

This Day in History... April 22, 1993

Holocaust Memorial Museum Dedicated

On April 22, 1993, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened in Washington, DC — a building so deliberately unsettling in its design that its architect, a Jewish child refugee from Nazi Germany, once said he wanted its central hall to feel like “a scream.” Fifteen years and \$168 million in private donations had led to this moment.

On November 1, 1978, President Jimmy Carter established the President’s Commission on the Holocaust, chaired by author and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel. The commission submitted a report to Carter in 1979, recommending a national Holocaust memorial and museum, an educational foundation, and a Committee on Conscience. After a unanimous vote by Congress in 1980, the federal government made available 1.9 acres of land adjacent to the Washington Monument for construction.

What rose on that land was no ordinary building. Architect James Ingo Freed was born in Essen, Germany, in 1930. At age eight, he was evacuated from Europe with his younger sister and eventually settled in Chicago. When he first began designing the museum, he was stuck. After three months, he packed his bags and traveled to the camps — Auschwitz, Birkenau, Dachau, Treblinka, and others. What he saw changed everything.

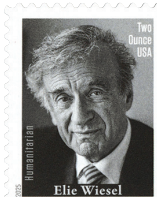
Freed visited Holocaust sites, camps, and ghettos to study their structures and materials. The museum he built is not a neutral shell. Its architecture — through abstract forms drawn from memory — alludes to the history it addresses. Four towers on the north side of the building represent the watchtowers of the death camps. Triangular shapes throughout the structure reference the badges used to mark Jewish prisoners. For the vast, three-story Hall of Witness, Freed used the tough language of early industrial architecture — massive brick walls and crisscrossing steel girders. The message was deliberate: the same architecture of technology and progress had been horribly twisted to build factories of death.



The date of Holocaust Remembrance Day was chosen as it was the day in 1945 that the Nazi death camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau (Poland) was liberated.

that pledge the very freedoms the Holocaust destroyed.

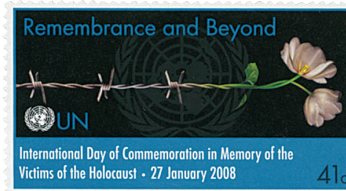
Nearly \$190 million was raised from private sources for the building’s design, artifact acquisition, and exhibition creation. Construction began in July 1989 and ended in April 1993. During those years, the museum’s founding director, Jeshajahu Weinberg, led the exhibition planning and artifact acquisition process.



Elie Wiesel was the 18th honoree in the Distinguished Americans Series.

War II in 1945. Along the way, the Tower of Faces presents a three-story display of over one thousand photographs of Jewish life in Europe before the Holocaust. The exhibition uses more than 900 artifacts, 70 video monitors, and four theaters.

Since its dedication, the museum has welcomed nearly 40 million visitors, including more than 10 million school children, 120 heads of state, and more than 3,500 foreign officials from over 132 countries. Those numbers are a testament to something Elie Wiesel understood before the first brick was laid — that forgetting is its own kind of danger.



In 2005, a UN resolution was passed making January 27 an International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust.

In the Hall of Remembrance, a steel box contains soil from various death camps, over which burns an eternal flame. Small triangular windows offer glimpses of the Lincoln, Jefferson, and Washington Memorials — structures



Issued by the UN’s Vienna office in 2008, this German-language stamp — “Gedenken für die Zukunft” (“Remember for the Future”) — depicts a flower growing through barbed wire, a deliberate symbol of hope and life persisting against imprisonment and death.



In the last year of the war, Allied forces liberated tens of thousands of concentration camp prisoners, many of them Jewish.

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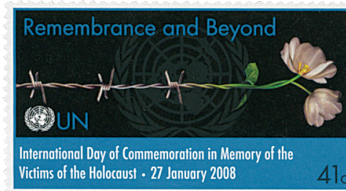
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