

Garden of the Righteous Gentiles

Siegel Jewish Community Center - Wilmington, Delaware

The Garden of the Righteous Gentiles is the first monument in the United States to Christians who saved Jewish lives during the Nazi Holocaust in Europe. The Garden is patterned after the "Avenue of the Righteous" at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum and resource center in Jerusalem.

The Holocaust was the systematic mass murder of 6,000,000 Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators during the years 1933-1945.

Few non-Jews risked their lives and the lives of their families to defy the murderous Nazis. The Christians honored here are among the heroes of human history. They risked their lives to save Jews from death during the Holocaust. By their actions, they demonstrated that love and decency could flourish amidst unthinkable barbarism.

RIGHTEOUS GENTILES REMEMBERED IN THE GARDEN

AMSTERDAM ARTIS ROYAL ZOO became a safe haven for many avoiding capture during the years of Nazi occupation of The Netherlands, including Francisca Verdoner Kan of Wilmington. Francisca's parents sent her and her siblings into hiding after Nazis commandeered their home. She honors Amsterdam's Artis Royal Zoo, where, as a child, Francisca spent many long days, while staff members hid hundreds of other Jews throughout the zoo, primarily in food storage lofts just above the animal cages. Hiding in these lofts was particularly dangerous, as the zoo was a popular recreation site for the occupying Germans. It was partly due to their frequent attendance, however, that allowed the zoo to remain in operation throughout the war and continually buy food, which not only sustained the animals, but those hiding above their cages as well. After the war, Francisca immigrated to the United States with surviving members of her family in 1948.

NOËL BARROT, a pharmacist from the Haute-Loire region of France, saved Dover, Delaware, resident Blanka Falek and her son, George. When she met Barrot in 1943, the young woman and her four-year-old son had already spent a year moving throughout France to avoid Nazi deportation. Through a Polish diplomat and his wife, Blanka was introduced to Noel Barrot. He provided shelter, food, moral support and documents which saved the Faleks, giving them the name Irakovitch (She had been born Blanka Israelovitch in Tarnow, near Krakow, Poland), helping them avoid capture despite numerous visits to the town by the Gestapo. After the war, Barrot became mayor of Yssingaux and was later elected a representative from the Haute-Loire region in the De Gaulle government. During a 1966 session of the French National Assembly, he suffered a heart attack and died in the arms of a colleague.

LOUIS AND ODILLE CEULEMANS-GRYSON, of Brussels, Belgium, saved Wilmington resident Betti Blaugrund Shain. As the Nazis began rounding up the Jews of Brussels in August of 1942, the Ceulemans-Grysons took in one-month old Betti. The couple kept photographs of Betti's real parents in a cupboard and showed them to her so frequently that she began referring

to her real parents as Mother and Father Cupboard. The couple never tried to convert Betti to Catholicism and at the end of the war, they returned her to her parents, who had been in hiding. Both Louis and Odile died in Aarschot, Belgium in the 1980s.

PIPROT d'ALLEAUME, of Marseilles, France, saved Lore Bermann Beitman, of Wilmington. A devout Catholic and Dominican priest, Father d'Alleaume opened a hotel school in Marseilles, employing about 15 Jewish girls as well as non-Jews. Working at the hotel provided the girls freedom and safety to an extent that even with the Germans positioned on the mountains overlooking Marseilles, Piprot d'Alleaume was able to protect the girls from even hearing of Nazi barbarism. German-born Lore Bermann Beitman was one of several Jewish lives d'Alleaume saved, having been separated from her family during the French deportations to Auschwitz in 1942. d'Alleaume took in Lore in 1943 and gave her the name Jeanne Durst, helping to change her identity to one more common from the Alsace-Lorraine region of France. Like the other girls, she felt completely free under d'Alleaume's care. Father Piprot d'Alleaume died in France of natural causes in the early 1960s.

KING CHRISTIAN OF DENMARK, THE DANISH CHURCH AND THE DANISH PEOPLE smuggled almost the entire Danish Jewish population of 8,000 to safety in neutral Sweden during the October 1943 Jewish holidays. The Danish prime minister received word from a sympathetic German Consulate official in Copenhagen that Hitler's "final solution" for Danish Jews was imminent. Immediately the non-Jewish population mobilized to shelter Jews, find boats to transport them at night bring the Jewish to those boats in ambulances, trucks and taxis. When the rescued Jews returned to their homes in Denmark after the war, they found their apartments, homes, and synagogues intact, having been cared for by their fellow Danes. The people of Denmark sought no credit for what they did. Humankind has much to learn from their inspirational behavior.

