In 2013 the Museum of the History of Polish Jews will open in Warsaw, and in April 2013 Poland, Israel, and people around the world will celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the first major civilian revolt in German-occupied Europe during the Second World War. Since the war's end, the heroes of the uprising, and the uprising itself, have been memorialized on stamps of both Poland and Israel. Here is an account of those philatelic tributes and, briefly, the associated history.

Just before World War II, Jews constituted about ten percent of Poland's 35 million citizens, while in Warsaw, the capital, there were more than 330,000 Jews, nearly thirty percent of the city's population. For these unfortunates, the blitzkrieg unleashed on Poland by Nazi Germany in September 1939, and the ensuing German occupation, were to have the most dire consequences. Whether Nazi policy toward Eastern Europe's Jews was preordained, or evolved in stages to be finalized at the Wannsee Conference in Berlin in January 1942, its goal became total annihilation or, to use a more current locution: genocide.

The implementation of this “final solution” in Poland was insidious and progressive. By the end of 1939, Polish Jews were deprived of their civil rights and forced to wear blue Star of David armbands. Their businesses were confiscated, their bank accounts looted. A year later, in October 1940, it was decreed that all of Warsaw's Jews were to reside in a walled-off “Jewish Quarter,” which became known as the Warsaw Ghetto. Ghettos were also established in many other cities — such as Lodz, Vilna, Krakow, Minsk, and Kovno — but the Warsaw Ghetto was the most populous.

With Warsaw's Jews concentrated into an impossibly small, densely populated area, and deprived of resources and livelihood, starvation and disease began to decimate the Ghetto; mortality rates averaged 3,900 per month in 1941–1942. This attrition, however, was too slow for the Germans, who, beginning in July 1942, instituted mass deportations of the Warsaw Ghetto Jews for “resettlement to the East.” In reality, “resettlement” meant murder in concentration camps like Treblinka, a fate that became known in the Ghetto from the reports of escapees. The deportations were relentless; for example, in August 1942, more than 130,000 people were deported.

Until the deportations began, the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto had practiced spiritual resistance: schools, libraries, and makeshift hospitals were opened, literary evenings, plays, and concerts took place. Historians under the direction of Emmanuel Ringelblum compiled detailed records of daily events with the intent of documenting the ongoing persecution and murder of Warsaw's Jews. Although Ringel-
blum and many of his colleagues were themselves killed, their records, buried in milk cans, were found after the war and published as *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*. They also inspired John Hersey's searing fictionalized chronicle of the Ghetto, *The Wall*.

With unrelenting deportation, it became clear that all of the Ghetto's inhabitants were doomed and that physical resistance, no matter how unlikely to succeed, was preferable to passive acquiescence. In late October 1942 various political movements, notably *HaShomer Hatzair* (a Zionist-Socialist youth movement) and the *Po'alei Zion* (the Zionist Workers Party), agreed on a consolidation of forces into the Z.O.B. (*Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa*—The Jewish Combat Organization). Twenty-three-year-old Mordecai Anielewicz of *HaShomer Hatzair* was appointed commander of the Z.O.B.

The initial actions of the Z.O.B. were several assassinations of Jewish collaborators, but the major activity was preparation for combat against the Nazis and their allies. At night, bunkers were readied beneath Ghetto buildings and stocked with provisions and medicines. Underground communications tunnels were constructed, and small arms were smuggled into the ghetto with the aid of the Polish resistance groups *Armia Ludowa* and *Armia Krajowa*. On January 18, 1943 the Germans began a new *Aktion* intended as the start of the final deportation of the remaining Jews in the Ghetto. Germans conducting Jews to the deportation assembly point were attacked with pistols and hand grenades. Many Germans and most of their Jewish attackers were killed in this battle, but the Germans withdrew. Sporadic conflict continued until April 1943, when the Nazis resolved to raze the Ghetto.

On the eve of Passover, April 19, a Nazi force of about 1,200 men, mostly SS, entered the Ghetto. They were fired on from every side and ultimately withdrew. A new German commander, Jurgen Stroop, was appointed by Himmler. Stroop decided to burn the Ghetto block by block, thus eliminating the Jewish fighters and their bunkers. The fighting continued for two weeks, with the Nazis using poison gas, tear gas, and smoke candles to force fighters from the bunkers. At last, on May 8, the Germans penetrated to the headquarters of the Z.O.B. at 18 Mila Street, an address made famous in Leon Uris's novel of the same name. Many of the occupants, including Mordecai Anielewicz, took their own lives rather than surrender, recalling the actions of the doomed Jewish defenders of Masada, the Negev mountain-top fortress from which they resisted the Romans some 1,870 years previously. The Warsaw Ghetto was utterly destroyed. Some 7,000 defenders died in the battle and 56,000 Jews were "deported," most to be murdered in the gas chambers of Majdanek and Treblinka. Stroop celebrated his "victory" by dynamiting the Great Synagogue on Tlomackie Street, which dated from 1878. He received the Iron Cross for his command of the Warsaw Ghetto *Grossaktion*.

