The Rozhishch Society in Israel

From its small beginnings, the Rozhishch society in Israel has developed into an organization with over 250 members. Its founder was Leah Gavish.

After the Second World War, its membership was augmented by those survivors of the holocaust who managed to reach Israel. Its major activities were the holding of the annual memorial service in memory of the dear ones who had perished in the Holocaust, and a mutual aid benevolent fund which offered financial assistance to members in need in the form of interest free loans.

Later, when contact was established with Rozhishchers in other parts of the world, the organization developed and took on its present dimensions. In consultation with, and through the active

Memorial tablet in honour of Rozhishch martyrs on Har Zion.
cooperation of the Rozhishch committees in the United States, Canada, Brazil and Argentina, the enterprise of purchasing Beth Rozhishch was undertaken.

BETH ROZHISHCH

Beth Rozhishch serves as the focal point and the centre of the activities of Rozhishchers both in Israel and abroad. It was purchased in 1961, is well situated in the centre of Tel Aviv, occupying the entire basement floor of a commercial and residential building, and consists of a large assembly hall, a club-room, an office, a kitchen and an outdoor patio.

It was officially opened at a festive ceremony attended by Rozhishchers from Israel and abroad. Many came specially to Israel for this occasion which was the culmination of much enthusiastic effort on the part of Rozhishchers everywhere. Beth Rozhishch was consecrated to the memory of those who had perished in the Holocaust, as follows:

"May this House serve as a monument in the memory of the disaster to the nation, and may those coming to this House learn to remember what the Amalech of our generation has done to us, and may concern and thought be given in order that such a thing does not happen again.

I WILL NOT DIE — BUT I WILL LIVE — AM ISRAEL HAI!"

And the inaugural charter, dated March 11, 1961 reads: "We, the undersigned of the city of Rozhishch, Volhynia, living in Israel and the representatives of those living in Canada, the United States of

The late President of Israel, Zalman Shazar, at a reception at Beth Rozhishch. He is being greeted by our chairman, Avner Rachmieli. Standing (left) is Michael (Max) Pepper of Denver, Colorado.
America, Brazil, Argentina and in other countries, have gathered together this evening in order to inaugurate Beth Rozhishch.

"More than eighteen years have passed since eight thousand Jews of our city and its area were cruelly massacred by the Nazis and the Ukrainians, on Elul 10, 1942, and to this day there has been no mark made anywhere in this world of their sacred memory.

"This evening, March 11, 1961, in the Bar Mitzvah year of the state of Israel, we dedicate Beth Rozhishch and consecrate it to the memory of the Jewish community which perished together with the six million Jews of Europe.

"This house will be designated for those coming from our city, for social gatherings, for parties, receptions for guests from abroad, etc. Here the annual memorial services will be held each year, and a museum will be established for keeping of documents and other souvenirs of historic value of the annihilated community.

"In this House general cultural activities for adults and primarily for youth will take place in the form of lectures, exhibitions, conferences and the like. Here a library will be established with a special section which will contain the literature of the Holocaust.

"We, the representatives from abroad, will continue to assist you in equipping the House and operating it, and the Israeli committee will ensure that the House fulfills its role with distinction."

**BETH ROZHISHCH ACTIVITIES**

Beth Rozhishch activities are many and varied. Its primary function is to unite Rozhishchers wherever they may be, and it is here that the many receptions are held for Rozhishchers who come to visit us from abroad.
The annual memorial service is held here. Three memorial scrolls have been installed in the assembly hall where Rozhishchers from all over the world may have a tablet inscribed in the memory of their loved ones who perished in the Holocaust. Many Rozhishchers have come to Beth Rozhishch for this express purpose.

The society's general meetings are held here as well as the elections to the executive committee. Meetings of the executive committee, and the council and the provident fund committee also take place in Beth Rozhishch.

When the publication of this memorial book was decided on, it was at Beth Rozhishch that the editorial board met. It was there too that the many meetings with members, who gathered together to discuss, register, and tape record recollections for the book, and to collect and gather documents and other material were held.

A Scroll of Honour has been installed at Beth Rozhishch, where the names of particularly active members are inscribed.

**PLANS FOR THE FUTURE**

It is felt that the best memorial to the past lies in the future, and therefore we hope to be able to expand and develop our activities in order to build a bridge between the past and the young generation. Our plans include setting up a library in the clubroom of Beth Rozhishch; founding a scholarship fund for deserving pupils; enlarging our hall by closing in the patio.