MR. KRIVIENKO, a Polish farmer, and his wife were responsible for saving the life of Minna Kassow Kraut of Philadelphia. Her daughter, Sandy Harad, resides in Wilmington. Mrs. Kraut was in her 30s when she escaped from a Nazi camp in Lithuania, only to be caught again. She was forced to join a group of Jews who were stripped naked, then herded to a ditch and shot. Lying in the ditch among the dead and dying bodies, Mrs. Kraut realized that somehow, she had avoided the Nazis' bullets. Naked and without shoes, she crawled out of the ditch in the middle of the night and went to a farmhouse, where the Krivienkos took her in. They kept her hidden there for six months, gave her clothing and fed her. Growing frightened for their lives, the couple let her go, but she was able to survive in the forest until the end of the war.

NORA AND LOIS LOEFFLER, of Vienna, Austria, saved the late Erich Glenn, a Wilmington resident who died in 1972. Glenn had been in a hospital during the German takeover of Austria. Afraid to return home after his release, he wandered the streets of Vienna before being taken in by Nora, a poor pianist and her husband, Lois, a worker in a salt factory. The Loefflers hid Mr. Glenn until his visa to the United States came through, allowing him to leave for the United States in 1938.

MARIA NICKEL, of Berlin, Germany, was a deeply religious woman who managed to save the lives of Ruth and Walter Abraham and their child. In 1942, Ruth Abraham, who was eight

months pregnant, was working as a forced laborer in a Berlin factory manufacturing aspirin for the German army. There she was approached by Maria Nickel, who brought her food and offered to save both Ruth and her husband, also a forced laborer at another site in Berlin. Having made certain that the woman was sincere in her offer of assistance, the Abrahams put themselves in her hands. Nickel provided false papers for Ruth and gave Walter her husband's driver's license for identification purposes. In 1943, two weeks before Ruth was to give birth, the Nazis announced that all Jews were to be deported. Maria Nickel hid Ruth until the baby was born. She then found safe quarters for Ruth and she kept and raised the baby with her own infant son until the end of the war. Maria Nickel was honored at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem in 1970.

ANDRÉE AND SUZANNE ROMAIN, of Emmeville, Belgium, rescued several Jewish children, including Charles Rojer, the youngest of three children in Brussels, Belgium. After the German invasion, he was first sent alone at the age of seven to hide in a tuberculosis sanitarium. Fearing capture, the directress of the sanitarium contacted the Belgian underground and placed Charles, along with other Jewish boys hiding there, into the care of Andrée, a 21-year-old social worker and her 19-year-old sister, Suzanne. For the next three years, the sisters conducted a rescue operation for 30 Jewish children, often masquerading as an orphanage and moving frequently from one town to the next to avoid discovery. All of the children under the Romains' care survived the war, although many of their parents, including Rojer's, did not. Charles Rojer was reunited with his siblings and immigrated to the United States. Andrée Romain died in Belgium in 1963. Suzanne Romain passed away in 2012 after enjoying many years of visits from the children she rescued and their families.

LEOPOLD SOCHA AND STEFAN WROBLEWSKI, of Lvov, Poland, were part of a three-man sewer team, working in the city's sewer system. A deeply religious catholic, Socha made a deal with a Jew named Ignacy Chigier to hide a small group of Jews, including Chigier's wife and children, in the sewers of Lvov. For 14 months, Socha and his partner STEFAN WROBLEWSKI faithfully provided for their 21 Jews, moving them when their safety was in danger, feeding them, washing their clothes and visiting them every day except Sunday. Socha continued their care even after Chigier's money ran out. Only 10 of the original 21 survived the 14-month ordeal. Among them was Halina Wind Preston of Wilmington, whose unflagging dedication to remembering the Holocaust led to the creation of the Garden of the Righteous Gentiles. Socha and Wroblewski are honored at Yad Vashem as Righteous Gentiles. Socha died in 1946 in Gilwice, Poland. Wroblewski died there in 1984.