Some of the leaders of the uprising managed to escape from the Ghetto via the sewer system and join partisan groups in the countryside, among them Marek Edelman, who later fought in the 1944 general Warsaw uprising against the Germans. Many others perished. It is worth quoting from Anielewicz's last letter:

"It is impossible to describe the conditions under which the Jews of the ghetto are now living. Only a few will be able to hold out. The remainder will die sooner or later. Their fate is decided. In almost all the hiding places in which thousands are concealing themselves it is not possible to light a candle for lack of air…. Peace go with you, my..."
friend! Perhaps we may still meet again! The dream of my life has risen to become fact. Self-defense in the ghetto will have been a reality. Jewish armed resistance and revenge are facts. I have been a witness to the magnificent, heroic fighting of Jewish men in battle.

The Z.O.B. and its leaders bring to mind David's elegy for Saul and Jonathan, who fell in battle against the Philistines: They “were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.” As for Jurgen Stroop, he was tried in Warsaw in 1951, sentenced to death, and hung at the site of the Ghetto in March 1952.

The first philatelic commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising came in 1948 on the fifth anniversary, with the issuance of Poland (Scott 418). This moving tribute depicts two archetypal fighters, a woman and a man, but we cast no shame upon them by noting that their expressions and body language reflect the general hopelessness of their struggle. Simultaneously, however, a seminal event occurred that was to dominate future iconography of the uprising: the unveiling on April 19, 1948 of Natan Rapoport's heroic Warsaw Ghetto Monument. The first philatelic appearance of the monument was on a Polish issue of 1956, drawn by the outstanding engraver Czeslaw Slania.

The sculptor Natan Rapoport was born to working class Jewish parents in Warsaw in 1911. Trained at the Warsaw Academy of Arts, he later studied abroad in Italy and France, where he was influenced by the art of Rodin. Rapoport, who was a member of HaShomer Hatzair, returned to Warsaw in 1939, but escaped during the German siege of the city, making his way to Bialystok and then Minsk in Russian-occupied Eastern Europe. Following the German invasion of Russia, Rapoport finally reached Novosibirsk where, after a stint in a labor camp, he was installed in an artist’s studio sculpting busts of Russian generals, partisans, and workers. News of the Warsaw Ghetto’s uprising and destruction devastated him, and he began to plan a memorial monument. His early designs were rejected by Stalinist authorities in Russia, but the war’s end enabled his return to Warsaw in 1946. There, amid the rubble of the city, his proposed monument was approved by the Warsaw Art Committee, which carefully weighed the political implications of a memorial to Jewish fighters in a Poland under Soviet sway. Rapoport was told that the monument had to be ready for the fifth anniversary of the Ghetto uprising. However, it was impossible to cast a bronze monument in ravaged Warsaw, so the sculptor returned to Paris, where he pondered what form it should take. Modern sculpture had become increasingly abstract, but he was certain that only an heroic, figurative representation could adequately commemorate the martyrdom and resistance of the Ghetto:

Could I have made a stone with a hole in it.... No, I needed to show the heroism, to illustrate it literally in figures everyone, not just artists, could respond to.... I did not want to represent resistance in the abstract: it was not an abstract uprising. It was real.

The dominant central figure of Rapoport’s sculpture is Mordecai Anielewicz, his head bandaged, resolutely advancing out of the stone wall, grasping a German hand grenade in his left hand. He is flanked on his left by a young woman holding a gun, and on his right by a powerful bearded man on one knee and an erect younger man armed with a knife. Behind Anielewicz, and to his right is the figure of a woman (who has been likened to Liberté) holding her baby in one arm and shielding her face with her other arm. In the left foreground is a fallen fighter; but the living figures look upward, purposefully and fearlessly, despite the flames behind them. This grouping has become emblematic of the spirit of the Uprising, serving also as a key design element for later stamp issues of Poland and Israel.

