
Reply ago 1 👍 · [Share](#)