



**UNITED STATES COMMISSION  
FOR THE  
PRESERVATION OF AMERICA'S HERITAGE ABROAD**

**NEWS**

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**COMMISSION TO HOST DEDICATION CEREMONY IN FORMER CONCENTRATION CAMP  
TO HONOR THE LIFE AND MEMORY OF REGINA JONAS, THE WORLD'S FIRST FEMALE  
RABBI WHOSE LEGACY WAS NEARLY LOST TO HISTORY**

*Commission Chairwoman Lesley Weiss and four pioneering American women  
who trailblazed as rabbis in their respective religious streams of American Judaism  
will be among the ceremony participants*

**WASHINGTON D.C.:**—On July 24, the *United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad* will hold a dedication ceremony at the Terezin Memorial (*the former Nazi concentration camp also known as Theresienstadt in the Czech Republic*) in memory of Rabbi Regina Jonas—widely acknowledged as the first woman rabbi in Jewish history. During the ceremony, which will take place in the Columbarium of the Terezin Ghetto, a plaque in Rabbi Jonas' honor will be unveiled.

The *United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad* is an independent agency of the Government of the United States of America. It was established in 1985 by U.S. Public Law 99-83 in order to preserve and protect cemeteries, monuments, and historical buildings associated with the foreign heritage of United States Citizens. The Commission also seeks the preservation of similar types of properties, including related archival material. It also encourages and facilitates private and foreign government restoration and preservation projects.

**BACKGROUND:**

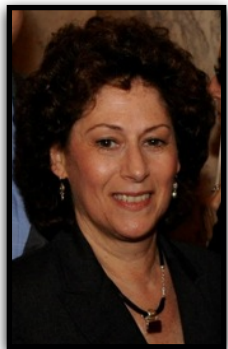
Regina Jonas was born in Berlin, Germany in 1902, studied there at the Liberal Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (Higher Institute for Jewish Studies) and was ordained by Rabbi Max Dienemann in 1935. Yet for nearly 50 years after her murder in Auschwitz in 1944, she remained largely forgotten. It was not until many of her papers were discovered in 1991 that her history—and her legacy—began to be revealed.



*Rabbi Regina Jonas*

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When Rabbi Jonas was deported to Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1942 from Berlin, she continued her ministry there by working for the camp's 'Department of Psychological Hygiene'. Her job was to provide mental-health care to those first arriving at the camp. She tried to help them cope with the shock of the horrific experiences that the prisoners experienced there daily.



**Commission Chairwoman**  
**Lesley Weiss**

“The discovery of the papers of Rabbi Jonas gives women rabbis—and all women seeking to become rabbis—new and substantial depth to their heritage,” said Ms. Weiss, who will deliver the keynote address at the ceremony. “Before the ordination of Sally Priesand in 1972, women who bravely set out on a path to be ordained had no history or precedent upon which they could stand. Now, Rabbi Jonas’ papers, which include her contributions to Jewish newspapers and periodicals and documentary evidence of her ministry in homes, hospitals, schools and welfare organizations, provide both history—and inspiration.”

Ms. Weiss and the Commission have invited the three American women rabbis who were the first ordinees of their denominations; and the first Orthodox woman to be ordained “Rabba” to participate in the ceremony. They are:

- **Rabbi Sally Priesand (Reform)**—Hebrew Union College, 1972
- **Rabbi Sandy Sasso (Reconstructionist)**— Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, 1974
- **Rabbi Amy Eilberg (Conservative)**— Jewish Theological Seminary, 1985
- **Rabba Sara Hurwitz (Orthodox)**— Ordained by Rabbi Avi Weiss, 2009

“This trip is an occasion to celebrate how far we have come in regard to women’s participation in Jewish life,” noted Rabbi Sasso. “Rabbi Jonas could have been the first and the last woman rabbi, but she wasn’t. She was the first in a long chain that continues. She may not have known it at the time, but she started what would become a revolution. We, who are her successors, owe her our gratitude and our voice.”

Musical selections for the ceremony will be performed by the granddaughter of one of the survivors of Theresienstadt. The event will also include remarks by Dr. Jan Munk, Director of the Terezin Memorial; Dr. Gail Reimer, Executive Director of the Jewish Women’s Archive (Boston, Mass.); and Dr. Gary P. Zola, Executive Director of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (located on the Cincinnati, Ohio campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion).



**(Clockwise from top left): Rabbis Sally Priesand, Sandy Sasso and Amy Eilberg and Rabba Sara Hurwitz**

Dr. Zola—a member of the Commission— conceived of the memorial event in Terezin. “Rabbi Jonas’ remarkable contributions to the world and to humanity were made during the darkest of times,” Dr. Zola observed. “She was a trailblazer and though the institution at which she studied (Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums ) would not formally ordain her, rabbinical colleagues and mentors *did* confer ordination upon her. Regina Jonas' career has been a beacon for hundreds of American women who consider her to be their beau ideal. In that sense, Rabbi Jonas has been an inspiring force for America's religious heritage over the past four decades.”

***For more information or to arrange for interviews, please contact Jeff Farrow, Executive Director of the United States Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad — [farrow@heritageabroad.gov](mailto:farrow@heritageabroad.gov) or (202) 254-3824.***

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The Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad was established by U.S. Public Law 99-83, signed by President Reagan on August 8, 1985. The purpose of the Commission is to help preserve and protect cemeteries, monuments, and historic buildings in Central and Eastern Europe associated with the foreign heritage of United States citizens.

The duties of the Commission include:

- *Identifying and reporting on cemeteries, monuments, and historic buildings associated with the heritage of United States citizens, especially properties in danger of deterioration or destruction;*
- *Obtaining assurances from the governments of the region regarding the preservation and protection of these cultural properties; and*
- *Encouraging and facilitating restoration of sites with private and foreign government funding.*