It is our hope that these improvements will encourage the younger generation to identify with us, to come to Beth Rozhishch, to use it for cultural activities, to hold their celebrations — bar mitzvas, brith millas and even weddings at Beth Rozhishch where there are fine facilities for such celebrations, and also to become acquainted with friends from abroad there.

---

Leah (Glazer) Gavish, a founding member and for many years chairman of the committee (centre), welcoming Mirel and Mendel Shames, from Canada, on the occasion of the dedication of the Beth Rozhishch Kitchen, July, 1965.

A reception held in Beth Rozhishch.
The Rozhishch Society in the United States of America

The organization in the United States is called "The Society of Rozhishch Survivors". Bob (Berl) Gellerstein was its founder and first chairman. He is now the honourary president. He takes part in all the activities of the organization and maintains close contact with the Israeli society, and before Pesach each year, it is his custom to send us "ma’ot chitin" (to give assistance to the needy for Passover). He visits Israel often, and here, too, he is an active partner in all our activities.

Baruch Rozen, of blessed memory, was the chairman of the United States organization until the time of his death in November, 1975. He will be sorely missed by all of us, and we regret that he has not lived to see the publication of this book in which he took so active and enthusiastic an interest.

Bella Tepper is the secretary, Zusia Kromirs the treasurer, and among the active members are Paul Perlmutter, Ted Royffé, Phylis and Shike Widra.

Each year this organization holds a memorial service. It has purchased its own cemetery in New York, and has sent money to

![Entrance to the Rozhishcher's cemetery in New York.](image)

The late Baruch Rozen (who died in November, 1975) at the wedding of his daughter in New York.
the organization in Israel for the purchase of Beth Rozhishch and maintains active and close contact with us. Many of its members have visited Israel and Beth Rozhishch.

The Steinway grand piano for the Beth Rozhishch clubroom was donated by the Committee in the memory of the late Max Garbuz. The chairs for the auditorium were donated by Abe Perlmutter, Denver Colorado. There are many other members of the United States committee who are active and their names are inscribed on our Honour Roll.

THE FIRST ROZHISHCHER BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION

The society bearing the above name was composed of Rozhishchers who had immigrated to the United States at the beginning of the century. It was founded on May 31, 1913 and comprised many tens and perhaps even many hundreds of members. Its objective was mutual benefit and assistance.

Mr. Sam Shatz, when he visited Israel brought us the brochure of regulations of the society as well as the booklets which they had issued on the occasions of their 13th and 18th anniversaries.

During the Second World War, they maintained some contact with the Israel committee, headed by Leah Gavish. However, after those Rozhishchers who had arrived in the States just before and after World War Two organized themselves into another organization, these two groups apparently could not find a common language, and they did not unite nor did they maintain contact with each other. For some reason, this organization has not maintained contact with the Israel society either, and we regret that this important group of Rozhishchers was not a partner in the purchase of Beth Rozhishch and in the publication of this memorial book, although we did contact Mr. Zager in New York.
The Rozhishch Society in Canada

Only a few Rozhishchers live in Canada, however, their active committee has managed to bring together a considerable number of members, many from other Polish towns. The Canadian organization is named after the late Harry Odwak, of blessed memory, who was one of the first to found the committee.

Every year this committee organizes a memorial service for their dear ones, and they regularly send us sums of money and maintain close contact with us, being active partners in the implementation of all our programs.

Sol Miller is the chairman of the committee. He and his wife, Ilana visit us in Israel every year and remain with us for a few months. Sol is a member of the editorial board for this book and participates in all our activities.

Mire'le and Mendel Shames devote all their strength and energy to the organization in Canada and to the excellent ties with the Israel organization. We will have more to say about them later.

Sonia and Louis Berger, of Sarnia, Ontario, were among the first to enthusiastically support the idea of the purchase of Beth Rozhishch. They headed the Building Committee, and when their son Leonard (Lozer) reached Bar Mitzva age, they contributed all the gift money he received for the occasion to the building fund.

This was the largest single contribution we received. They also influenced other Rozhishchers to contribute to this cause. Beth Rozhishch remembers them with appreciation for this great deed and has inscribed them on the Honour Roll.
Seymour Zuckerman is one of the active members of the Canadian committee, and it was at his home that the committee was first organized.

