



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Robin Cavanaugh
rcavanaugh@hmh.org / 713-851-4478

HMH to host world debut of *The Book Smugglers* exhibition in March

--New exhibition curated by HMH set to travel to New York and Chicago--

Houston (February 7, 2020) . . . “Would you risk your life to save a book?” That is the underlying question of Holocaust Museum Houston’s (HMH) new exhibition *The Book Smugglers: Partisans, Poets, and the Race to Save Jewish Treasures from the Nazis*, making its world debut March 13, 2020 in the Museum’s Minckberg Gallery. The exhibition is curated by HMH’s Chief Curator of Collections and Exhibitions 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.

“We have all been taught when we see something wrong, we need to say something,” said Dr. Kelly J. Zúñiga, CEO of Holocaust Museum Houston. “In the story of *The Book Smugglers*, the Nazis tried to silence the Jews in Vilna, but they resisted by taking action to save their cultural artifacts. This exhibition honors the heroes of the Paper Brigade and reminds us of the importance of taking action for good in our collective society. What you say and what you do matters.”

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.

On view at HMH March 13 through August 16, 2020, *The Book Smugglers* exhibition is already confirmed to travel to Holocaust and human rights museums in New York, Dallas and Detroit from late 2020 through 2023.

The Book Smugglers exhibition is a partnership between Holocaust Museum Houston, David E. Fishman, Moreshet Archive, Anielevich Memorial Holocaust Study and Research Center, 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.

The Book Smugglers exhibition is funded in part by the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance. Sponsors include Premiere Sponsor Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, Inc.; Presenting Sponsors Bruce and Rhona Caress and The Lewis and Joan Lowenstein Foundation; Title Sponsors Paula Goldstein and The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous; and Lead Sponsors Lorrie Block, Krista and Michael Dumas, Dr. Michael and Linda Eisemann, Denise and Steve Estrin, Dr. W. K. Horwitz, Joe and Cathy Jankovic - In Honor of Their Children and Grandchildren, and the Sterling Family Foundation.

[Click here for exhibit photos and press materials.](#) For more information about *The Book Smugglers*, please visit hmh.org.

Admission to HMH is free for children and students (includes college students with valid college ID), \$15 for adults, and \$10 for seniors, AARP members and active military. As a member of the Houston Museum District Association, HMH waives admission from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. each Thursday. Parking is available onsite in the Museum's lot for \$8 for the first four hours. The Museum's hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday noon to 5 p.m.

ABOUT HOLOCAUST MUSEUM HOUSTON

After two years and a \$34 million expansion, Holocaust Museum Houston reopened in June 2019 after more than doubling in size to a total of 57,000 square feet. Ranked as the nation's fourth largest Holocaust museum and fully bilingual in English and Spanish, the new three-story structure houses a welcome center, four permanent galleries and two changing exhibition galleries, classrooms, research library, café, 187-seat indoor theater and 175-seat outdoor amphitheater. With more than 50 screens, mini-theaters and interactive terminals are featured throughout the Museum.

Holocaust Museum Houston, Lester and Sue Smith Campus, a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization founded in 1996 by Houston-area Holocaust Survivors, their descendants and members of the community, is accredited by The American Alliance of Museums. Average annual attendance is 130,000 visitors, including more than 71,000 middle and high school students. The Museum is dedicated to educating people about the Holocaust, remembering the 6 million Jews and other innocent victims and honoring the survivors' legacy. Using the lessons of the Holocaust and other genocides, we teach the dangers of hatred, prejudice and apathy.

#