JUZEF TUNKEWICZ, a Russian farmer saved the lives of at least 10 Jews and did so without seeking payment. In his farmhouse, he gave refuge to Jews from the village of Kobylnik (renamed Narach), near Vilna, in what is now Belarus. He brought food and milk to the house in the Kobylnik ghetto where Ann Jaffe of Wilmington grew up. Tunkewicz was not a religious man. In a region in which almost everyone attended church, he was conspicuous for his lack of attendance, but he was known for helping poor people. When asked by Mrs. Jaffe's father, David Swirski, why he risked his life to bring them food, Tunkewicz replied: "It's only my wife and me; it's only our lives that I'm taking a chance with, and I do it willingly to fight the beasts." Juzef Tunkewicz died of natural causes in Belarus in 1967.

GER AND GERARD van RAAN of Holland protected 8-year-old Rudolf Klijnkramer and several months later, opened their home to 8-month-old Rudolf Liebknecht, during the Nazi occupation. The baby was called "Peter" to distinguish him from the older child. They additionally risked their own lives by giving up Gerard's identification card to save a Jewish man, Sigmund Boekdrukker. The van Raans sheltered the two boys for two years, claiming they were nephews whose parents were out of the country. Both boys survived the war. The van Raans moved to the United States in 1951, settling in Ardentown, DE. The van Raans attended the dedication of the Garden of the Righteous Gentiles and received a special plaque from the Jewish community of Wilmington. When asked about their heroic activities, they often responded humbly, "We did it because we felt we ought to do it." Gerard and Ger van Raan died in 1992 and 1997, respectively.

RAOUL WALLENBERG, a Swedish diplomat, is credited with saving about 100,000 Hungarian Jews, including Vera Lorant of Wilmington. Employed by the Swedish Embassy set up by Wallenberg, Vera twice was saved from death by his personal intervention. Wallenberg often showed up at the scene of deportations, personally removing startled Jews from the lines of the doomed, announcing that he was claiming Swedish citizens. He additionally established dozens of safe houses throughout Budapest, sheltering thousands of the city's Jews under the guise of Swedish diplomatic buildings. In a bitter twist of fate, Wallenberg was arrested as a spy by the Russians on January 17, 1945, and disappeared into the Gulag. Claims of his death in 1947 were made in the late 1950s, although his fate remains unknown. In 1981, President Reagan signed a resolution making Wallenberg an Honorary United States Citizen.

Some Jews were able to survive the Holocaust because of the actions of UNKNOWN RIGHTEOUS GENTILES. Most Righteous Gentiles remained anonymous for reasons of self-preservation: If they had been found out, the Nazis would have killed them and their families. Others stayed anonymous for various personal reasons. Among the Jews whose lives were spared because of assistance rendered by such unknown individuals were Terry Dannemann of Dover and Dorothy Krause Finger of Wilmington. Terry was living near Tarnov in Galicia when the war broke out. In July 1941, her family met a young Polish man who hid them in a stable on his parents' farm, then led them to the ghetto of Dembica, where they hid in a cellar for several days. He refused payment for his actions. Terry was smuggled out of the ghetto to the train station, where she mixed with Poles going to work near Heidelberg, Germany. She spent the rest of the war there disguised as a Roman Catholic Pole named Teresa Kowalska. Along with 11 other Jews, including her mother, 13-year-old Dorothy was locked in the attic of a barn in her native town of Chodorow in Galicia for three days in March 1943. The group paid the man who lived there to hide them while the town was being rid of Jews. Dorothy subsequently survived the war in three ghettos, a labor camp and the forest near Przemyslany in Galicia.

Garden of the Righteous Gentiles Design and Dedication, 1981-1983

The idea for the Garden in Delaware originated with the late Halina Wind Preston of Wilmington. As a young woman barely in her 20s, Halina Wind hid from the Nazis for 14 months in a sewer in Lvov, Poland. Until her death at age 60, in 1982, she dedicated her life

after the war to keeping alive the memory of the Six Million Jews who were murdered by the Nazis.

The tree planting ceremony was held on November 16, 1981. Individual bronze plaques at the trees in the Garden bear the names of rescuers, nine of whom saved Jews who later came to live in Delaware. One Christian couple, Ger and Gerard van Raan, honored in the Garden for their heroic efforts in Holland, came to reside in Delaware.

