



1360 N Prospect Avenue • Milwaukee, WI 53202 • 414.390.5730 • [www.jewishmuseummilwaukee.com](http://www.jewishmuseummilwaukee.com)

---

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Emily Timmons  
920.609.4846  
[emily@waterstreetcreative.com](mailto:emily@waterstreetcreative.com)

## **Jewish Museum Milwaukee to host *The Book Smugglers* exhibition**

MILWAUKEE, Wis. (Jan. 8, 2024) – “Would you risk your life to save a book?” That is the underlying question of *The Book Smugglers: Partisans, Poets, and the Race to Save Jewish Treasures from the Nazis*, on view January 19 to May 19 at the Jewish Museum Milwaukee. The exhibition was curated by Holocaust Museum Houston and based on the book of the same name by David E. Fishman.

*The Book Smugglers* is the nearly unbelievable true story of ghetto residents who rescued thousands of rare books and manuscripts by hiding them on their persons, burying them in bunkers and smuggling them across borders. Set in Vilna, Lithuania, also known as the “Jerusalem of Lithuania” for their robust Jewish culture rich with art, music, literature, poetry, theater and opera, a small group of partisans and poets risked everything to save Jewish cultural treasures.

Prior to WWII, literature and art enabled Vilna residents to rise above their everyday persecution and enjoy a world of beauty in sound and color. Cultural activity compensated for the Jews’ difficult political and economic situation. Once Vilna’s Jews were forced to live in a ghetto, the “Paper Brigade” was formed by a group of 40 intellectuals, writers, educators and activists to save Judaica for the next generation. Together, they rescued Jewish artifacts, books, scrolls, photographs, works of art, diaries and literature from the hands of the Nazis by either smuggling them into the ghetto or hiding them in plain sight.

The exhibition consists of approximately 100 artifacts and reproductions on display, including panels with paintings and drawings, photographs, poetry, diaries, testimonies and music representing the Jewish heritage of Vilna. Featuring themes of resistance and persistence of cultural identity, the exhibition focuses on the complicated history of Vilna, life before WWII, contributions of five members of the Paper Brigade and the results of their heroic mission.

*The Book Smugglers* exhibition is a partnership between Holocaust Museum Houston, David E. Fishman, Moreshet, The Mordechai Anielewicz International Center for Holocaust Documentation, Research and Education, The Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, The Judaica Collection of the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania and the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, Vilnius, Lithuania.

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit [jewishmuseummilwaukee.org](http://jewishmuseummilwaukee.org).

*This program is supported by Harri Hoffmann Family Foundation, Linda & Eli Frank, Susan Lubar, Marjorie & Jonathan Margolies, Wisconsin Department of Tourism and other generous donors.*

# # #

**About Jewish Museum Milwaukee**

The Jewish Museum Milwaukee is dedicated to preserving and presenting the history of the Jewish people in Wisconsin and celebrating the continuum of Jewish heritage and culture. The history of American Jews is rooted in thousands of years of searching for freedom and equality. We are committed to sharing this story and the life lessons it brings with it, so that we may enhance the public's awareness and appreciation of Jewish life and culture.