The Canadian committee has attracted a most interesting personality to its activities in the person of Rabbi Dr. David Monson. Dr. Monson is known in the United States and Canada as an enthusiastic Zionist and a warm-hearted Jew. He is involved in Hebrew education, is active in working for the Keren Kayemeth, the Histadruth and for Aliya to Israel. He also participates in interfaith activities. Our friends in the Canadian committee appreciate him as a great personality and are proud of his interest in their small organization and grateful for the help which he extends to them. He attends every memorial service and has even visited Beth Rozhishch. We, in Israel, also regard him highly.

MIREL

Mire'le Shames is the living spirit of the Canadian organization. Her energy, devotion and love for humanity in general, and of Rozhishchers in particular, all of whom she regards as her family, have inspired members in the United States, in Brazil and in Israel to activity and achievements well worthy of note.

The first contact we in Israel had with Mire'le and Mendel was when the president of our organization met them in the winter of 1956 in Salt Lake City. At that time they were still not on their feet economically, but they really wanted to "do something" great
and distinguished for the sake of the living and in memory of the loved ones who had perished in the Holocaust. Our president, Avner Rachmiel, was infected with their enthusiasm.

When they told him that this "something" should be done and that they would give the Israeli organization as much as they required, he knew that here were people who could be relied on. And indeed, this was exactly what he told a group of friends, including Baruch Rosen, Shike Widra and Ziske Kromirs at Bob Gellerstein’s home in New York. It was there that it was suggested that the "something" be Beth Rozhishch. They promised help for the purchase of the house, for the provident society and for the publication of this memorial book.

Later, when our chairman visited Brazil, a group of Rozhishchers met at the home of Motel Weisberg, and there a committee was formed, which also promised to support the program.

On his return to Israel, he submitted the program to the committee of that time, headed by our dear friend, Leah Gavish. The idea was enthusiastically received, and it was decided to start working towards its realization. The plan was also made known in Argentina, where Haim Feffer worked towards its realization.

Each year the Canadian committee, regularly, sends us the sum of money promised. In recent years, they have even taken to holding the memorial service in Mire’le and Mendel’s home in order to save expenses. This committee has contributed the kitchen equipment for Beth Rozhishch, in memory of Sonia Miller, of blessed memory.

When Mire’le first visited Israel, she found the kitchen empty of all dishes, glasses, cutlery and the like. One day she arrived at Beth Rozhishch, tired but satisfied. She had spent the day running around the shops, and had brought all this equipment to Beth Rozhishch.

She and Mendel initiated the laying of the memorial tablet at Har Zion. They also arranged the special bus trip there for its dedication. This was an experience in itself.

Both she and Mendel have taken an interest in this book and have taken part, as members of the editorial committee, in the determining of its principles, as well as having written interesting and important articles for it. Their share in all our achievements is really significant. It would be difficult to imagine our organization without Mire’le.

Mendel, her husband, is at her side in all her activities, and the two of them do everything together. Mendel loves every Rozhishcher, wherever he may be. He remembers every detail of the town. Mire’le and Mendel were enthusiastically received on both their visits to Israel, as everybody loves them. A visit from Mire’le and Mendel Shames is a real treat for the hundreds of our members.
**Rozhishch Society in Brazil**

When our chairman visited his brothers in Rio de Janeiro in 1957, he also visited Sao Paulo to meet with most of the Rozhishchers living there and in the adjoining city of Santo André.

The Brazilian committee was organized at the home of our dear friend, Motel Weisberg. It was headed by Golda Shevtz (Wollek), Motel Weisberg and Mendel Wollek. This committee has sent us sums of money to aid in our activities and in the acquisition of Beth Rozhishch. They often visit Israel. Golda has written an article for this book and has sent us some important photographs.

The Rozhishchers in Santo André have their own synagogue. They have become friendly with the local bishop, Dom Jorge Marcos de Oliveira, who is an interesting personality. It is his custom to come to the Synagogue on Yom Kippur and on Independence Day and to shake hands with everyone. His good friend, Idel Weisberg, brought him with him on a visit to Israel, and we held a reception in his honour at Beth Rozhishch.

The Bishop expressed his wonder at what he had seen in the country, and his deep love for the Bible and the Jewish people. He was very impressed with the Beth Rozhishch facilities, and noted the energy and devotion of a small group of people originating in small town who had set up a proud institution in the centre of Tel Aviv, of which even a much larger and more influential group could be proud.

**Rozhishch Society in Argentina**

There are only a few Rozhishchers in Argentina. Haim Feffer maintains contact with us. A few years ago he sent us financial assistance (in the name of the Lutzk and Environs committee in Argentina) and we have received pictures and articles from him for this book. He and his wife have visited Israel twice and on each occasion they met with us for consultations in connection with our activities.