

Media release

October 2024

Underground: The Hidden Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto on display for the first time outside of Europe
Melbourne Holocaust Museum, 17 November 2024 – 30 March 2025

On display for the first time outside of Europe, [Underground: The Hidden Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto](#), opens at **Melbourne Holocaust Museum (MHM)** from **17 November**, with rare artefacts from the hidden archive of the Warsaw Ghetto. *Underground* will be the inaugural exhibition held in MHM's Alter Family Special Exhibitions Gallery space.

Underground will give visitors an opportunity to see precious documents from the Emanuel Ringelblum Archive coming from Poland. During the Holocaust the archive was secretly buried within the ghetto. Miraculously, a portion of the archive was retrieved after the war from deep below the rubble where the ghetto once stood.

Historian Emanuel Ringelblum initiated an unprecedented campaign to collect material in the ghetto — the collection today known as the Ringelblum Archive. He established the archive in 1940. Already imprisoned in the Warsaw Ghetto, he knew that the Nazi persecution of the Jews was unprecedented. He was determined to create a historical record for the outside world, and for posterity.



To help him with this enormous project he mobilised a group of Jewish academics, writers and activists. This clandestine group of sixty plus members was called *Oneg Shabbat* (the Joy of Sabbath). They collected documents during the day, wrote their own notes at night, and met secretly on Saturdays to discuss the progress of the archive. Over a two-year period, up until the ghetto uprising in April 1943, *Oneg Shabbat* members collated tens of thousands of items documenting life and death in the ghetto.



The archive reflects many aspects of life within the ghetto including the appalling conditions and isolation experienced, with items such as drawings, posters, songs, poems, plays, invitations to events, and even lolly wrappers. These accompanied more familiar representations of ghetto life such as food ration cards and work passes.

Many archive members were caught up in the deportations to the Treblinka death camp 1942. Those who remained continued their work. In August 1942 the first cache of documents, stored inside metal boxes, was buried below the ghetto. The second and third caches were buried in February and April 1943 respectively. Only one of over 60 members of the *Oneg Shabbat*, who knew where the archive was buried, had survived the Holocaust.

One of the metal boxes unearthed will also be on display in the exhibition. This specific box included the final will of David Graber, a teenager who helped bury the archives. An excerpt from his will, dated 3 August 1942, reads:

We have decided to write our wills, to collect our little material about the deportation, and to bury it all. We must hurry because we are not sure how much time we have. We felt the responsibility. We were not afraid of taking a risk. We were aware that we were making history. And that was more important than our lives.

Like a time capsule, *Underground* tells a never-ending, arduous, harrowing but ultimately successful attempt to write the story of the Holocaust from the perspective of its victims. It also represents the first attempt to directly document the German-initiated mass murder of European Jews as it was unfolding. In this context, creating the archive was an act of resistance, and a commitment to post-war justice.

The exhibition also features a uniquely Melbourne perspective, featuring artefacts and first-hand accounts from survivors who immigrated to Melbourne after the war. Melbourne Holocaust Museum senior curator Sandy Saxon said: "Presenting a precious selection of documents from the Ringelblum Archive, on loan from Poland's Jewish Historical Institute, provided the museum with an opportunity to highlight local Holocaust survivors' lived experiences of the Warsaw Ghetto. More than 8,000 Polish-born Holocaust survivors immigrated to Australia within the first decade after WWII. Most settled in Melbourne, including approximately 2,000 from Warsaw."

A series of public programs featuring international speakers, behind-the-scenes tours, film screenings and more will launch soon.

Underground: The Hidden Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto is presented in partnership with the Jewish Historical Institute, Poland, the Association of the Jewish Historical Institution of Poland, and the Munich Documentation Center for the History of National Socialism, Germany.

The Ringelblum Archive is owned by the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland, which, as a social partner, looks after this collection of documents together with the Polish state cultural institution - E. Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute. In 1999, they became the first documents stored in Poland to be included on UNESCO's World Heritage List - Memory of the World, along with the Nicolaus Copernicus manuscript.

Image credits:

Top right: Unearthing the first part of the Ringelblum Archive buried in bunkers below the Warsaw Ghetto between 1942-43, Warsaw 1946. The archive is listed on UNESCO's Memory of the World Register. L – R Michal Borwicz & Hersz Wasser. Photo: PAP/Wladyslaw Forbert.

Bottom left: Wiktoria Sweets Factories candy wrapper from the Warsaw Ghetto, Ringelblum Archive, ARG I 395_4

The Melbourne Holocaust Museum was created by Melbourne-based Holocaust survivors as a memorial to the 6 million Jews who were murdered in WWII. More than just an award-winning museum and education centre, it also houses an incredible collection of eyewitness testimonies, historical documents and artefacts from the Holocaust, available to be explored.

Underground: The Hidden Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto
17 November 2024 – 30 March 2025

On display at: Melbourne Holocaust Museum

13 Selwyn St

Elsternwick

mhm.org.au/underground/