The original bronze figures of the monument were shipped
from Paris to Warsaw, where a base had already been constructed on the rubble of the Ghetto at the intersection of Zamenhof and Gesia (renamed Anielewicz) streets. The retaining wall erected behind the figures, symbolic of both the Ghetto wall and the Western Wall in Jerusalem, was constructed of granite blocks located in Sweden. With satisfying irony, these blocks originally had been ordered for a German victory monument to be erected in Berlin. In 1975 a duplicate of Rapoport’s grouping was installed at Yad VaShem, Israel’s Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority, in Jerusalem.

At its dedication in April 1948, the Warsaw monument received nearly universal praise, for it poignantly recalled desperate events and deep wounds that were fresh in the minds and hearts of the viewers. It was a season of mourning and remembrance, not a time for aesthetics. Later critics would carp about archaic art, or decry what they characterized as proletarian stereotypes. However, Rapoport’s monument provided an unique space for both private and public commemorations: a place for individuals and small groups to leave flowers, light candles, or recite memorial prayers, and a locus for statesmen and dignitaries to pay homage. Presidents Carter, George Bush, and Obama have visited the site. Solidarity held rallies at the monument. Honor guards stood at attention. Pope John Paul II bowed his head in prayer. And the funeral of Marek Edelman, the last surviving commander of the Ghetto fighters, was held there in 2009.5

Perhaps the most famous gesture was made by Chancellor Willy Brandt of West Germany during a politically freighted reconciliation visit to Poland in 1970. Confronted with Rapoport’s sculpture, Brandt sank to his knees in respect. Questioned about his actions, Brandt responded:

[I] had to do something to express the particularity of the commemoration at the ghetto monument. On the abyss of German history and carrying the burden of the millions who were murdered, I did what people do when words fail them.

Today, there is a small bronze bas-relief of the kneeling Brandt adjacent to the Ghetto monument.

To commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Uprising, in 1963 Poland issued a 2.50-zloty stamp picturing a ghetto fighter with a bandaged head, holding a hand grenade in one hand and a rifle in the other. The figure looks like Anielewicz, as portrayed in the monument, and this identification is strengthened by the first day cover’s cachet, which depicts both Anielewicz and the young woman of the monument against a background of the ruined Ghetto.

On the twenty-fifth anniversary, Israel issued a 60-prutot stamp depicting the young woman fighter from the Rapoport memorial. It is surprising that there were no earlier direct postal tributes from Israel, although a 1952 issue commemorated the defense of Yad Mordecai, a Kibbutz in southern Israel near Ashkelon, named for Mordecai Anielewicz. The kibbutz was founded in 1936 by Jewish immigrants from Poland who belonged to HaShomer Hatzair. Its members later fought an important delaying battle, blocking the road to Tel Aviv against invading Egyptian forces during the Israeli War of Independence in 1948. The stamp depicts the ruined wa-
tower of Yad Mordecai, with visible shell damage. There is a statue of Anielewicz by Rapoport at Yad Mordecai.

For the 1983 fortieth anniversary, Poland issued a set-tenant 6-zloty commemorative and label. The stamp reprises the figures from the Rapoport monument, while the label, celebrating the Z.O.B., features the anniversary medal with a rifle and banner superimposed against the Ghetto wall.

Also in 1983, Israel issued a souvenir sheet honoring resistance in the Warsaw and Vilna (Vilnius, Lithuania) Ghet- tos. Two of the three 10-shekel stamps feature leaders of the resistance, Anielewicz in Warsaw and Yosef Glazman in Vil-

na. The third stamp honors various groups of resistance fighters. All three stamps are shown above a frieze of razed ghetto buildings.

For the 1993 fiftieth anniversary of the uprising, Poland and Israel offered a joint issue. The two stamps differ in their text: the Polish version refers to “50 years since the Jewish uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto,” whereas the Israeli version refers to “50 years since the uprisings in the ghettos and concentration camps,” a description that is repeated in Polish on the Israeli stamp, but not on the Polish stamp, where the Polish text corresponds to the English description on its tab. Both stamps picture what seems to be a man forcing open the gates of a camp or prison, but it must be admitted that this symbolic vignette is far less compelling than the Rapoport figures used on the earlier commemoratives.

A second Polish tribute related to the fiftieth anniversary of the Uprising is represented by a memorial postal card with a 1500-zloty indicium picturing the Star of David and the Polish Eagle rising phoenix-like from the conflagration of war. Additional franking is provided by the fiftieth anniversary Ghetto stamp, and the postmark repeats “50th anniversary of the Jewish Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto.” The sketch within the postmark is the young woman from the Rapoport monument. The Polish text on the card can be translated as “Holocaust Victims Memorial Day.” The medal pictured on the left represents the Nissenbaum Foundation, which supports the restoration and preservation of Jewish heritage sites in Poland.