“The trees, planted in honor or memory of those valiant Christians who saved Jewish lives during the Nazi era, will remain – we trust – an eternal symbol of unity between Jew and Gentile, then, now and for all time.” - Halina Wind Preston, 1981

After Mrs. Preston’s death in 1982, the Holocaust Education Committee she founded was renamed in her honor. The Committee’s first task was to formally dedicate the Garden of the Righteous Gentiles. At the suggestion of JCC member Doris Morris, Wilmington garden designer Robert Grenfell was chosen to design and install the original Garden of the Righteous Gentiles and did so pro bono in 1983. Tasked with creating a serene, contemplative environment, secluded from the surrounding vehicular and pedestrian traffic that would also be the first garden of its kind in North America honoring Righteous Gentiles, Grenfell chose Willow Oaks to outline and enclose the garden because they are handsome, durable native trees with a structure that would soon become venerable. Grenfell designed the original entry paving and planting as the spot to proclaim the garden's purpose and to create a transition from the busy environment of the JCC entrance to the Garden's interior.

The Garden was formally dedicated on December 11, 1983. Methodist theologian and Holocaust scholar, Dr. Franklin H. Littell was the featured speaker. A monument at the entrance of the garden was unveiled reading: THIS GARDEN HONORS RIGHTEOUS GENTILES WHO SAVED JEWISH LIVES DURING THE NAZI HOLOCAUST 1933-1945.

Later in the 1990s, Grenfell added a circular garden to the center of the larger garden. The circle is bisected with a path to encourage visitors to stroll through the garden and to view it from different perspectives. Several years later, a group of volunteers on Mitzvah Day installed a semi-circular belt of Cherry Laurels to enclose the rear of the garden along Garden of Eden Road.

Design and Rededication of the Garden of the Righteous Gentiles, 2013

When the Committee decided to recreate the garden's entrance, upon the death of longtime Committee Chair Harriet Wolfson, Grenfell again devoted considerable thought to creating a new design with the same goals—to proclaim the garden's purpose and to create a transition from the busy outside environment to the garden's interior.

Again employing a circular design, Grenfell and mason Gabriel Gonzales created a semi-circular entrance backed by a low, serpentine wall to receive the message, "THIS GARDEN HONORS RIGHTEOUS GENTILES WHO SAVED JEWISH LIVES DURING THE NAZI HOLOCAUST 1933-1945." The same lettering from the original monument was saved,

refinished, and reinstalled on the new entry. The entrance's new design provides for sufficient space for groups of visitors to pause before entering the garden, perhaps to hear a guide or teacher describe the garden's purpose and the people it honors. Behind the wall now lies a semi-circular planting bed of azaleas, Japanese maple, and cypresses chosen for their four-season attractiveness, hardiness and ease of maintenance. Further enclosing the sides of the Garden, serpentine belts of native inkberry hollies have been installed. Robert Grenfell dedicated his efforts in creating the new entrance to the memories of dear friends and extraordinary women Doris Morris and Harriet Wolfson.

The Garden of the Righteous Gentiles was formally rededicated on April 7, 2013. Dr. Eva Fogelman, who has written extensively about Holocaust survivors and rescuers, was the featured speaker. The Garden was rededicated along with two new trees, planted in honor of the Artis Amsterdam Zoo and Andrée and Suzanne Romain.

A sculpture In Memory of More Than One Million Children Who Perished During the Holocaust 1933 – 1945 now stands at the center of the Garden of the Righteous Gentiles. The idea of a memorial to the estimated 1.5 million child victims of the Holocaust came from Wilmington resident Dorothy Krause Finger, herself a child survivor. In lieu of gifts for her 25th wedding anniversary, Finger asked friends to donate to a fund specifically for developing the children's memorial. The project culminated in the dedication of the sculpture in 1985 at the Siegel Jewish Community Center in Wilmington and featured guest speaker, U.S. Representative Sam Gejdenson of Connecticut, whose parents were Holocaust survivors. The 6-foot tall bronze memorial features a figure holding a child and standing next to shorter figure representing the child victims of the Holocaust. The figures were created by Israeli artist Aharon Bezalel and are cast from two of thirteen figures comprising his work The Last Kaddish that stands at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. In 2013, the memorial was moved from the JCC entrance to the center of the Garden of the Righteous Gentiles for the Garden's rededication.