In addition to Mordecai Anielewicz, philatelic honors have been bestowed on several other individuals associated with the Warsaw Ghetto. Chief among them is Janusz Korczak, who appears on stamps of Poland, Israel, and Germany. Korczak (1878/1879–1942) was a Polish-Jewish physician, educator, writer, and humanitarian. Born Henryk Goldszmit in Warsaw, Korczak adopted his pen name in 1898 when he
began to write; his first book was *Children of the Streets* (1901). As a practicing pediatrician, Korczak was concerned with the whole child, not just its physical health. This focus led to his work with orphans and, in 1912, to the directorship of a Jewish orphanage in Warsaw where his ideas about the emotional life of children and their right to respect were put into practice. Simultaneously, Korczak continued to write; his 1923 book *Król Maciuś Pierwszy* (*King Matthew the First*), concerning a young prince who becomes king and must learn many lessons in human relations, is an enduring classic in Poland where its place can be compared to that of *Peter Pan* in England or *The Little Prince* in France. For the twentieth anniversary of Korczak’s death, Poland issued a lovely set of six stamps featuring a bust of Korczak and five illustrations for *King Matthew*.

In the 1920s Korczak administered both a Jewish and Polish orphanage and by the 1930s he also had a popular radio pro-
gram on which he was known as “the old doctor.” Increasing anti-Semitism in the 1930s, however, turned his interest toward Zionism. He visited Palestine in 1934 and 1936 where he was impressed by the kibbutz movement. Nevertheless, he returned to Poland, where the war, the German occupation, and its murderous intent toward Polish Jewry engulfed him. Forced by the Germans to move the Jewish orphanage into the Ghetto, Korczak declined offers to be smuggled out to safety, choosing to remain with the children. In August of 1942, Korczak, his staff, and nearly 200 children were deported to Treblinka, where they were murdered. There are heart-rending descriptions of the orderly march of the children to the trains, four abreast, dressed in their best clothes, knapsacks on their backs, led by Korczak and his assistants. In Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto, Ringelblum writes of Korczak and his colleagues: “There were directors of homes who knew what awaited them ... but held that at a difficult time such as this they could not let the children go alone and must go to their death with them.”

Lest I conclude this philatelic survey only with death, I would like to cite an Israeli issue of 1985 devoted to Zivia and Yitzhak (Antek) Zuckerman. Zivia and Antek helped organize the Z.O.B. and Zivia fought in the Ghetto Uprising. Antek, who was outside the Ghetto when the Uprising began, helped to organize the escape of small groups of surviving fighters, including Zivia, from the Ghetto via the Warsaw sewer system. Both Antek and Zivia remained in Warsaw and fought in the 1944 general Warsaw uprising against the Germans. In this battle, Antek led a troop of 322 survivors of the Ghetto Uprising as part of the Armia Ludowa. After the war, Zivia and Antek helped to smuggle Jewish refugees to mandatory Palestine, and then emigrated to Palestine themselves, where they helped to found the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz. Both testified at the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961.
It is satisfying to note that in 2001 their granddaughter, Roni Zuckerman, became the first female fighter pilot in the Israeli air force.

The agony and heroism of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising constitute an epic tale of defiance and courage in the face of annihilation, one that has inspired sustained philatelic remembrance. Its enduring memory is now part of the seder celebrated in Jewish homes at Passover, with the Ghetto fighters compared to the Maccabees of two millennia ago. And Powstania Zydow w Getcie Warszawskim ("Jewish Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto") finds an honored place among the significant battles of Polish history inscribed on the walls of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw.6

No doubt, the new Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which opens next year in Warsaw, will also honor the Ghetto Uprising. That said, the possibility of further philatelic tribute remains. Marek Edelman, the last commander of the Uprising; Emmanuel Ringelblum, witness and historian of the Ghetto’s destruction; and Jan Karski, the Polish emissary who tirelessly warned the world of the murder of Polish Jews, could be fittingly remembered on future issues of Poland or Israel. On May 29, 2012 Dr. Karski, who became an American citizen and taught for many years at George-town University, was posthumously honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Obama in a White House ceremony. Remembrance on a United States postage stamp would be particularly appropriate.

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Endnotes
5. For a short video of Edelman’s burial with full military honors, see: www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLz94SydZcQ.

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